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**IMPLEMENTING CREATIVE DRAMATICS IN A LANGUAGE ARTS
LITERACY CLASSROOM FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined the incorporation of creative dramatics into a language arts classroom for students with special needs. Participants were initially eight 8th grade identified special education students, although the number became seven during the latter portion of the study. Early assessments indicated these students had difficulty in the areas of reading and comprehension, while student surveys expressed little to no desire to read for enjoyment. These students all were identified as learning disabled while a majority also exhibited emotional and behavioral disabilities. One student was emotionally disturbed with an additional medical disability. These students were observed during specially designed instruction given individually, in small groups, and in full class discussions, and activities. Students took part in drama activities including journal writing, writing in role, and activities incorporating movement. Student engagement and participation improved while involved in these methods. Student writing improved in depth and details and content after being exposed to these methods. When tested and surveyed again later in the school year, all students improved in their writing skills while increasing their outside reading, as well. The presence of these dramatic, instructional strategies enhanced overall reading and writing performance and helped students gain confidence in themselves and their abilities to express themselves in verbal and written form.

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“I’ve heard it said, That people come into our lives for a reason, Bringing something we must learn, And we are led, To those who help us most to grow, If we let them, And we help them in return. Well, I don’t know if I believe that’s true, But I know I’m who I am today, Because I knew you.”

~Wicked

My students have been and always will be a major source of inspiration for this endeavor. Their enthusiasm, their humor, and their intelligences pushed me further than I even thought possible. Each and every one of these students will remain forever etched in my heart. I thank them for shaping me into an even more effective classroom teacher.

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RESEARCHERS STANCE

His name was Jack. Well, John actually, but heaven help you if you dared call him that. It was to Jack only that he would answer, and answer you he gladly would, always with a smile and a polite, "Yes, Ma'am." This little man, from Alabama, wise beyond his years, taught me more about teaching than four years of university ever could. He graced my classroom for a scant few months, and although three years have passed since I had the honor of being his teacher, his words and actions have lingered with me, propelling me to better myself as an educator and to research new methods in order to better reach the Jacks of this world. Somewhere early in Jack's education, a teacher told him that he could not read and told him that he would never advance beyond a second grade reading level. When I got Jack in the 7th grade, he immediately asked me where the second grade reading level books were. "Oh no, Miss, you best make sure I get me a second grade book, for my old teacher says that's the only kind of book I should ever git." I looked at him with befuddlement. Here was a child brimming with curiosity about the written word, and himself in the process of writing a book called, The Spirits of Vengeance, and yet he did not have the confidence to engage in books that he felt were beyond the reading level that someone else imposed upon him. Did he struggle with the text before him? Yes he did. It broke my heart to see a child with such a fervent desire to read, and yet I felt I could not extinguish the fire that was so evident inside of him. I pushed him

to read more, to expand his reading circle to that which was outside of his comfort zone. I didn't want to believe that this child would never surpass the limitations that someone else carelessly tossed upon him. In Jack's innocence he believed that all of his teachers were correct. We, his teachers, were infallible. Kempe (1991) analyzed children with special needs and found that they were seen rarely, if ever, in a position that demonstrated qualities of leadership. Furthermore, he found those students often relied heavily on being told exactly what to do, with much of their education "being oriented towards performing structured tasks" (Kempe, 1991, p. 137). That had been Jack's experience thus far in education, and is a bias I have recognized in this field. In contrast to Jack's previous educational experiences, I believe in the Cognitive Learning Theory, which essentially states that learners actively construct knowledge and are not passive recipients of information. In order for learning to be meaningful, connections are made between information that learners already know and new information they are trying to learn. It is with anger that I wanted to confront Jack's former teacher, but I knew that would not help the situation, rather I needed to focus my energy on the task at hand.

Jack trusted me...so he humored me. He let me try new things with him, including the practice of writing letters to characters in a novel, writing in role. He played along when I incorporated movement exercises into literature class, which then parlayed into rich, thick descriptive writing. These were my first crude

attempts at implementing creative dramatics into the language arts classroom. These were tasks that Jack could not complete in rote; he had to think about his actions and words. DuPont (1992) summarized the works of others and found educational research suggesting that teaching strategies which promote active learning are a more effective means for promoting student achievement than instructional strategies that use lectures, seatwork, and other forms of passive learning. I saw it working with Jack. And yet, I felt, in the back of his head, he still believed his former teacher. He still believed that this was all for naught. "I love you, Miss, but it is ok. I know I will never be a reader. Thanks for trying so hard tho. I never bin treated with so much respect before," he said to me one day. While I was seeing this child grow with leaps and bounds, he was still stuck in the mindset that the progress was not enough. He was hearing the mantra in his head that so many special needs students hear, "You are a failure. You will never amount to anything." I pushed harder. He pushed harder. Together we were making a difference. The strategies of writing in role and journaling were making an impact. Movement activities broadened his thinking. Books were beginning to be more than just a jumbled blur on the paper as he was making connections to real life experiences and interpreting the emotions of the characters to make the novel come alive for him. He no longer believed that the second grade books were all that were in his life, in fact they were part of his past, and he now eagerly ravished new books as they were presented to him. "Miss, look. I am reading!

Can ya see? It isn't a little kid book, Ma'am!" he proclaimed to me one day. He finally saw what I had been able to see all along. His eyes were shining with pride, and mine were holding back tears. It was a victory for both of us that day. And then he was gone. Jack had been living in a homeless shelter while at my school and his mother decided to return home to Alabama, once again delivering Jack into the hands of his former teacher. I never knew whether my efforts were enough, or if they were once again supplanted by the teacher who was his before I received him in my classroom. I never heard from him again. And yet he is one fundamental reason why I have chosen to pursue this research.

Special education teachers have the task of facing their students day after day knowing the educational tools they have available to them are limited. These students enter the classroom reading four to five years below grade level, and come marked with the burden of failure. Teachers look these students in the eye, everyday, and do the best they can. Their commitment to educating their students is unwavering.

When I began my career as a special education teacher, I did not know what to expect. Over the course of the years I have taught, I have been assigned various placements, including my own resource (OCR) language arts classroom and my own math classroom, as well as given the placement of being an In Class Support (ICS) teacher for science and social studies. As an ICS teacher, I walk into another teacher's domain and accommodate the unique needs of the special

education students in that classroom. As an OCR teacher, I am the only instructor in the classroom and I am responsible for the plans and the course of study for the students. Because of my unique scheduling, I can conceivably see students six out of eight periods of the day (270 minutes). By the end of the school year I know those students in and out and the personal connections we make are long lasting. While such extreme student contact time can be difficult, it also allows me to see just exactly what the students can accomplish and push them that much harder. That time together and my mixed schedule helped me to arrive at my own teaching philosophy during my first year of teaching. I saw the disparity between how the regular education students were spoken to and “my” students were instructed while they were mainstreamed into the regular education classes. I saw how expectations were lowered for “my kids”, as they were called by the classroom teacher. And I saw how those special education students achieved little in those settings. On the contrast, those same students were improving dramatically while in their OCR classes. They were given challenges in writing and analyzing character motivation that they were meeting and exceeding. They were coming prepared with homework and truly engaged with classroom activities. The only difference was that I pushed them and knew that these kids were not limited by the label that followed them in a manila folder. They were more than that folder and being with them six periods of the day allowed me to see that. The regular education teacher never saw more than that folder and that

label and because of that both she and the students were being short changed. My philosophy stems from seeing the students achieve and knowing it is my responsibility to make sure ALL teachers also see that “my kids” can achieve.

Jack and I had success with a limited integration of creative dramatics in a language arts class and I wondered how I can help my students comprehend higher level skills through the use of these techniques. Jack taught me that these methods work. When students write from the perspective of a character in the novel, they are making deeper connections to the material. When students journal and then share their thoughts on a particular subject, they are learning to validate their own opinions and are just not accepting what someone else has stated FOR them. It is my fervent belief that if I had had more time with him, he would have made even more progress. As a teacher I am willing to do just about anything to help ensure academic success for my students and I firmly believe that students can rise to any level that we set for them. I also believe, however, that students are more apt to achieve success if they feel confident in themselves. Swartz (1998) contends that when students use creative dramatics, they gain confidence as readers and learn that their ideas and opinions matter and are important.

Implementing creative dramatics into a classroom will allow special education teachers the opportunity to look into the eyes of their students and know with confidence that they are providing them one of the latest, researched tools for enhancing their education. Implemented in my study, these techniques

will put the focus on special education students, the growing population of kids who most likely will be left behind unless innovation is allowed to take place in the classroom.

Using dramatic strategies will allow for a myriad of rich educational experiences for my students. It is about looking at my students and innately knowing that new avenues **MUST** be pursued in order to meet their needs. They simply deserve our very best and I believe, with confidence, that the use of creative dramatics in a language arts program will allow for **their** very best to come to light.

My success with Jack and the improvement I have seen with my other language arts classes had me arrive at the following research question: what are the observed and reported experiences for special education students when drama in education strategies are implemented into the language arts/literacy program?

In order for this study to be successful, I must be an objective researcher. I will be collecting data in varied ways in order to get multiple perspectives about students, their work, and the practices that are being implemented. While I have a set method of collecting data, I will also be open to unexpected findings. A primary source of data collection will be through direct participant and non-participant observations. By capturing the exact words of the students a better understanding of the climate will be appreciated. Student work will also be analyzed, with a heavy emphasis on individual journals which contain student

responses to class prompts as well as free writing opportunities. The use of journaling offers me the perspective of where the child's thinking lies, and is a raw look through their eyes without filters. An important aspect to this study is the practice of self reflection. While going through daily observations and student work, reflecting on the data on a daily basis will allow me to gauge the learning that is taking place as well as ascertain what changes need to be implemented in order for more effective learning to be acquired. Reading and writing has always come more naturally to me, so I need to be certain that I do not hold the bias that it comes naturally for every student I see. I cannot take for granted that while I may want the students to write a profound response to the journal prompt "Freedom is..." I must be content to accept their answer of "the flag" and guide them in ways so that they can better capture their thoughts in words.

Ethical guidelines must also be adhered to while conducting this research. Open communication and trust in the classroom promotes higher level learning. Those concepts are integral to the concept of this program to its success as a whole. Because this study is being conducted in a normal class, full participation is expected, and no child will be affected if they choose to withdraw from the research at any time. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) discuss the need to ensure confidentiality in any research design. While a student who withdraws is still expected to complete all activities and assignments, their work would not be included in any published findings. All student information will be presented

anonymously though the use of pseudonyms and all data will be safeguarded and destroyed upon the completion of the study.

This focus of this study is on students; therefore all safeguards must in place in order for true education to occur. That is my true goal and highest aspiration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review examines the effects that introducing dramatic strategies into a language arts/literacy program has on identified special education students. It discusses the positive aspects of these techniques over traditional methods as well as indicates concrete methods for including them into a given curriculum. Specific learning traits of special education students are also detailed, with accommodations that can be met through the incorporation of informal drama activities.

Special Education Students

Behavioral disorders and emotional disturbances have many causes, ranging from learning disabilities to physical or psychological disabilities. Regardless of the causes of the student's problems, many of the same behaviors may appear in differing degrees of severity. These students are usually easily distractible, have a very short attention span, are difficult to interest, and have very little motivation to complete tasks. They are usually experiencing little to no success academically and their social relationships may be characterized by hostility, anxiety, or the inability to function in relationships with others. Pearson-Davis (1988) notes that most of these students have low self esteem and tend to blame other people or forces outside themselves for what happens to them. Kempe (1991) analyzed children with special needs and found that they were seen

rarely, if ever, in a position that demonstrated qualities of leadership.

Furthermore, he found those students often relied heavily on being told exactly what to do, with much of their education “being oriented towards performing structured tasks.” (Kempe, 1991, p. 137).

Reading and Special Education Students

McCray (2001) interviewed middle school students in special education classrooms and documented that they were reading multiple levels below their peers and experiencing deficiencies in basic reading skills such as word recognition, decoding, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Stanovich (1999) compiled researchers’ findings that indicate that students with reading-related learning disabilities are at risk of becoming further behind in reading each year in school that they are without explicit reading instruction.

Research on lower track classes suggests that such students have traditionally been relegated to a skills-based curriculum with little or no stimulation of higher order thinking and writing. Anderson, Morrill, and Adler (2002) found that low-achieving eighth and ninth grade students reported a greater frequency of grammar exercises as well as fill in the blank assignments, true-false questions, and multiple-choice questions. Translated to instruction, in eighth grade, teachers lectured to low track students 40% more often than they did to higher achieving students. More lecture means less time for discussion.

Anderson, Morrill, and Adler (2002) also found that lower track classes were half

as likely as higher track classes to include discussion into the curriculum. DuPont (1992) summarized the works of others and also found educational research suggesting that teaching strategies which promote “active learning” are a more effective means for promoting student achievement than instructional strategies which use lectures, seatwork, and other forms of passive learning.

Dewey (1938) contends that experiences must be engaging in order for desired results to be procured when he states:

How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited. How many come to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? (1938, p. 27).

McCray (2001) concluded that reading underachievement in the middle school grades, and subsequent academic failure, indicate the need for effective reading interventions for students with reading disabilities.

Creative Dramatics and Rationale for Use

The use of dramatic arts in the classroom is grounded in the research-based foundation of the Cognitive Learning Theory. Cognitive Learning Theory essentially states that learners actively construct knowledge and are not passive

recipients of information. In order for learning to be meaningful, connections are made between information that learners already know and new information they are trying to learn. Because it uses a narrative discourse similar to that used in students' homes, literature, with dramatic strategies, has the potential to reduce the foundational gaps of those identified students.

Drama has always been a means of expressing the emotions of human beings. Kempe (1991) has described drama to be any activity that involves human beings projecting themselves into an imaginary situation and using their voices and bodies to act out the characters and events they have imagined. "Dramatic activity is concerned with the ability of humans to become somebody else and the process is a very simple way of crystallizing certain kinds of information. Humans employ it naturally and intuitively all their lives" (Fine, 2002, p. 2).

Paley (1992) contends that play in and of itself gives pleasure. Human beings love the function of play. Indeed, Booth (1994) decrees that play is vital to the development of children. Ranger also states:

Play releases us and frees us from the worries of life. We enjoy the element of play, to take on other roles than ourselves. As babies we play with props, as toddlers we play with toys, as preschoolers we begin to socialize with others and begin to play pretend. We play fireman, doctor, or teacher. We learn these things through imitating life, visually witnessing life, listening to life, and

touching and feeling life. It is our means of comprehending the world around us. (1995, p. 16).

Drama activities can range from the formal presentation of a play for an audience with memorized lines, props, and sets, to the most informal, improvisational enactments by students, including role-playing. Journal writing is another activity which provides an active and concrete means for students to participate in the text. Journal writing allows for students to write in the role of a character from a novel or a short story. They become integral to the thought processes the characters use to make decisions and are better able to express in written form how they interpret character motivation. Drama response journals use a variety of cognitive modes: observations, questions, speculation, self-awareness, digression, synthesis, revision, information. "Drama response journals help to connect reading and writing, promote critical thinking and effective response, develop interpretive skills, and support follow-up discussion activities" (Swartz, 1998, p. 73).

When children act out or dramatize a story they read, it helps them to realize that reading is more than word calling. It allows them to experience reading as something lively, enjoyable, and meaningful. Acting requires the student to read between the lines and to make evaluations and judgments about the characters they are replaying. In this manner, students fully participate in the

written words and use their own background experiences to construct meaning for the text.

“Thinking is the foundation of all learning” (Ranger, 1995, p. 17).

Utilizing drama in the classroom is designed to involve students in thinking that gradually becomes more sophisticated as the students delve beneath the surface of what they are reading and make meaning come alive through acting out a character, finding the purpose of the character, or examining and recreating the emotions of the character.

Creative Dramatics and Special Education Students

“To invent is to come alive” (Paley, 1997, p. 50). By implementing dramatic strategies into a language arts literacy curriculum, special education students are being afforded the opportunity to “come alive” and find success. Children who have had experience in creating their own dramatized stories bring a greater sense of expectation to print. “The learning experience in drama can increase the child’s storehouse of personal meanings, thus altering any meaning he or she brings to the text (Booth, 1994, p. 18). When drama is introduced, students find themselves in role, so that learning is viewed internally but from a new or different perspective.

DuPont (1992) found that culturally disadvantaged students who engaged in story dramatization, as opposed to those students exposed to traditional teaching with basal readers, showed significant gains in reading achievement

scores. She concluded that dramatization of literature motivates reading, enhances vocabulary, develops critical reading, develops greater comprehension, promotes more reading, and encourages lifetime readers. McKean and Sudol (2002) provide empirical evidence that drama as a strategy of instruction embedded within a writing/language arts unit helps students improve their writing, especially those students who were classified as “low” functioning.

After implementing informal drama activities into a language arts program, Kieffer (1996) noted that confidence and self-esteem flourished, while Fine (2002) found that children were better able to rethink and discuss difficult social situations so that complexities could be revealed, analyzed, and debated after they utilized role-playing as a teaching tool.

“Play, including dramatic play, role playing, and psychodrama, continues to be a major method of working with children in therapy today. Drama therapy has been used with positive results with nearly every kind of emotional, behavioral, and psychological disturbance, including schizophrenia, autism, and brain damage” (Pearson-Davis, 1988, p. 27).

The production of even a simple play provides an arena in which the student can feel normal and move out of the world of special education and isolation, if only for the moment. This technique can provide opportunities for emotional release so that students may deal with feelings of hostility, fear, aggression, and sexuality in a positive and safe manner. Because of the

complexity of special education, it is essentially important not to lose the individual voice of the children that are learning. Writing in role affords students the opportunity to voice their own concerns and opinions while shielded in the identity of a main character. Fine (2002) asserts that a student's voice is shaped by personal history and distinctive engagement with the surrounding culture. It is through the development of voice that students affirm their own identities in terms of race, class, and culture. Special education students, at times, have to contend with someone else telling them who they are, or what they believe. Creative dramatics gives each student their own voice and the ability to rationalize decisions and makes them better equipped to understand and deal with the pressures of their every day lives. According to Jackson (1997), Freud viewed creative play as the projection of wishes and the reenactment of conflicts in order to master them.

Peter (1994) contends that success with creative dramatics can parlay into success in other curriculum spectrums, as well. Students can develop learning skills, memory, attention, problem solving, through active strategies learned with creative dramatics. More importantly, drama can allow for a teacher to know her students more intimately, and therefore be more effective with tailoring instruction to meet their individualized and specific needs.

Summary

The best special education teachers know that if the social and emotional needs of these students are not addressed throughout the school day, very little learning will take place in other content areas. Drama and all of the arts provide valuable modes of learning, viable ways of knowing the world, and its cultures, and important areas of potential success experiences for students who are “turned off” because they cannot seem to succeed in the more traditionally academic areas of school. Utilizing drama strategies appears to enrich learning in the reading program, the literature program, and the areas of oral language development, nonverbal communication, vocabulary development, listening skills, thinking skills, and creative writing. Indeed, if students are willing to continue their efforts to improve their reading achievement, we must be willing to continue to find approaches and strategies to aid them.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To determine and document the experiences of eighth grade special education students when creative dramatics were introduced into the language arts/literacy curriculum, a fifteen week observational study was conducted to record both the positive and negative effects of such an introduction. School-related scheduling issues dictated the selection of the class for the study.

Setting

This unit of instruction was conducted in an eighth grade in an intermediate school housing students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Considered to be the urban center of a primarily agricultural county, our 3.2 square mile town is predominately Caucasian with an emerging culturally diverse population of 15,166. It is in an urban area in the Northeast United States and serves 720 students, with the majority of the students walking to and from school. The school is an Abbott school district and over 65% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Census data classified this town as a low socioeconomic area. The median household income in the year 2000 was \$36,000, with 13.4% of the population falling below poverty level. Education levels in the adult community (25 or older) indicate that 7.9% have less than a 9th grade education while 20.9% attended school up to 9th to 12th grade. Sixty-two percent of residents have a high school diploma or equivalency and 9.2% have a B.S. or post-graduate

degree. The number of college students in this town is significantly below the state average.

While room assignments vary from year to year, the classroom where this study was conducted provided ample space for the children to move around in. The room is the health room of the building and is large with a high set of windows at the back of the classroom. Because this was only our space for the two periods I taught language arts, we tried to make it seem like it was our “home”, even though it clearly was not their domain. Health posters were hung on the wall and their supplies littered the room, including resuscitation dolls, skeletons, and large charts depicting various systems of the body. Notes were written on the board with “please do not erase” comments attached to them, which, at times, made this room less than ideal for instruction. Despite these obstacles, students and teacher worked to make it feel like “theirs” for the time they were occupying it.

There were 20 desks in the room. These desks were free standing and could be moved if warranted. Due to the number of students in the classroom, desks were usually moved from the rows that we found them in when entering the classroom each day, to a circular pattern for better facilitation of classroom discussion. Under each desk was a basket where students could keep any materials. There was a whiteboard at the front for use with direct instruction, as well as a movable white board which was used to display notes if desks were not

facing the front. There was a green cabinet at the side of the room where our supplies were kept, including markers, journals, books, construction paper, and writing utensils. Books, both fiction and nonfiction, were always available in bins that I kept in the cabinet, as well. In the back of the room there was the health teacher's desk where I could sit and conference with a student. Students used this area as a workspace and area to sit independently, as well, when warranted. To the right of the door was a table with one computer, which was hooked up to the printer in the library. Students received their language arts/literacy instruction daily, in a 90 minute block period. This was sixth and seventh period for them, and ran from 12:36 until 2:12 P.M.

Participants

I was trying to conduct this study in the most trustworthy manner as possible. In order for that to be established, certain guidelines had to be in place. The students, at all times, must be my top priority. It must be their interests that I keep at heart, at all times. Note taking or observations could not and would not interfere with my research intentions. It was also my responsibility to articulate clearly to my students that they were partners in this endeavor and their permission must be earned if I were to use any or all findings pertaining to them. A breach of that trust would have huge ramifications in my classroom, not only for the study, but for the learning experience, in general. A key component to a trustworthy study, I felt, was to be a reflective researcher. It was only through

looking back on my own teaching that we began to process the needs of our students, because again, it was the needs of them that drove this program. Being reflective also included examining ways in which data would be analyzed and portrayed.

In reviewing Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005), I was again reminded that students should be my top priority. All students were safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms and all data was stored in my home and destroyed upon completion of this study. Students were notified of their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. All students, regardless of participation in the study, were involved in classroom activities with no exclusion. Those students who opted to withdraw were not be used in any published findings (see Appendix A). Principal consent was also obtained to ensure the safeguard of the students (see Appendix B).

To begin the study, there were eight students in the Out of Class Replacement Language Arts/Literacy class, all of which were identified special education. Students ranged from thirteen to sixteen years of age. Gender breakdown consisted of two males, with six females. During the course of the study, one boy's placement was changed, bringing the class size to seven. They were being instructed by a female special education teacher. All students were classified with specific learning disabilities. One student was classified with Emotional Disabilities and has benefited from anger management sessions, while

another student's classification falls under Other Health Impaired, due to a severe medical condition. The students' reading levels ranged from 1.7 to 4.3 in the beginning of the study. There was little diversity in the classroom with five of the seven Caucasian, and one of Latina descent, and one African American. Most students were born in the town of the school and have lived there all their lives. One of the seven students resided with both his father and mother, with the remaining students lived with their mothers, and one boy resided in a group home. All students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Procedure

The first step in the research process was to submit an application to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). This board reviewed the application to ensure that the study was to be conducted in an ethical manner. The research proposal was accepted before the research was enacted (see Appendix C). My study involved incorporating dramatic strategies into the language arts/literacy curriculum for special education students. Various strategies were incorporated throughout the course of the semester and were documented as such. Over a fifteen week study, students were immersed in several forms of creative dramatics and I used the following different drama events throughout the study. Each event was revisited with different books or short stories. Some literature activities used only one drama event, while others used more than one. Because of the repetition of events, students were able to

become familiar with them and better able to concentrate on added challenges provided, such as focusing on the literature or the development of their responses or reactions. Below are descriptions of drama events and literature activities:

Pantomime: Students act without words, using gestures to express themselves.

Storytelling: Students invent creative stories to share orally, retelling specific parts or elaborating on ideas or events presented.

Class or town meetings: Students role-play characters, such as classmates or townspeople, for these meetings dealing with a conflict or an open-ended issue presented in a specific book.

Creative Movement Exercise: This exercise consists of students moving around the classroom space first, in response to words: heavy, closed, sustained, second, light, open, floating. Using the opposition of movement, students develop a kinesthetic understanding of the concept of freedom.

Poetry writing: Student will write short descriptions of the sensory experiences of freedom based on the discoveries during the movement work.

Hot Seating: The students question the teacher in role as a character in the novel. Once this concept is mastered, students will then assume the role of characters in the novel.

Tableaux: Students work in small pairs to devise an image using their own bodies to crystallize the chosen event in the person's life. Once the main tableaux is formed, students create a "before" and "after" tableaux to frame the event

tableaux. To further expand this activity, students will then speak one line of dialogue as their character within each “frozen picture”.

Theatre conventions will be used as a means of deepening responses to a short story:

Story told from different points of view

Incidents talked about between different pairs of characters

People outside the story commenting on the characters and events: ex,
teachers, neighbors, social workers, relatives

Telephone conversations will take place in which one character tells
another what has been happening.

Role-playing conventions will also be implemented to the language
arts/literacy curriculum and include the following:

Hot-seating characters about their motives and reactions

“Outside” broadcasts, news stories, chat shows involving characters or
events from the story.

Context-building action will be represented by the following:

Still-image conventions

Tableaux

Letters, diaries, or notes written by or between characters

The following is a sample of work completed:

Weeks 10 and 11: Poetic Inspiration and War

- 1) Journal: How can one person make a difference in this world?
- 2) Students pantomimed definitions to following vocabulary words: foe, quarrel, armistice, wounded.
- 3) Students read the short story, In Flanders Fields, by John McCrae (see Appendix D). Each student then received a copy of the poem and sat in a circle writing a discourse analysis of the words and phrases and meaning they attributed to the work. Each student wrote their thoughts, and then passed their sheet to the next person who then commented on the previous notation and added their own insights. This continued until all students received and commented on the poem two times.
- 4) Students were then given a picture of an older gentleman, (see Appendix E, standing in the rain selling poppies. They wrote the story of the old man, in role. This was a story from a picture, but approached from the character perspective. To assist them they first wrote an I AM poem, from his point of view (see Appendix F).
- 5) Once they developed the character of the old man, they assumed his persona and played Hot Seat, answering student questions about his involvement in the war and his life as it is now. As their character, they wrote a letter to the editor stating their views of the current world and whether or not he felt his efforts were appreciated.

6) Students then, as a class, created a tableaux of what they felt represented War...they then moved into a frozen image of what they felt represented Freedom.

7) Decompression of activities with discussion. Feelings check-in.

Data Sources

1) I kept a journal of anecdotal notes of the classroom environment, detailing experiences of students when dramatic strategies were implemented. I involved students as teacher-researchers.

2) I collected samples of student work from various activities, including student kept journals.

3) Students were given an Informal Reading Inventory (see Appendix G). This gauged the students' initial responses towards reading and detail working background knowledge of where the students' interests lie.

4) The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered as a pre and post data source. This test determines student reading levels as well as scores the following sub categories: Wide reading, Self-Assessment/Goal Setting, Expression, Phrasing, Rate, Accuracy Rate, Prediction, Summarization, Literal Comprehension, Interpretation, Reflection, Metacognitive Awareness, and Text Level, (see Appendix H).

5) Students were given an interview question sheet with probes pertaining to their dramatic experiences (see Appendix I).

6) Non-participant and participant observations were on going through the course of the study.

7) A self-assessment reflection approach to these strategies was also utilized (see Appendix J).

DATA ANALYSIS

As the research was being implemented, I recorded my observations and experiences in a field log. These “field notes are direct observations of what is being said and done as well as impressions or hunches of the observer” (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001, p 140). I reviewed my teaching journal each week, noting significant learning events and the characteristics of behaviors being displayed and I analyzed student surveys for trends and/or patterns. I collected and interpreted student journals to see the correlation between their findings and my own anecdotal records. Students were given an initial survey to determine attitude regarding the acts of reading and writing. Students were given this same survey upon the completion of this research to gauge effectiveness. Each student expressed an increased enjoyment of both the reading and writing processes. Another form of data analysis was the use of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). This test, given at the onset of the research, and then upon the completion, showed individual student growth and development in literal reading comprehension. After a few weeks of collecting data, I began to code my field log. Coding is the application of a descriptive label to pieces of data. The codes are a way of organizing the data into categories (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). For example, I wrote the phrase “student frustration” in the margin if I described an incident where a student expressed concern or a sense of failure while doing an

activity or assignment. Near the end of my study I grouped my codes to create bins of similar categories. It was through this grouping that I was able to begin to see patterns and relationships in the data.

After gathering and collecting the data, I further explored themes and bins by interpreting them using various literary forms. My students were and are the heart of the classroom. In order to know the students more fully, data were displayed in the form of personal vignettes written for each individual. Patai poems provided the VOICE and climate of the classroom as various dramatic activities were engaged in. While collecting and analyzing my data, I was also engaged in reflective dialogue with John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, and Lisa Delpit. After reading the varying perspectives of these philosophers, and to better organize my thoughts and data, I wrote reflective memos exploring multiple quotes from these authors, and the connection of their intended meaning, to the relationship of my data.

To verify my findings, I triangulated data sources to include student work, surveys, group and individual interviews, and personal reflections. I frequently asked for the opinions of the students in my study. I also asked members of my research group for their interpretation of data. By seeking broad consent within a group, teacher researchers develop and test for “truth” (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001).

Summary

Over a fifteen-week period, creative dramatic strategies were implemented into the out of class replacement language arts literacy classroom. Research supported the use of these methods, and various modes of drama were in place and utilized. The curriculum was infused with context building drama strategies and the experiences were documented. During the course of this study, observations were recorded and reflected upon with an interview given to students upon completion.

MY STORY

“It’s an ancient saying, But a true and honest thought, That if you become a teacher, By your pupils you’ll be taught.”

~The King and I

Stage Call

All the world is a stage . . . so they say. Is not that the same as the classroom then? I always feel like I am a performer when I enter these walls. I get stage fright and butterflies in my stomach when the curtain rises. The curtain is ready to rise and there is nothing to stop the show. My students will be entering the classroom in a scant few minutes and I cannot wait to get to know them. I can hardly believe that ACT I is about to begin. I have so many expectations for these faceless names, this cast of characters. I wonder where our journey will take us. This curtain is rising on a stage devoid of scripts, devoid of automatic outcomes. Will this story be a tragedy, a comedy, or perhaps a mixture of both? I wonder where we will be when it is time to take our final bows.

The Performance

***“Getting to know you, Getting to know all about you. Getting to like you,
Getting to hope you like me.”***

~The King and I

Delpit (2002) demonstrates the need for students to feel accepted and loved by their teachers in order for academic success to take place. Teachers must see the students for who they are and not the carbon copies of who we WANT them to be. Each student has their own voice, their own culture and their own language and interests that dictates how they learn. If teachers want their students to adopt their way of thinking in the classroom, teachers must be willing to embrace from where the students come and thus not alienate them. In order to gain trust from students, one must listen to them first. That makes sense to me. In order to set the stage for the school year, expectations needed to be spelled out and clarified. Amidst the ice breaker activities, games in the classroom, and candy being handed out the first few days of school, I decided to have a conversation with the students about how they thought I should behave. I needed to learn from them right from the beginning and listen to their needs as students. It was for them that I came to school every day, then to them I must show my desire to feel connected.

“We must reconnect them to their own brilliance and gain their trust so that they will learn from us. We must respect them, so that they feel connected to us.” (Delpit, 2002, p. 48).

By asking their opinion, I wanted to let the students begin to see that I value their insights into the classroom, as well. In order for this study to be successful, I felt students needed to start to feel comfortable and start realizing that from them, I too, would learn.

At first, students seemed to be shocked that I asked them how I should act. I think they were just expecting me to tell them how to behave. Are they so used to that? My role as a teacher is not merely to transfer knowledge to students. It is not about me being an omnipotent power while they are subjects on a string. I have always felt that one of my primary roles as an instructor is to teach my students to THINK, to open new worlds of self-exploration to them, and to listen from them so I can better steer them on their paths.

Students looked at each other as if they were waiting to see who would respond first. I merely talked to them, gently reminded them that I really wanted to know how I could be the best teacher for them. It was to that prompt that Keith gave his first answer, “Be fun”. As I wrote the phrase on the board, I looked at Keith and smiled. I thought it showed strength that he was willing to be the first one to respond to my query. Why does he look surprised that I wrote the phrase on the board without making him justify his response? Doesn’t he realize that I,

too, feel there is a need for fun in the classroom? Before long, each and every one of the students contributed at least one rule for me.

They decided that this year I should adhere to the following rules:

Be Fun	Be Fair and Consistent
Be Nice	Leave all Problems at the Door
Be Respectful	No inappropriate Talk
Be On Time	Be Cooperative
Be Kind	Give Candy
Be Helpful with Work	Be Patient

We looked at the list on the board and we were all satisfied. I vowed that I would do my best to follow each rule and I showed them my support by accepting each rule without hesitations or modifications. Each student fully explained why they felt the rule they contributed was valid and integral to the success of the classroom. By listening to each other, we were already starting to get a sense of who we were, what was important to us, and what we were willing to argue about. I began to formulate ideas as to who these students were before me. My students were able to see my own sense of humor when I fully endorsed the candy rule. My only stipulation was that if there were candy to be brought in, I wanted a list of what kids liked and did not like so I could better follow the rule. The looks they exchanged with each other were priceless. From there, however, I asked the students if it made sense that they, too, should follow the same set of classroom expectations. I did not want to think for my students, nor did I want to assume that

they needed or wanted the same set of rules. “The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thoughts on them.” (Freire, 2005, p. 77). The teacher cannot be the only teacher in the classroom, imposing a singular idea to the masses; rather, students are teachers, as well. By relinquishing control of the classroom I managed to maintain order. The class, as a whole, unanimously voted that it was only “fair” that if I have to follow the rules, they should too. They left class that day thinking they pulled a fast one on me. Maybe they did. I left class that day knowing that this year, these ACTS, were going to be exciting.

Hallowed Whispers Overheard

“What do you think? Think she’ll be nice?”

“Shit. I hope so.”

“We TOLD her to bring candy! And she really wrote it!”

“*They are always nice the first day . . . then, they change. Let’s see how long this lasts.*”

“What if I know I like her already?”

“It is 8th period already?? ”

“Do you think she will give us assigned seats tomorrow? Maybe she just forgot today.”

“Shit. I hope not.”

“I hate reading. That class is gonna blow if we have to read a lot.”

“THOSE RULES ARE NEAT. NEVER TOLD A TEACHER WHAT TO DO BEFORE. WELL, I DID, BUT I MEAN I GOT IN TROUBLE FOR IT.”

Hallowed Whispers Resounding in My Head

“They seem like a good bunch of kids.”

“Why were they stunned when I laughed with them?”

“I never did that technique before. I was not even sure it was going to work. YES! For some reason it did. Must be my lucky day.

“Note to self: Maura cannot eat chocolate. Must bring in other candy for her.”

Student writing improves when they are able to pull from personal experiences and to identify with characters in a novel. How, though, can a student empathize with a foreign character if they were not first able to articulate their own thoughts and feelings? I tackled this obvious problem by incorporating a “feelings check-in” for class (see Appendix K).

I began this class session by explaining that part of literature deals with character emotions and experiences. As good literary detectives we are often asked to identify how others are feeling. A good way to practice that is to first be able to discuss our own emotions. A feelings check in helps students put a word to some emotions they may be experiencing. I personally like this sheet because of the visual that accompanies each word. I was excited to hear that students loved this idea and they laughed over some of the pictures. I told the students this will be used on a regular basis in here. Sometimes my students would be asked to talk about or write why they were feeling that particular emotion, and other times they just had to say the emotion. One aspect I did not think about was the fact that I asked students to pick only ONE feeling. While I did this with the intention that I was making their lives easier, one student articulated that I actually made it more difficult for him because I ONLY asked for one.

Keith: “Mrs. Franco, I am feeling so many things right now. How can I feel obnoxious but not worried? Can I choose more than one?”

“Of course! That is an excellent observation. I, too, was experiencing multiple emotions when I met all of you the first time.”

Keith: “Oh good, cause I have seven. Wanna hear em?”

Keith and the rest of the students then openly shared their feelings from the day. I was impressed that this first session went so well and I looked forward to further implementation. This little exchange also sparked a discussion where I opened up about my own anxiety about my first day of school with this class. How can I expect them to be honest with me if I cannot identify my own emotions? I have been asked on countless occasions how I feel and I am left without a response to give someone, at times. I must keep that in mind when I use this activity. Will students then be able to parlay their own understanding of emotions and transpose them to character identification? Will students then commit their thoughts to paper? This was a beginning step for us as a CLASS. We were learning from each other already. There isn't a dress rehearsal in this play we are acting out. Slowly, but surely, I see us learning the lines of the classroom.

Maura

Maura seems to be very shy but I see her yearning to want to participate. She keeps glancing at me and then averting her eyes when she catches my glance. What role is she looking for in this cast of characters? Does she not realize that no role we play is ever permanent? Does she not realize yet that she, too, deserves to play the lead, that she does not have to content herself to just a background nameless cast member? Maybe, though, that is where she is truly happy. I need to go to her comfort zone and expand it. This stage is going to be her home for the next few months and she needs to feel safe here. She needs to understand that despite her struggles in reading, despite her apparent lack of confidence . . . she is now home.

***“There is a castle on a cloud, I like to go there in my sleep,
Aren't any floors for me to sweep, Not in my castle on a cloud.
There is a room that's full of toys, There are a hundred boys and girls,
Nobody shouts or talks too loud,
Not in my castle on a cloud.”***
~*Les Miserables*

Fine (2002) asserts that a student's voice is shaped by personal history and distinctive lived engagement with the surrounding culture. It is through the development of voice that students affirm their own identities in terms of race, class, and culture. Special education students, at times, have to contend with someone else telling them who they are, or what they believe. Creative dramatics gives students their own voice and the ability to rationalize decisions and makes them better equipped to understand and deal with the pressures of their every day lives.

Delpit writes about the need for teachers to intimately know their students:

Furthermore, by not listening, teachers cannot know what students are concerned about, what interests them, or what is happening in their lives. Without that knowledge it is difficult to connect the curriculum to anything students find meaningful. And just how do we do that, even if we want to connect children's lives to the curriculum. (2002, p. 43).

This typifies the belief that students can more effectively learn from teachers who have taken an active interest in their lives and use that information to scaffold information to their level.

My students came to me this year from a unique situation. I looked into this array of faces and I knew that some of them had experienced tragedy in the classroom the previous year when their special education teacher died in March. Their safety net was pulled from them and I knew that could be an obstacle or challenge in the classroom that I needed to counter this year. Would they so freely trust again, knowing full well that they could be hurt? How did that death change them? With the countless substitutes and changes they needed to live through a scant few months before, were they ever really able to grieve? She was and still is an important person to them and I wanted to honor her memory in some fashion, and get to a better understanding of my students because of that shared experience. I read aloud to them the children's book, Papa's Gift. Children are read to at the elementary level on an almost daily basis. Unfortunately, that practice is sometimes lost by the time students reach the middle grades. It is one practice that I implement frequently and one that I feel teaches my students a great deal. Creative dramatics incorporates the use of read alouds and I chose this book because it is a poignant story of the love and loss between a little girl and her grandfather who are the best of friends. Clara and Papa Clarence do

everything together until the day Papa Clarence falls ill and eventually dies. She is left to pick up the pieces and resume her “normal” life without her beloved friend.

I read to them. Each word. Each line. Each emotion. I read to them. They saw me as being a human and reaching to them. I was not devoid of emotion, for at the end of the book, my voice was cracking and my cheeks were wet with tears. I was not the only one who cried that day in class. There was silence when I reached the last page. There was a hush that settled within our walls that seemed to settle within our hearts. There was a visible grief, yet the underlying current of hope. And then there was a discussion. The walls that students had erected around themselves and their hearts were beginning to crack.

Students shared their pains and their laughter and their thoughts about the death of their teacher. Colleen shared her anguish over the death of her aunt in a car crash and the subsequent responsibilities she has assumed since that fateful day. Keith, big, tough, street kid, was quiet; finally telling the class it was a “thinking book ya got”. He then admitted it made him think of his own grandfather’s death. Rachel cried out her pain asking, “Is it better to just not love someone then, Mrs. Franco, because it hurts so much when they die? Tell me how to not love!”

This raw and moving question drew responses from all the students, save one, in the classroom. One student, Maura, chose to write in her journal and not speak to the class as a whole. She understands my policy that if she writes

something in her journal that she does not want others to see, including myself, she only has to dog-ear the page down. Colleen emerged as a leader, challenging Rachel to speak about the love she felt, telling her she cheapens her love by not embracing the grief she may be feeling. I took a step back and watched the dialogue exchange between these highly charged individuals. Where just a week ago there was uncertainty and questioning, I was starting to see compassion and grace as they were struggling with this higher concept. They were using their own personal experiences to connect to Clara in the book and they were exploring how they, too, would handle the same situation.

I wanted them to connect further by committing their thoughts to paper, however. Journal writing allows me to see them as the unique children they are, and not just the collective assembly I see before me. Each one of them brings to the table strengths, weaknesses and histories that shape and mold the experiences that are yet to come. If I do not understand where they are coming from, it is difficult to determine how best to cater to their future. After reading about Clara and her anger, I had the students respond to the following journal prompt: "Tell about a time when you were angry. How did you handle the situation? Do you feel your anger was justified?" The level of sharing that took place so early in the year shocked me and I was proud that they already felt they could be so honest and open with their emotions. These were continued steps to get to know my students. The following are just some of the responses that were shared that day:

Sometimes there is no reason for me to get angry. When I do get mad I need to keep busy and do something.

The time I was angry is when my mom and dad were fighting and almost split up. The way I handled it was not talking to them and breaking things. I also locked my sister in my room all the time. Yes I did have a reason to feel angry because they have been married 21 years and I love them both.

I was mad at two people for 4 years because they took me away from my mom and I did not live with her for years. I was 11 years old when I was taken away from my mom. So one day they locked me out of the house and I got mad because it was not the first time that they did that to me so I went to a friend's house and called my mom and told her that they locked me out again. So my mom came and got me and that is why I have to go to court in 3 months.

My father tried to kill me when I was born. Well, he really isn't my father. I think that was part of the problem.

A time that I got angry is when I went to meet my birth mom and she told me I was a mistake and she never wanted to have me and she was crying. I did not say anything that whole day. I loved her so much. Now I don't know where that love is. There is a side of me that I still need to get to. But the other side is me. I stay real with myself and love myself before she goes and hurts me. I want to have that mother and kid thing one day. And yes I had the right to be angry and I cried and cried.

Colleen

She was never supposed to be in this classroom to begin with. She never came to school during the 7th grade and she never completed any work during home instruction. She was “passed on” erroneously and now she sits in my class. She intimidates other teachers and gives off this aura of indifference and defiance. Her suspensions are too numerous to list, as are her medical issues. She has seen more and lived more in her short 15 years than most adults see and live in a lifetime. She is beautiful. She writes when she feels she cannot handle a situation. She has written tomes, yet others see her as closing herself off. She can fly off the handle, seemingly not following her anger management techniques, but others fail to realize she is fighting for the rights of the underdog. She is brutally honest and does not play games. Did she ever have the opportunity to play games as a child? She takes on the responsibility of so many others and yet no one takes care of this child. She is still a child. She is still a CHILD. SHE IS STILL A CHILD!

Depths

They think

They see

They hear

Much more than they are given credit for

They feel

They cry

They hurt

Much more than they are given credit for

They yearn

They dream

They accomplish

Much more than they are given credit for

They WILL think

They WILL see

They WILL hear

They WILL feel

They WILL cry

They WILL hurt

They WILL yearn

They WILL dream

THEY WILL ACCOMPLISH!

“Haven’t you noticed, Suddenly I’m bright and breezy? Because of all the beautiful and new, Things I’m learning about you, Day by day.”

~The King and I

I was beginning to get to know my students on a personal level, but I still needed to determine their academic strengths and weaknesses. To better serve their individualized needs, I needed to see from where they were coming. I decided to formally test my students by administering a Developmental Reading Assessment (D.R.A.). The assessments were conducted during one-on-one reading conferences as children read specially selected assessment texts. The DRA evaluates two major aspects of reading: accuracy of oral reading and comprehension through reading and retelling of narrative stories. Both aspects of reading are critical to independence as a reader. Questions pertaining to concepts about print are also included in the assessment. In addition to the formal testing, I wanted to catch a glimpse into the way each of my students thought about reading and this class. Each student was given a skeletal outline letter that I wanted them to fill out where they talked about their hopes and fears for this academic year (see Appendix L). This letter told me more about their inner thoughts. I was also able to learn little, yet crucial aspects including how they wrote, their word choices, and their level of decoding. Students were also given the opportunity to decorate the envelope in which they sealed their letters. This was another venue

for me to see their creative sides and learn from them in a manner that was non-threatening.

After looking over the data from both sources, I was enthused. Of course I could have looked over the data and been dejected over the low scores or the comments of “I hate reading,” but I merely looked at the information as a challenge to myself and to the class as a whole. Their letters to me proved that while they knew they were not “proficient” readers, they still had the desire to improve, (see Appendix M). They still yearned for achievement and I knew that together we could make that happen.

To receive even more information from my students, I administered an Informal Reading Survey for the students to complete in order for me to get a better understanding of how they saw themselves as readers (see Appendix G). This survey asked specific questions regarding genres of texts they prefer as well as purposes for reading. All questions were read to the students and explained so they comprehended the assignment. Once it was collected, I then individually sat with each student to go over his or her answers. On their sheets I wrote student’s comments verbatim, where further clarification was asked for. In talking with each student, I was able to HEAR how he or she talked about reading, and not just take the written response (see Appendix N). This better allowed me to perceive their depth of emotion connected to reading. By reading with the students and talking to them, I noticed that each one regarded reading as an activity that

involved just SCHOOL books. Each student failed to mention magazines or trade books that they also enjoy. By talking to the kids, I was able to show them that those reading materials are indeed valid and should be accounted for.

Sounds of Reading

Head on wrist . . . “Why do all of these words have to be so hard?”

“READING MAKES ME SAD.”

“When I think about reading it makes me scared.”

“When I think I have to read it makes me mad,
upset, and nervous.”

“Reading makes me tired.”

Eyes to the clock . . . “How much longer, Mrs. Franco?”

This story we are acting out on stage is wrought with tensions and emotions, yet there is an underlying power and grace that seems to support all of those, all of us that are involved. There are challenges to this stage and it would be so easy for these kids, this cast of characters, to just not show up. But they are willing to put in the time . . ., willing to learn their lines. Their willingness to open themselves up to me gives ME the strength to proceed. It is hard to direct a play which seems to not have a script. What if I misread them? What if I somehow lose them along the way? This is foreign to me, too. Can they see that? Do I want them to see that? I feel excited yet terrified at the same time. I have more information now about the setting of this story we are acting out, time to see how that information changes over time.

“It’s the hard-knock life!

No one’s there when your dreams at night get creep!

No one cares for you a smidge, When you’re in an orphanage!

It’s the hard-knock life!”

~Annie

Freire (2005) discusses self-depreciation as an inherent characteristic of one who is oppressed:

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything - that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive-that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (2005, p. 63).

I see this on a daily basis in my classroom. My students believe that their worth and value is less than others, that they are not worthy of intelligent conversation, worthy of their voice being heard. Using journals in the classroom I see comments that break my heart. “Why are you asking me this, Mrs. Franco? Don’t you know yet that I can’t do this?” “I am in the sped class, remember! Didn’t you talk to my teacher last year and find out how low I am?” These are just two specific quotes from students yet they typify the belief held by the class as a

whole. They have been told for so long that they are outcasts and unworthy that they now label themselves as “speds” and do not trust me when I tell them they are capable of accomplishing greatness.

Keith

Keith came to class exhibiting behaviors that indicated he was angry or upset about something. He was not answering any questions and he had a scowl upon his face. Students were required to write a comparison of two books we had read together in class and he sat there and did not begin working. When I gave him a piece of paper again, he crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. I went over to Keith’s desk and just gave a quick nod of my head to him indicating that he could sit with me at the back table, privately. I had never experienced his anger before and I was uncertain how he would react to this invitation. While I knew he was not capable of doing the written assignment at the moment, I did not want to lose him for the rest of the day.

“I am filled with so much anger right now. I can’t focus. I can’t breathe. I hate this place. This school. People.”

“And the anger you feel towards me? Is that because I asked you to write a paper about the book?”

“No, I am not angry with you. I just won’t do the assignment though. I am just too angry. I hate everything.”

“Tell ya what. You write down all the reasons why you are angry and then we can discuss the book later. Just take ten minutes-no big deal of time-and you write all the things you say you hate about your life and while you are doing that, I will write down all the things that I like about you.

“You would do that?”

“Of course I would. Let’s see what we come up with.”

Keith looked at me straight in the eye for a long 10 seconds. I willed myself to not break eye contact although I must admit it was nerve racking. It seemed like he was assessing me in some manner. I wondered what I would write. When I told him I would write something I really was just grasping at straws. With one final glance, Keith bent his head and began writing. Soon his words filled an entire sheet of loose leaf. I, too, bent down to write.

Things That Amaze Me About Keith

His eyes are the deepest shade of blue – they are always looking and searching for something. Peace? Answers? Safety? They never seem to stop...his quest is unending.

His mind sharp – razor sharp. He attacks a situation methodically and with seamless ease. When he believes in himself he is infallible. I wish it happened more often.

His mouth and words command respect and people’s attention. When he speaks people listen. Yet why does he continue to think he is of little worth? Can’t he see what I see? Doesn’t he understand that I look forward to him speaking?

His heart seems to be filled with conflicting emotions. He feels things so passionately and yet he seems to hold himself back at the same time. He says he trusts me but does he trust himself to trust me? I wonder.

When I noticed that Keith was finished writing, I too, stopped. When I started writing I almost stopped thinking, the words were just flowing from my pen. I was uncertain how Keith would take my words, but I knew that if I wanted honesty from him then I also needed to model that. When he was finished writing his list he silently slid it over to me. I likewise did the same.

My heart was breaking as I read his list for it contained many real issues that students just should not have to endure. Why on Earth would his book comparison be important to him when he was dealing with court dates, depression, and abandonment issues to name only a few. Living in an orphanage must not be easy. He was reading my letter to him with an odd look in his eye. I wondered what it meant. Thankfully I did not have long to wait.

“That’s a poem, and um, hey, that’s me. You know when you wrote about that trust? Well, you are right. Cause, believe me, if I let you know all of me, you would want to throw me out of that window.”

“Keith, for now, I am willing to know all of you that you are willing to share, In time I hope you believe me when I say that I would be honored to know all of you.”

“Can I keep this poem, Mrs. Franco?” He looked so earnest when he asked me this.

“It is yours, Keith. I wrote it for you.”

Keith at this point went back to his desk and actually completed the original assignment. I did not feel it was appropriate to draw attention to it or say anything further to him. He was smiling at his desk and doing his work. Every once in a while he would look at me and I would smile at him. When the bell rang he was not finished with his work but he told me he would complete it for homework. He kept his word and I was overjoyed!

“Anything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you. No, you can’t. Yes, I can!”

~Annie Get Your Gun

Creative Dramatics Activity: Numbers Up Game.

I wanted to begin this class with a feelings check-in, because I was anticipating tension arising from the Numbers Up game. By gauging their emotions now, I was better able to determine if it varied from the implementation of the game. Students all had the feelings check in worksheet that they could refer to in order to aid them with coming up with an appropriate response.

T: “Ok, kids, I would like to begin this portion of class by having you take out your feelings check in worksheets. Remember, you can tell me anything that you are feeling, even if it is not listed on this sheet. Let’s just go around the room stating one word of how we are feeling right now. Today we don’t have to journal our feelings or why we think we feel the way we do, we are just going to articulate the feeling.”

D: “Sad/mad”

K: “Joyful

M: “Hot and tired”

It was indeed hot and tired in the classroom and Maura looked lethargic. I suggested to her that she get a drink before we began. She smiled at me and seemed to relax a little.

S: "Angry"

R: "Weak and Happy" I wish the powers that be would understand that the heat in this building directing influences the academic outcomes of our students!

B: "Feel sick"

H: "Bored"

T: "Well hopefully, this game will change your response, Hannah. I will be asking all of you how you feel one more time after we play a game in here. It is called Numbers Up."

I proceeded to explain the directions to the students, going over each rule and expectation until I was confident the students understood what was expected of them. Because it was a new concept to them, I needed to repeat the directions three times before students completely understood what was expected of them. Before we began I was confident that they knew how to play the game. They demonstrated this by each one explaining the game in their own words.

T: "All right, now. Each of you showed me that you know how to play. While you are doing this I am going to actually sit back here and just watch all of you superstars in action. This is your turn to play the game and I will not interfere with you at all. I will just be taking notes on how the game progresses. I will share with you my notes when we are finished, I promise."

I then proceeded to move to the back desk and write the quotes from each of the students. The following is the dialogue exchange between the class during the next 25 minutes.

H: "We've got to start over. Oh my God, Rachel, why are you doing that?" I looked at Rachel and noticed she had her head up, which was against the rules. I waited to see how this will resolve itself.

R: "I'm not playing. Keith keeps messing this up so I am not even gonna try."

Keith looked at Rachel with a smile on his face; as if he knew what he was doing was wrong. In reality, he was trying the way he knew best to 'win' this game. He and Daniel were saying the numbers faster in order to get to their end number, while Rachel apparently did not like this scenario.

The game continued, actually, there was no pause in action during the game at all. Even while student discussions were taking place, the students were still taking part in the game.

S: "Stop being childish. STOP. You have to start over. This is nuts!" Students at this point had not made it past the number eight. Some students had elected to continue going, against the rules, while Shamika was trying it seemed to bring about order.

R: "Let's go down the rows. We will each take turn saying a number, it will be easier." Ahh...trying to create more rules in order to accomplish the goal.

It was interesting that while Rachel originally said she wasn't going to play, she was still actively engaged and even searching for ways in order for the group to be more successful.

H: "But you can't, those aren't the rules." She was correct when she stated this.

H: "Wait a minute, Mrs. Franco, I got something to say. Look, we were counting right, and then someone messed up and THEY kept going."

S: "We don't need Mrs. Franco to solve this. I am trying to bring it back, but if we don't get this right, I am not gonna play at all."

At this point I saw some students emerging as leaders, while others were remaining in the background, seemingly content with the way the game was going. Maura, on the other hand, had said nothing. She may have been hesitant to offer her number into the game. Beth, too, had only spoken occasionally. Hannah and Rachel at this point were getting fired up, as evidenced by their comments, while the boys seemed more laid back taking the comments in stride. I think they may have even enjoyed them a little.

H: "Ah, Keith. The WHOLE point of the game is your head needs to be down. You too, Daniel. All you guys are messing us up." This actually was true although she was being harsh on the boys. They were now antagonizing the girls it seemed, by deliberately calling out the numbers faster. I decided to do something if it persisted.

D: “OK. I got an idea. If someone pauses and no one talks, I will fill the pause.”

Aha! He was trying to come up with a logical solution in order to make the game a success. He was, in reality, creating a pattern or a rule though, which defeated the purpose.

S: “Keith! You know what! We are getting aggravated with you! Please stop it! This is supposed to be a slow game and you are calling the numbers too fast. Can you please refocus so we can try again?” I was secretly pleased with the vocabulary terminology she used! Shamika moved her seat closer to the front and away from where Keith was sitting.

These students have refused to give up. Even with the frustration and the difficulties they had been experiencing, each one of them had stuck with the game and had tried to come up with a way to make it more effective. They wanted so badly to be successful.

H: “MRS. FRANCO?!? WHY WON’T YOU TALK?” Hannah turned to me, her eyes flaring, as she willed me to take control and give them all of the answers. She must learn that the answers are inside her and she must not rely on me.

T: “That isn’t the point though, Hannah. I want to hear you all talk your way through it and I honestly think you are all doing a fantastic job. I will say, however, that I think we all need a break from this for a little while. How about

we do a feelings check in so we can establish our emotions in regards to this activity?"

S: "Angry" She said this as she whipped her head around.

D: "Happy"

K: "Happy"

M: "Mad" This surprised me from Maura because she gave me no indication of this from her responses or her body poses during the activity. I was looking forward to what she wrote about in her journal regarding her experiences with this activity.

H: "Kinda angry"

R: "Confused"

B: Did not respond at this point, she went to the nurse. She had originally stated in her feeling check in that she was feeling sick. Mid way through the game I signed her agenda book so the nurse could take her temperature.

T: "Thank you for being honest with me. I will share something with you. I played this game with a group of teachers and we all felt emotions that were very similar to what you are feeling right now. There were some people who opted out of the game. Meaning they chose to not call out numbers and they had their own reasons for doing so. I noticed that some of you may have opted out and I want you to think about what your own personal reasons were. When I played people also got very frustrated which as you can see, you did as well. So your

thoughts and feelings are on par with adults...you did an excellent job! Now I would like you to take out your journals and tell me what you are feeling in regards to our experience with the game. Be honest. Did you hate it? Are you angry? Why? What was frustrating or fun?"

S: "Are we gonna read this out loud cause I am SO ready!"

All students at this point were writing detailed responses in their journals. This was an opportunity, again, for students to be able to articulate their feelings and then justify them.

While giving the students time to write, I noticed that Keith was not putting anything in his journal. This was disappointing to me because he has much to say but always seems hesitant to put it down on paper. Is this because he is lazy or does he believe that his words lack worth? In this case, I felt it best that I know what he was feeling, so I asked him to verbally articulate his thoughts for me.

T: "Shall we share some ideas then. Let's keep this positive though. When I played this game before I know that some people's feelings were hurt when we talked about them as if it were their fault we weren't successful. I know you guys would never do that so I don't need to remind you of that." I said this because my students seemed to think it interesting that they were playing a game that I did with other teachers. I wanted them to understand that this was a difficult game

that dealt with listening to each other so we could grow together as a class.

Placing blame would only defeat the purpose of the game.

H: "There should be rules to this game because no one ever listens." I found this interesting because Dewey discusses the need for explained rules and that children would accept them if they were understood. This game did not have enough rules, that was one of the purposes to it, and my students were uncomfortable with it. Interesting.

T: "What kind of rules would you want?" I think it was important to take this a step further so I asked for more clarification from her. I needed her to understand that I valued her opinion.

H: "I don't know. So people wouldn't confuse others. Like. I don't know."

Hannah had so much to say and yet it seemed that she was lacking confidence to put it into words. She knew what she wanted to say, she has just not been able to put it into words it seemed. Is she afraid what she will be laughed at? That her ideas will not be worthy?

R: "I know one rule. Say someone is on one, but then says eight, then that person should be out."

D: "Or if two people said a number at the same time, like me and Hannah both said seven, then we are out of the game."

S: "We need more rules to understand it. NO. I mean we knew the goal to get to 21, but we needed rules to help us get there."

H: "WE WANT RULES!"

"One could go further and propose that there is no such thing as play without rules" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.94). This was a real eye opener for me because it was the first time I heard all students really pull together and clamor about something they believed in. Creative dramatics allows for students' understood rules to be made clearer to me and to themselves. By examining from which a student was drawing their personal experiences, I was better able to teach the students effectively. If there truly is no thing as play without rules, then the way a child plays can dictate how they were raised and under what circumstances they are subject to thrive or struggle. When rules are perhaps not clear to a child, they may push themselves harder and search for rules or create them so the situation makes more sense to them. Even that is a set of behavioral rules that they quietly abide. In this situation, students were taking their own learned behaviors and applying them to a situation that was new. They needed the game to make sense for them and they were bringing to the game rules that they, themselves, understood. The interesting dilemma, and one that takes place in the class every day, is the fact that students come with their OWN unique set of rules for every situation they encounter. Sometimes those rules are in direct conflict with another person's. It is through the use of creative dramatics that we are able to discuss the rules we bring to the class and make sense of them all. In this assignment, the number up game, students collectively agreed upon a set of rules so peace and

success could ensue. They were steadfast in their resolve to meet the challenge of the goal despite the obstacles and their frustrations. They were learning to express themselves. They were beginning to see that I do, indeed listen to them, but that they also did not need to depend on me. It was not I who restored order to the classroom rather they listened and responded to the dictates of their peers.

There is sometimes chaos and confusion on this stage. Yet . . . Where others hear noise, we hear music. Where others hear discord, we hear harmony. Where others hear harshness, we hear opportunities. Where others have given up, we still trudge forward. Shows open and close within days on Broadway. That will not be the case with this cast. No, this cast is resolute. Do they hear themselves discussing problems and finding solutions? Do they realize how much they have written about their opinion and their thoughts in only a scant amount of time? These kids who “hate” to write are tearing out page upon page of their thoughts. I am amazed at the script this cast is producing, for it is they who generate these pages.

Beth's Voice

I sit here and I play the game, but that is all I am going to do. I will call out my numbers and pretend I am interested. I will not get mad or upset over the game even though I know the boys are cheating and the girls are getting mad. I know that my teacher is writing down some things that we are saying and I don't want her to write anything down about me. What if I say something and then can't remember what I said? I will feel stupid asking her to tell me what I said. Then I will get angry and I throw things when I get angry. No, I will just sit here and play the game as best I can and then just explain to her in my journal why I am kinda quiet. I can even dog ear the pages down if I am not sure I want her to read it. I dog ear the pages a lot. Well, then I UN dog ear them. I think maybe I really do want her to know what I am thinking. This one I will leave UN dog eared. She needs to know my thoughts.

“Hold my hand and I’ll take you there. Somehow, Some day, Somewhere!”

~West Side Story

Students began class by responding to the following journal prompt:

“Poetry is. . .” I reminded students that there were no rights or wrongs to their responses, but that all responses would need to be shared with the class, orally. There was not a discussion about the prompt because I wanted the students to formulate their own ideas without someone else’s prompting.

Students took only four minutes to write in their journals. When all students had their pencils down I asked them to go around the room and give their responses, which are as follows:

A form of writing

Expressing yourself and what you feel inside

Everything

Expressing yourself, love, happiness, and sadness

Expressing your feelings or thoughts

Isn’t anything to me

My sister does poetry; she does it when she is sad

Each student openly volunteered his or her response without prompting.

As they called out their answer, I wrote it on the board. When we were finished we talked about the best way we could order the phrases so it flowed better. The

end result, the way it was typed, was the resulting poem. Students learned that just about anything can become a style of poetry writing. This excited them because each one of them said they thought poetry would have been harder. Keith seemed to think that his answer (isn't anything to me) would not have been accepted, rather it lead to an interesting discussion about how two people can have very different viewpoints, (Hannah wrote 'everything'), but still be correct.

I then told the students that I wanted them to put their heads down and close their eyes. I went around to each student and I asked them to whisper in my ear the first word that came to mind. Students giggled as I approached them, each one gamely doing as I asked even though they did not know why I asked them to do this. As each student said his or her word, I wrote it on the board, so it was a surprise for the class when I told them they could lift their heads.

When students opened their eyes, the following words were on the board:

Mad

Hi

Losers

Dogs

Music

Gum

Sad

Students giggled and made comments, including, “Who said gum? That is so funny!” and “Losers! Did you see that one?!” I was laughing along with the students and I was glad that they seemed to be enjoying this activity.

I then told the students that they had created a poem with their words. The next step in this creative dramatic activity was to have the students go around the room and say his or her word out loud in whatever manner of voice they desired. They could say the word as if they were laughing, annoyed, or any other emotion they could think of. They were reminded that they could use the feelings check-in sheet if they were looking for a different face to match a voice they may have been thinking of. I told them by chanting these words chorally they could better see for themselves that they had created a poem.

Students then went around the room a total of five times, each saying his or her word followed by the next person, and so on. Each time they went through they varied their enunciation of the word as I asked them to. I was unsure how students would respond to this because I had never asked them to do any choral reciting before this time. I was concerned that perhaps Maura would not be ready for the challenge of this public acting, but she said her word each and every time it was her turn. No, she did not vary the cadence of her voice, but that was probably outside of her comfort level at this point.

I wanted to expand this activity to a higher level and further prove that poetry could be made from anything, so I asked a student to give me an emotion

to write about. Beth offered the word, “sad.” I then told the students I would take their own words and using the resonating emotion of “sad,” write a poem. I wrote the following on the board:

Mad at the world, never to say
Hi to anyone again. I am surrounded by
Losers who treat people like
Dogs. I hear no
Music in my head because I am drowned out by
Gum chewers of the world.
Sad is my life.

We decided as a class to call the poem, “Thoughts at 1 P.M.”

Students were impressed by the ease in which this poem was created. I think it drove home the point that poetry can be just about anything and everything. Words can be powerful and they were beginning to understand that concept.

They are doing it. They are buying into themselves and starting to see what I am already honored to see. They flit around the stage and dance in and out of the spotlight. They are not comfortable to stay in the spotlight for long, but each one of them has glimpsed what it is like to stand there, eyes on them, knowing that people are hanging onto their every word. They are surprised and awkward and shy. They are proud and tentative and scared. They look each other in the eyes now. They listen with their hearts and eyes and hands. Directing this play, I am responsible for much more than just literary elements in the curriculum. These students are starting to believe in themselves, and there is not a state standard or benchmark that coincides with that. What, I ask, is more important? How can one be achieved without the other in place? This cast of characters has been told for so long that they are “not good readers”, “not good writers”. Were they ever really given the opportunity to express themselves? They sometimes look at me with adoration, but what have I done that is so wonderful? I make them speak. I make them write. I make them think. I am starting to see them DREAM.

“Look at me, And tell me who I am. Why I am, What I am.”

~Jekyll and Hyde

To build upon the poetry lesson, I had students construct their own I AM bio poems. This was a way for students to begin to incorporate poetry into their writing in a manner that was familiar to them. Creative dramatics involves giving students varied ways of telling their own personal stories. I AM poems allow for a student’s individual voice to be heard.

“Today I want you to think back on how you described poetry. Each of you wrote a journal telling me your thoughts, now I want you to recall that. If you need help remembering, check your journal to refresh your thoughts.”

Students all flipped back in their journals to remind them of what they wrote. I was surprised actually, that students were so dependent on their journals. It was as if their own thoughts were now somehow meaningless and they had to check to see what was validated previously. Do they need that affirmation before they are willing to share of themselves freely again?

“Ok, now who can tell me some of the things that we talked about before?” I liked to begin lessons by drawing upon previous experiences. In this manner they begin with success and their comfort levels are not beyond what they can handle.

“One of us said that poetry is a way of writing and someone else said that poetry is a way of expressing yourself and what you feel inside.” I was excited that Maura volunteered to answer me! She kept her head down in her journal while giving her response, but she spoke clearly and without hesitations. This pleased me to no end!

“Excellent! Now, we are going to draw upon what we know and actually apply it to our own poems! You saw before how poetry can be free style. ..” I was interrupted here.

“Yeah, when we made that poem up about the words we each said that one day. That was really neat. You are a better writer than I think a lot of grownups are.” Daniel said this quickly and yet I did not sense any embarrassment with his outward compliments of my writing style. The other students nodded and gave verbal agreement with his words and I felt honored that they not only remembered the lesson that day, but also felt the need to recognize it to me personally. I thanked Daniel and the class and showed them how their words meant to me.

“Thank you, Daniel. All of you. But the thing is, we did that poem together. You provided the words, so I guess you are saying that all of you are better poetry writers than some grown ups. And I would agree with that!”

The students all murmured and I nodded and I think they seemed pleased with themselves. I give them this moment to relish in their knowing that they have the ability to become excellent writers.

“So we are gonna write some poetry today? Good because remember I told you alls that my sister is good at poetry? Well I will show her what I write today.” Beth seemed like she was ready and willing to go.

“We are going to be writing bio-poems or poems about ourselves today. Maura was correct when she said that poetry is a way to express yourself and what you feel inside. Well, sometimes we feel so much inside that we don’t know where to begin. This bio poem, or I AM poem, will give us a framework to tell us where we can begin. It allows us to tell our own stories a little better without worrying that we are telling it the ‘wrong way’. Now really, there is no ‘wrong way’ to tell the poetry of ourselves, but I know you kids sometimes worry about that. I do too! That is why for this creative activity I will give you the questions that I would like you to answer. We will keep these because later on we can compare how we feel with how we think other characters feel.”

I was setting the stage for having the students write poetry in their own words and then being freer to write in the voice of a character. I knew that if I just gave them the assignment of writing about themselves in a poem, they would balk. I honestly would, too. This guideline, thus, removed some angst that may have been associated with poetry.

I passed out the I AM direction sheet (see Appendix F) and corresponding sheet with examples of student poems to each student (see Appendix O). As a class, then, we read together the various components and I answered individual questions as they were posed. Students seemed genuinely interested in how I would respond to the poem prompts so I obliged them by writing my own I AM poem on the board for them as a model. I had intended to do this anyway because although I liked the examples I provided the students, I felt the students could benefit from hearing my own thought processes as I talked myself through the prompts.

Each student asked me to check their work as they were writing and were reminded that these were rough drafts and that I did not expect them to be perfect. I wanted them to focus on their thoughts and not to get hung up on the correct spelling of words because that could be improved when we typed up their final copies.

Keith and Colleen asked for no help with their writing and did not ask me to copy edit their work for them once they felt they were finished either. As soon as Colleen was finished, she took out her independent book and started to read. Keith immediately asked if he could start typing his. I asked to see his work and then we talked about changes he needed to make before I signed off on it saying I approved it was computer worthy (see Appendix P).

The remaining students worked until the bell rang on their poems. Two students asked to borrow the dictionaries. Three students automatically asked me to spell a word for them. When they did ask, I reminded them that we can work on spelling during the editing phase of the writing.

Hannah

I watch her, her face in profile. She is in the 8th grade for the second time. I was warned about her. THEY tried to warn me. I did not listen. I could not listen. Why didn't I listen?! Oh, that is right; THEY were giving me all the wrong warnings. THEY did not tell me that I would give my heart over so completely to this girl. THEY did not warn me that her tough exterior was only a façade and that if you probed a little deeper you would see this shining example of intelligence personified. THEY did not tell me how much I would laugh when I was in her presence. THEY did not tell me that she would be a reason as to why I wanted to better myself as a teacher. THEY did not warn me that I would learn so much from her. THEY did not tell me what it would feel like to see a child who admittedly hates writing suddenly write a four-page story about something entirely made up. THEY did not tell me the pain and anguish I would endure when I saw her deal with her personal grief over the death of her grandmother. THEY did not warn me her smile could stop you dead in your tracks. THEY did not tell me that when she is absent, there is a deafening silence. THEY did not warn me, for THEY did not know.

“War is a science, With rules to be applied, Which good soldiers appreciate, Recall and recapitulate, Before they go to decimate, The other side.”

~Pippin

“Over a decade even the profoundest thinkers never questioned the assumption; they never entertained the notion that what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.85).

Most, if not all, of today’s aptitude tests are based strictly on what a child can accomplish when assessed on an individual basis. Students are tested in isolation and their scores are compared against like aged students, according to norms. Vygotsky is making clear his assertion that a better indicator of student achievement would be the degree of accomplishment a student can garner through the assistance of others. That takes into consideration the level of potential development a child has through collaboration with peers or an adult. That potential development or the zone of proximal development is a better indicator of the educational achievements of an individual.

An integral component to this research question in the language arts classroom was the ability to communicate with others and to listen to the ideas or perspectives each one had to offer. Being able to write in role and to collaborate with their writing allowed students to see their own world through someone else’s eyes. Many times that lead to a deeper appreciation of the material I was covering

and a deeper connection to the novel we were reading in class. Students were being given more opportunities to talk to each other and learn from each other, and thus their own world was expanding.

To correlate with the novel, My Brother Sam is Dead, I had students draw their visual interpretations of the concepts of war and peace. This incorporation of creative dramatics allowed for students' background experience to be the foundation of their connection to this novel. Because this book dealt with war and the ramifications of war, it was important to me that students bring with them a starting point. To work within their Zones of Proximal Development, this drawing activity allowed me a better understanding of how they processed these concepts. Writing about their pictures also enhanced their verbal skills.

Each student was given a white piece of drawing paper and crayons, markers, colored pencils. They were instructed to fold the paper in half (across). On the left side they were told to label the side PEACE, and the right side was then labeled WAR. On the back portion of the paper students wrote a six sentence explanation of why they chose their items as their visual representations.

An informal conversation took place which discussed items that could be used to represent each concept. Students all called out various ideas about war, but seemed to struggle with the concept of how best to represent peace. That saddened me.

Students were genuinely interested in what each student chose for their depictions. They listened as to WHY the student chose a particular visual, and more importantly, the artists were able to believe more fervently in their pictures once they were giving their opinions. It suddenly mattered to them. Listening to them talk, I was struck by how they were teaching each other about war and peace and how the simple drawing activity was shaping their own voices. Alone, the students may have done well, but the integration of cooperation of peers made this a true learning experience, and brought the level within potential development.

To Grapple With

IS THERE EVEN ANY SUCH THING AS PEACE?

If there were never war, would we know what peace looked like?

That is wonderful! I would have never thought to draw that for war.

Simple fights can sometimes become huge wars.

Everyone always talks about the peace symbol, but why does it have to be just a symbol? Can't it be more than just a symbol?

THERE IS ALWAYS BLOOD IN WAR, AND WAR ALWAYS HURTS.

People need to come together to end war and bring about peace.

Can you help me draw a dove? You are good at drawing and I could use some help.

Their voices are becoming louder, stronger. Their words are being backed with credence and authority. Their questions are more profound, more thought provoking, more inspiring. They are NOT looking for me to direct them in their search for answers; rather trusting themselves and turning to each other. This story we are acting out has rich, thick dialogue. Finally, someone is listening to them.

***“With one look I can break your heart, With one look I play every part...With
one look you’ll know all you need to know.”***

~Sunset Boulevard

A Frozen Tableaux

I asked them to move around the room.

They did so.

Tell me with your body what you think heavy looks like, what brother looks like, what freedom looks like, what war looks like.

They did so.

Hold that position and think about why you are depicting that word in the manner you have chosen, I tell them.

They did so.

Now everybody freeze in the position of war. Stand in silence. Think about the novel, the characters, emotions they may have been experiencing. Think about how you are feeling as you look at your classmates and the images they have created.

They did so.

Tell me with your body what you think of when you hear the word WAR.

They did so.

Bodies lying prone on the ground. Lying as if in a trench, arm exposed as if holding a gun. Knees bent with arms raised as if in prayer. Tears. Silence.

Tell me. Can you write about this?

THEY DID SO!

“Draw a line in the sand, And then make a stand.”

~Rent

“Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.” (Freire, 2005, p. 81).

My students are faced with many challenges and struggles during the course of their lives. They carry the world on their shoulders and many adults would shudder to hear the stories these kids could tell. Instead of teaching these students facts that they can give out, creative dramatics opens dialogue with students so they can handle the real life problems they deal with on a daily basis. Problem solving education sets out to create critical thinkers.

While reading the novel, My Brother Sam is Dead, students had a difficult time telling me their thoughts on whether or not they agreed with going to war. They second guessed themselves and were not able to make a decision in regards to their own opinion. This novel is set in Connecticut directly following the battles of Lexington and Concord, Mass., in the Revolutionary War and the students were apprehensive about lending their own voice to the debate over whether or not to go to war. Tim, a character in the novel, is faced with the same debate that I posed to the students. Once I asked them what TIM should do, they were able to give their opinion and validate with both novel examples and

personal experiences. Students were confident to speak in Tim's voice, and as Tim, each one of the students spoke with authority. Writing in role allows my students an avenue to escape any oppression they may put on themselves. Because my students sometimes lack the confidence to speak about their own thoughts, writing in role provides them an opportunity to don the persona of a character from a novel and thus share "their" thoughts. Where my students believe their own opinion will be "wrong," they are gaining confidence in parlaying or transferring their thoughts onto another character.

Freire believes in students and their ability to rise to meet high standards and expectations. Once they are given situations that foster critical thinking, they will continue to challenge themselves and will not be content to stay downtrodden and oppressed. Their liberation will have begun and they will no longer hear the "boss" inside of them. Success breeds success and once students taste that success and innately believe that they deserve success, they will not be willing to settle for less.

One of my students currently has a sister who is serving in Iraq and he has many conflicting and unresolved issues surrounding this. While reading the novel, it has been more important for Daniel to think critically about the war and the effects it has on people and his feelings, than whether or not he could recall the name of the tavern where the Meekers worked. He is being asked to think critically and thus far he has responded.

Daniel knows his personal history much better than I do. Why on Earth would I want to think for him? His thoughts are valid and real and they bring a depth of intelligence to the classroom that I could never achieve. He is bringing his personal experience of dealing with a sibling in war to the classroom. If he says he does not agree with war, he is coming from that perspective from a history that I do not share. He is thinking for himself and forming his own opinion, and there is beauty in that.

While discussing the novel, Rachel commented about the hardships a mother must feel watching her son go off to war, while Daniel and Keith commented that it would be just as difficult for a father to endure the same situation. They are thinking for themselves and able to justify where they are coming from with their opinions.

Daniel' Voice

I have a lot to say. She told me I could write down all of the poems I have in my head. I have been typing them on the computer and I think I can have my own little book by the end of the year. She makes me think that my words are important. I am realizing that I DO have a lot to say. She got a tear in her eye when she read my own poem and she said I could bring in pictures of my sister being in the war. I am an important person in this classroom, she told me. And well. I think she is right. Did I always know that or am I just maybe growing up? I never knew you could talk so much about a book. I never knew I would have so much to say.

*“Children will see, And learn, Oh guide them that step away, Children will
glisten.”*

~Into the Woods

“Play provides a transitional stage in this direction whenever an object (for example, a stick) becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse. The child cannot as yet detach thought from object.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.97).

When students are first beginning to explore using a free form of play, Vygotsky believes that it is easier for students to imagine an abstract idea with an object that is rooted in reality. He feels that the concrete object can become an abstract and help shape the ideas of the child.

This study relied heavily on the student's ability to play and lose themselves in the moment. It also encompassed the directed play where students were expressing someone else's words with their own actions. One part of the study that related to Vygotsky was the use of acting out scenes from the novel. For those students who struggled with expressing themselves, using the novel helped them.

“You are writing in the voice of Mr. Heron. PRETEND Tim delivered a 2nd note to Mr. Burr. What do you think it would say? Now, think about the political view of Mr. Heron.”

Students asked me if they could look back into the book to help them. It was as if they were afraid to be wrong. I discouraged the students from using the book because I knew they could do this. They could form their own opinion. We had an informal discussion about why Tim's father would not let Tim deliver the letter and what that may tell us about Mr. Heron's viewpoints. Maura offered very little and was clutching onto her book as if it were a life preserver. I nodded my head to her and smiled which was the signal that she could use the book if necessary. While she still did not offer her opinion voluntarily, when asked specific questions she was able to respond appropriately.

R: "Well, if Mr. Heron is trying to kill Sam, I think it is weird that he would get his little brother to deliver it. So, we're writing a letter from Mr. Heron?"

T: "Yup. What are some things that Mr. Heron might say to Mr. Burr once he realized that he could trust Tim?"

While Rachel began writing, I noticed that the rest of the class was not responding to my directions. I wanted further clarification that they understood what I wanted them to write. I knew I, too, was also a little distracted. In the previous class I had to reprimand Beth for inappropriate behavior and I was feeling unsettled. I also knew that Beth, herself, was not fully participating now and I wanted to somehow remedy that.

T: "Come on..get up! Let's pretend!"

K: "What scene are we doing? I liked when we did the scene where soldiers were holding me." I was excited that Keith said this. It validated that he was remembering key scenes from the novel as well as enjoying the hands-on way I was teaching these concepts.

T: "You are going to be doing two different scenes. One that DID take place. The trip of Tim to Mr. Burr and the events that took place that fateful walk, and then one that SHOULD have taken place."

The students nodded in agreement with me and no questions were asked.

The following parts were given out to the students.

Keith: Mr. Heron

Shamika: Tim

Once she received this part she cried, "Oh! I need a letter in my hand!" This statement indicated to me that she was actively participating in this session and that she was well aware of the sequence of the novel.

Beth: Betsy

I assigned a part to her because I was trying to get her back on focus. This seemed to work because she assumed the persona of her character and her earlier frustration was no longer evident.

Maura: Mr. Burr

I wanted to get Maura involved because she was still hesitant to participate fully with creative dramatics. Because Mr. Burr has a small role, I felt this would fit with her comfort level. She smiled when she heard what part she had and she gamely walked to the front of the classroom. She even asked me if she were in the right spot which I felt was a positive sign.

T: “Without me telling you what to do, act out what DID happen as Tim delivered the letter from Mr. Heron to Mr. Burr.”

Shamika and Keith were paying particular attention to detail and were worried about the prop they needed. They each wrote a note quickly so Tim (Shamika) had something in her hands. The students asked if they should make up words to go along with their actions, and they did so in the true spirit of the novel. This attention to detail made me feel that they, indeed, understood the concept of this action of the novel. Keith was in particular sticking to the novel as he remembered that Tim hides the letter in his shirt. He told Shamika to do the same thing which she eagerly did. All students acted out the scene as appropriate. The dialogue they created was authentic and told the story they needed to tell. Beth was actively participating and was now smiling. Her previous anger was now dissipated and she was engaged with the acting. As Betsy, she encountered Tim on his walk and stole the letter from his hand before quickly running away. Beth did all that was expected of her and I was proud of her improvement.

Students then acted out the reverse of the novel. They pretended what was INTENDED from the novel.

R: "So they are acting out the letter as if it got to Mr. Burr?"

T: "Yup."

Students carried out this scenario with no problems and with much seriousness. When they were in character they only spoke in character and there was no laughter. Maura even created a line of dialogue when Shamika handed her the letter. Because this line of dialogue was totally student created and not dependent from a book, I was doubly glad that I gave her this role.

T: "From this second scene, kids, I want you to write your letter."

R: "I want to be someone next time. You know how I love to act."

T: "Now use your creative juices to tell me what he would tell Mr. Burr once he knew Tim could be trusted."

R: "Oh! We are being creative again? Now I get it!"

All students had a grasp of what I wanted them to write now. Keith was confident with his writing. He told me that he thought his was good. Shamika was asking how to spell words, while others in the class were quick to try to spell them for her. Rachel got up from her desk and walked to where I was standing. She then leaned on the desk near me. She kept glancing at me while she wrote. When she spoke it was for historical questions, like, "What was the name of the

other team? The Tories and the what?" She then finished writing and then quickly asked me if hers were good. The rest of the class turned in their assignment with no questions and comments. I decided to conclude this period by giving an informal interview question to the class so I could better gauge validity of the activity.

T: "How did acting out the scene affect your understanding of my expectations for writing?"

R: "It gives us a lot of experiences to see what the characters went through."

K: "Gives you a visual of what we can write."

M: She was tapping on her desk and hunched over which led me to believe that she was nervous in responding. I told her that I would give her a second to think about it and that I would come back to her next.

S: "It puts more thoughts in my head."

M: She was ready to go now and I didn't even have to call on her. "The acting showed me how to bring a letter somewhere." This was true and yet the simplicity of it was lost on me. I had not stopped to think that perhaps this is indeed what a student would learn.

D: "Are you gonna ask me? Cause I got something. It gives you like a visual of what happened. Hrm..beat you all. That was a good one!"

B: "Not to trust people. It's easier to watch something then just read it. It gets stuck in your head."

K: "Actually, Daniel, yours is almost like what mine said."

While acting out this scene from the novel, Shamika cried out that she NEEDED a letter to deliver to the other character. She then proceeded to create a letter to use while she acted out the scene. Did she indeed, need that letter to help root her to reality and the task at hand? Perhaps it aided in her comfort level, or

perhaps, she did merely want to add to the authenticity of the portrayal. Whatever the reason, that piece of paper was integral to Shamika's mental state. With the letter firmly in hand, she was able to pretend she was the main character in the novel and was able to immerse herself in the words from the book. She did truly assume the persona of Tim.

Shamika

“Some times I feel real good. Some times I feel ok. Sometimes I just sit back and let the music play.” I asked her once to tell me her life as if it was a song, and those were the words she came up with. She lives her life that way. Her heart is on her sleeve and you can read her every emotion. When she hurts, you hurt. When she struggles, you stop yourself from rushing to her aid. She wants to learn more about herself and her culture. She opens herself up to others and then innocently is shocked when someone hurts her. She involves herself in every story, every situation, and every nuance of life. She is what you call an “active participant” in life. Her body is in constant motion. She makes cards for people “just because”. She struggles to read, and hides behind books. When she listens, though, she makes profound connections to literature. She has an inner strength that could move mountains. She has taught me how to forgive. She giggles and makes me believe in innocence.

“Hold onto your breath, Hold onto your heart, Hold onto your hope. March up to the gate and bid it open.”

~The Wizard of Oz

A Tear Falls

9:50 A.M. 3rd period

It is now official. As of Nov. 7th, Keith will not be one of my students. This angry, struggling student took my challenge and far exceeded my expectations. His growth in math class means that his entire schedule will be changed thus not in any of my classes. I just spoke to the special education coordinator for the middle school and a new IEP meeting is scheduled to make this change permanent. I am sitting here brimming with pride because I know I have done my job and done it well, and yet I am struggling against a lump in my throat and I am determined to not let this tear fall. Keith doesn't yet know of this change and I am afraid I will cry when I do broach the subject with him. That will be ok, too. I know and understand that.

10:10 A.M. still 3rd period

It is done. Keith's eyes are shining and a goofy grin is now affixed on his face. I pulled him into the hallway from social studies class and I gave him the news.

“You did it, Mrs. Franco. You actually believed in me and fought for me. My goal to get in regular math is going to happen? You aren’t shitting me? I am going?”

“Keith, I didn’t fight for you. YOU fought for you. You have worked hard and I am confident you will be successful with Mrs. Smith. I expect great things from you, ya know. Miss. Heiden will come down 4th period to talk to you, too.”

Keith and I stand in the hallway just looking at each other. There seems to be so much we want to say to each other. But still, both of us remain silent.

Keith takes his hand and puts it on my shoulder right as I say, “I am proud of you.”

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Franco, I will still come down to visit you during 6th and 7th period.”

A tear falls.

The cast of characters is now changed. One less name is on the marquee. One less voice will be heard in this play. Have I taught him all that was important? Have I taught him little things like grammar and punctuation? Did he understand the bigger concepts I was trying to drive home? Did he see that despite the inherent struggles in his life, he could still achieve success? Will he lose his voice if he thinks no one is still listening? The stage seems large and

cavernous without his presence, his thoughts, and his ideas to fill it. Was it only a few weeks ago that he sat with me and I created that poem for him? I watched him set a goal for himself that day when he was so angry, so frustrated. He longed to get out of the “sped” class. I challenged him. I knew he could do it and somewhere along the line he started believing he could do it. The rest of the cast will feel his departure, how will it impact them? How has he changed me?

“Will I lose my dignity, Will someone care, Will I wake tomorrow, From this nightmare?”

~Rent

I was pregnant. Was being the most important word in that sentence

“Lost in the darkness, Silence surrounds you. Once there was morning, Now endless night.”

~Jekyll and Hyde

I was going to be a mommy. My students made sure I was taking care of myself. They asked me every day if I was eating lunch. They comforted me when I experienced sickness.

“How do you write a song, When the chords sound wrong, Though they once sounded right and rare?”

~Rent

They couldn't wait until they could meet my child. They were there the day they realized that they, too, would never meet my child.

“Hold my hand and I'll take you there. Somehow, Some day, Somewhere!”

~West Side Story

They held my hand. They needed me to show them that I was ok. They made me be ok. They took care of me and let me laugh and let me cry and let me come back to them.

“You're out of the woods, You're out of the dark, You're out of the night. Step into the sun, Step into the light.”

~Wizard of Oz

My students helped me heal. They made me whole. I knew I would be ok.

Rachel

She is a nurturer and worrier. She can look into my eyes and instinctively know that something is amiss. The next day she will come in with homemade Spanish rice because she thinks I am not taking care of myself. She leaves notes on my desk and meets me at the door to see how things are. She is diligent and hard working, never taking her eyes off her ultimate goal. She is filled with tension and wants to fix every problem. One day she will unfortunately come to the conclusion that she can't fix everything. Maybe one day I will realize that, too. She works hard to get herself on the honor roll and yet still calls herself "dumb." Her smile can melt glaciers and her outside beauty is only matched by her inner radiance. She doesn't know how to hate, doesn't know how to hold a grudge, and doesn't know how unique she is.

“At first, when I started to teach, They were shy and remained out of reach, But lately I’ve thought, One or two have been caught, By a word I have said, Or a sentence I’ve read, And I’ve heard an occasional question, That implied, at least, a suggestion, That the work I’ve been trying to do, Was beginning to show with a few . . . ”

~The King and I

Very simply, when students who are perceived to be limited are not given abstract means in order to express themselves, they are more inclined to lose that ability. Students need to be fostered in this area and not just continually given concrete concepts to learn.

While designing this study, part of my primary concern was allowing students to be given a realm to explore that was different from what they may have experienced before. Abstract thinking was part of that design because it stimulates creativity and expression.

For Veteran’s Day, I had my students respond to the journal prompt, “How can one person make a difference in this world?” Students then pantomimed definitions to the following definitions: foe, quarrel, armistice, wounded. I then had my students complete a discourse analysis of the poem In Flanders Fields, a WWI poem by John McCrae. Each person was given a copy of the poem and they were told they were to write any thought, idea, or question that came to mind while reading each stanza (see Appendix D). They then passed their

papers to the next person who commented on their writing and offered their own commentary. While, yes, some of the ideas the students came up with were concrete, “what does foe mean” (Maura), many other comments were deeply profound and abstract in nature. For the line “In Flanders fields the poppies blow,” Daniel wrote “it is a symbol of something beautiful but it means death”. The line “take up our quarrel with the foe,” Shamika wrote “maybe they can do this is peace”. These were abstract thoughts and ideas being expressed from “retarded” people and yet through their words and their understanding of the poetry, each one of us came away with a deeper connection to the poetry and looked at it through different lenses (see Appendix Q).

To further our writing on this subject, students were all given a black and white a picture of an older gentle man standing in the rain selling poppies. They wrote the story of the old man, in role. This was a story from a picture, but approached from the character perspective. To assist them they first wrote an I AM poem from the character’s point of view. Once they developed the character of the old man, they assumed his persona and played Hot Seat, answering student questions about his involvement in the war and his life as it was now. As their character, they wrote a letter to the editor stating their views of the current world and whether or not he felt his efforts were appreciated. They then created his story and committed his life to paper (see Appendix R).

I have been blown away by the progression of these actors. Their words are not those of scared children who are afraid to speak. A simple story from a picture has erupted into stories that are three, four typed pages long. Did I miss the middle of this play? How is it that they have grown so much in just a scant amount of time? When did I stop being the director of this play and when did they stop experiencing stage fright? How can I look at them and not be proud of all that they bring to this stage? Their writing is not meant for just my eyes, no, rather, their words are MEANT to be on stage. They NEED to be publicly validated. They HAVE to be heard.

“When I look back, I will always recall, Moment for moment, This was the moment. The greatest moment, Of them all!”

~Jekyll and Hyde

My students clamored for it. After working diligently the past few weeks on analyzing poems and memorizing their words, they felt they were ready to put on a public performance of their work. They each had written powerful stories in role about a veteran serving in the armed forces. Their desire was that others could hear all that they had accomplished. How could I deny them?

They don't need me anymore. They don't need me whispering in their ear that I believe in them. They are past that now. They have proven themselves to me; they now want the world to know they are not the “sped” kids. It was their idea to have this coffee house, their idea to invite other teachers and their parents. It was their idea to create invitations and have the performance videotaped. They were the directors and the actors in this endeavor and I was just along for the ride. Why am I suddenly nervous? I know they will be successful when the spotlight is on them. The spotlight, though, is a harsh glare and can pick up every flaw, every inflection, and every facet of their inner dialogue. Not only them, however, it will detect my flaws, as well. Am I ready for those flaws to be captured for posterity's sake? Yes.

Maura Speaks

I practiced with her yesterday. Just me for about a half hour. First I got to sit in the back of the room with her. I read a line, then she read a line. She reads so well. Her face lights up when she gets to certain parts. Then she is done and when she looks at me I know it is my turn. I mean, I KNOW it is my turn, I have the paper here too, but it makes me feel better when she looks at me. She always smiles when she does. I will start looking at her and smiling at her when it is her turn. Yes, I think she noticed when I did that. Yes, she really did 'cause now she is waiting to read her part until I look and smile at her too. What? Oh no! I have to move to the front of the room now and she is going to stay in the back. Speak louder, Maura, I tell myself. I may as well tell myself before she does. Hrrmm. I wonder why she didn't tell me to speak louder. I think I am doing OK. The smiling trick is keeping me at a good pace too. She said I could hold my poem in my hand tomorrow if I need it. I may need it in case I get nervous. She told me when she gets nervous she plays with her fingers. I can't believe she gets nervous. I have an idea. I do have two poems I could read tomorrow. I mean I have been practicing a lot. There isn't really a reason why I can't do two. Maybe I will surprise her and tell her I can perform BOTH poems tomorrow. Yes. That's what I will do. "Mrs. Franco . . . ?"

My Eyes

I know Maura can do this presentation tomorrow. She just needs some more confidence in herself. Maybe if she practices with someone she will feel stronger. No. Not just anyone. She needs to know that **I** believe in her. Sitting with her on the floor in the back of the room I try to make the first readings as easy as possible. She is reading well, just lacking some emotion. I need to model how to emphasize certain words and phrases, I think. Yes, now she is getting it. She looks for confirmation from me after each line to let her know she should keep going. I hope that the smile I give her is reassuring. Oh! It must be working because I think I just got a shy smile back from her. That pleases me! She is speaking more clearly now and her face is not as flushed. She is calming down. Is she starting to believe in herself? Time to shake things up a bit. She nervously walks to the front of the room when I stand in the back. She looks like a child . . . all eager, innocent, and anxious at the same time. I KNOW she can do this, but am I pushing her too hard? She is talking a little low but I think she will realize that without me commenting on it. Yes, she seems to have self-corrected on that. Maybe because she saw me leaning ALL the way forward. Ok, so I am sure now she saw me do that because she gave me a little laugh. Hey, I get nervous too, there is no reason why I can't be honest with her about that. She is doing really

well. I hope she knows that she will be wonderful. I think she does. I just wish I knew for sure. Oh wait, she needs to tell me something. “Yes, Maura . . . ?”

“I’ve heard it said, That people come into our lives for a reason, Bringing something we must learn, And we are led, To those who help us most to grow, If we let them, And we help them in return. Well, I don’t know if I believe that’s true, But I know I’m who I am today, Because I knew you.”

~Wicked

Curtain call after curtain call. The ending cannot be prolonged any longer. We are no longer random characters in an untitled play; rather, we are a seamless cast in a story more profound than words. The story that emerged was touched with tragedy, yes, but comedy and hope prevailed. We came to this stage virtual strangers, we leave as a family. We came confused and directionless, we leave with a purpose. This stage has told many stories and we have left an indelible mark here. It was our home. I am not the same person as I was when that first act began. I have been changed for good.

Curtain Closes

FINDINGS

Sounds of Reading

Hannah sits on the floor, knees to her chest, head tilted to the filing cabinet, book
on her knee.

Hear her pages turning.

**RACHEL, HER BACK SLUMPED TO THE WALL, ONE LEG
OUTSTRETCHED, FINGER FOLLOWING HER EVERY LINE OF
TEXT. "MRS. FRANCO, LISTEN TO THIS PART," SHE SHARES
WITH ME.**

HEAR HER EXCLAMATION OF INJUSTICES FROM THE BOOK.

*Maura, sitting at her desk, holding her head with left hand,
her eyes seem glued to the book.*

Hear her silence.

Eyes to the clock . . . "How much longer, Mrs. Franco? I wanna finish this"

Our time together on the stage is over, but what has it all meant?

*Did I teach them in ways that they needed to be taught? Have I taught
them that imagination is more important than knowledge? Have I taught
them that it is ok to make mistakes? Did I allow them to grow and develop
and flourish? What did I see on that stage? Have I told their stories in
ways that make people want to know the hearts and minds of my students?
What did I learn? What did I find? What can I take from this cherished
experience that will enhance future instruction that will touch the lives of
future performers who grace my stage, my classroom, my domain?*

Throughout the course of this study, data were continually analyzed and coded to determine patterns. This study incorporated various creative dramatic techniques with the desire to increase student reading and writing levels, as well as increase the desire to read for outside pleasure. The focus was to make the Language Arts/Literacy class come alive for this group of identified students with special needs. In order for that desire to be reached, students had to fully participate in the class and overcome any inner oppression they felt regarding reading. That coincides with a belief of Freire, “In truth, the boss was ‘inside’ them” (Freire, 2005, p. 64). Freire explains how the oppressed person may become reluctant to resist their oppressors because they lack confidence in themselves and the courage to face those that are holding them down or keeping them back. Eventually the oppressor begins to live inside them, they don’t need an outside force telling them they will not be successful because now the oppressed believe it themselves and tell themselves that every day.

Increasing student confidence, then, was another primary focus of this study.

“Why are you asking me this? Don’t you know that I am sped? Didn’t you ask my other teachers to see how dumb I was?”

“Wow, Mrs. Franco, I didn’t know I could do this. I guess I do know what I am talking about.”

~Keith, September and November

Maura never volunteering to answer a question in September.

*“I feel safe in here now and I am not too shy to read out loud in here. I
won’t offer to read in any other classes though.”*

~ Maura, December

In conducting this study, a recurring theme was that *discourse that broadens students’ Zone of Proximal Development can lead to academic success.*

When having students write written responses to prompts, I had to first ensure they understood exactly what I was asking. The journal prompt, “Tell about a time when you were angry. How did you handle the situation? Do you feel your anger was justified?” was not answerable to three students who, at first, did not understand what the word “justified” meant. By taking opportunities to explain higher vocabulary terms, students were better able to fully participate in the lesson at hand. Shamika initially sat at her desk with no writing on her paper, but after further clarification, she shared a very heartwarming and in-depth response.

A time that I got angry is when I went to meet my birth mom and she told me I was a mistake and she never wanted to have me and she was crying. I did not say anything that whole day. I loved her so much. Now I don’t know where that love is. There is a side of me that I still need to get to. But the other side is me. I stay real with myself and love myself before she goes and hurts me. I want to have that mother and kid thing one day. And yes I had the right to be angry and I cried and cried. ~Shamika

When students were given the task to write in role of the veteran selling poppies for their story from a picture, their writing was developed after first critiquing and then expanding upon their original manuscripts. Students who were at first hesitant and shy about the writing process were able to listen to the teacher offer suggestions for writing and then the class brainstormed ideas. In an initial student survey, students remarked that they did not like writing. Those same students, however, suddenly were producing multiple pages of text. Daniel was one student who said initially that he did not enjoy the writing process. He typed a four page story from a picture, however, and then journaled how he felt that writing had become a way for him to get his inner thoughts down on paper.

“In the beginning of the year I didn’t like writing. Now I like putting down all of my ideas. I was happy when I did that four-page story and I couldn’t believe I could do that. When I was writing it I was thinking about how maybe my parents would be proud of me.”

~Daniel

Students completed a discourse analysis of the poem, In Flanders Fields. After I modeled how this process was to be completed, students were better able to conceptualize the assignment. Students then wrote in a journal that it helped to see other students’ perspectives about the work, which brought the difficult terminology to the level of each individual student. Shamika commented that she

felt she was able to look at the poem differently and get a deeper feeling about the words when she saw the guidance of both the teacher and her peers interspersed with her analysis. Anderson, Morrill, and Adler (2002) found that lower track classes were half as likely as higher track classes to include discussion into the curriculum. The importance of discussion was evident when students remarked that it was easier to produce written work after talking about their ideas, further proving that discourse that broadens where a student is coming from, can lead to academic success. When working in role, I can open up a number of routes for enriching the drama. I can challenge the class in ways that are not possible as a teacher. By supporting a minority view, by suggesting alternatives, and by moving the drama along, I can elevate the language and support the contributions of the students.

“That is great. Now imagine that I am walking by the Veteran on the corner. How would I feel looking at him? What would possess me to purchase poppies from him?”

“I do not support the war or anything it stands for. What gives that man the right to sell his flowers on MY pavement?”

~ Examples of further probing by the teacher

Initially, in September, students were not able to expand their thinking. Extended practice with this concept allowed students to think in multiple perspectives. Their work in “drama” was never finished.

A recurring theme was that *drama helps children see beyond literal meaning, even subconsciously, so that an understanding of the complexity and subtlety of meaning is applied to the story.* If story is being used as the source of a drama, then the child brings to the text the ability to hypothesize, to identify with and clarify what is happening in the story, in the drama, and in his or her own life. The learning is integrated as he or she engages with the two art forms. When a student has translated a written symbol into experience, he or she can then re-examine the story in the light of this new experience. Papa's Gift is a book that deals with the relationship between a young girl and her grandfather and then his ultimate death. Students were able to cull more meaning and were able to relate more personally to the character when they wrote individual journals about their own experiences dealing with death. "Drama response journals help to connect reading and writing, promote critical thinking and effective response, develop interpretive skills, and support follow-up discussion activities" (Swartz, 1998, p. 73). Students were able to see beyond the literal meaning of just Clara and her history, and they were able to articulate their own personal histories. This was further exemplified when students wrote letters to the main character in the novel we read. Not only were they identifying their own histories, they were now able to apply their world, their voices to different situations.

Dear Clara,

I wanted to say I am sorry for the death of your grandfather. I know it may be hard for you because he was your best friend. You did everything together like make snow sandwiches and snow chickens. Your pa gave you sucker peppermints in church. I know it is hard to deal with death and it is never easy, but you can't give up. My aunt died in a car crash last year and I wanted to give up, but I couldn't. I can't give up even if I want to. My aunt left behind three kids that I have to be there for. Clara, you need to be there for your mom and dad, too. One day it will be easier to go into his room and sit in his rocking chair. One day the snow globe he gave you won't make you feel so sad. I want to give you some advice, Clara. Don't think of the sad things that you can't do anymore, think of how sad it would be if you NEVER did those things with your Pa. That is the only thing that helps me deal with my aunt not being here anymore.

Your friend,

Colleen

The process of writing can be a language form in which engaged writers/participants explore their feelings and ideas, learning not only to express themselves but to rethink, reassess, restructure, and re-examine their work and perhaps even come to an understanding of the needs of the reader.

“That book you read to us was a thinking kind of book. It made me think of my grandfather.” ~ Keith

Writing in role and acting a scene allows a student to lose his or her inhibitions and speak more freely, without fear of repercussions. During the course of this semester, I was struck by the lack of confidence students had when I asked them for their opinion regarding an issue. They were often times baffled that I would even ask them what their thoughts were and were hesitant to offer their views. This was first exhibited when students were wary of offering their thoughts on classroom rules. They struggled with the fact that I wanted to truly hear from them. When students were able to “hide” behind the persona of a character, they were suddenly able to express their thoughts. Fine (2002) found that children were better able to rethink and discuss difficult social situations so that complexities could be revealed, analyzed, and debated after they utilized role-playing as a teaching tool. Evidence of this was when I asked the students to debate whether or not they agreed with a character’s decision to go to war. They could not do that task. When it was posed to them as “what do you think Tim should do?” they were able to immerse themselves in the character of Tim and fully debate this concept. They were then able to take their spoken words and apply them and commit them to the paper as written text. Maura was initially a shy person who felt her contributions to class discussions were worthless, but through the continued use of speaking in role, she was able to broaden her

comfort zone and then eventually her own voice was being heard more and more. Maura rarely raised her hand in the beginning of the semester. She answered questions when called up but would speak in a whisper with her eyes lowered and her cheeks flaring red. Through the incorporation of creative dramatics, by the end of the study she was volunteering to act out scenes from the novel. She volunteered to be Mr. Heron, a character from the novel we read, and even created authentic spoken lines to correspond with the movements she incorporated. In an interview, she said those activities helped her “open from her shell” in here and now she is even comfortable reading orally to the class. “I won’t read out loud in any other class, but in here I feel safe.” Maura and the other students’ confidence and competence in their language abilities were enriched and increased through the synthesis of language, feeling, and thought.

As students grow in dramatic ability, they improve their communication skills. Using journals allowed the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of students’ thinking and allowed students to understand more of their own thinking. In order for me to effectively teach students, I needed to know from where they were coming. When journaling, I asked students to grapple with experiences; when acting, they synthesized their problems. Initially, students wrote one or two sentence responses to journal prompts. During the course of the study, the length of the responses grew, as did the depth and clarity of their ideas. Students always had the opportunity to “dog-ear” a journal page that they did not want me to read.

Beth was one student who took advantage of this opportunity. After continued writing and a continued effort to build trust in the classroom, Beth no longer felt she needed to dog-ear her work. Her communication skills were expanded and she was able to reach from her safety net.

NOW

Now...I read when I am bored.

Now...I write when I am upset and need to get my thoughts down on paper.

Now... I know that I can speak and not worry about being made fun of.

Now...I read and the books take me new places.

Now... I want to know what happens to a character when the last page is read.

Now...I know that when I write, someone actually wants to read it.

I will always live in NOW and never go back to

YESTERDAY

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

“The whispered conversations in overcrowded hallways, So much to say not just today but always. . . Yes, everything’s as if we never said goodbye . . . We’ve taught the world new ways to dream!”

~Sunset Boulevard

There was never really a true beginning to this journey that we embarked upon, and likewise not a clearly defined ending. The shared experiences that lived and thrived within the walls of our classroom are not curtailed just because the students have found their own way into the drama. Our time together has only deepened my desire to better educate my students, better know them completely, and better help them achieve their own voices that will carry them to success larger than I can even dream for them. We have come so far, but there are still places that await us. Many aspects of this research would benefit from further study. Implementing creative dramatics covers such a broad spectrum of concepts that it was difficult to see the strengths and weaknesses of the individual activities. While I saw a tremendous increase in student writing, was that due to the amount of journaling the students completed or perhaps the character identification through writing in role? Perhaps if only one area was focused upon I would have a more clearly defined answer. Our classroom became a safe haven for students and they were able to participate more fully in the texts that we covered. A further extension of this study would be to see how the students transfer newly acquired writing skills to other academic areas. One student Maura

remarked to me one day that she felt “safe” in the language arts class and she wasn’t shy to read out loud any longer, but she would never volunteer to read in her other classes. How did that happen? Did we just wake up one day and innately know we could trust each other in this classroom? A closer analysis of the discourse used in a classroom to promote a climate conducive to learning would be beneficial.

This classroom was our stage for four months and much was accomplished during that time frame. Because many areas of creative dramatics were covered, however, I was not able to give each student enough time to deeply delve into a role they were assuming. If more time were allocated, I would have been able to have students further express their thoughts in the dramatic manner that best suited them. One student, perhaps, could write a play detailing his or her interpretation about how a story SHOULD have ended, had he or she been the author, if writing in role was a strong suit. While another student could have the opportunity to do creative movement exercises depicting the same story, if that was an area where he or she was strongest. Teaching and learning then could be more self directed and geared towards the individual academic needs of the students.

My goal from the onset of this endeavor was to make reading come alive. That goal was accomplished and then some. Students with low reading scores

were able to read texts multiple levels above their “tested” abilities. These kids did it. Their stories will never end.

“We’ve taught the world new ways to dream!”

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

September, 2005

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices to take place from September 6th through December 15th. This semester I am focusing my research on the field of special education, documenting the experiences of special education students when creative dramatic strategies are implemented into the language arts/literacy curriculum. Researching and documenting these experiences can lead to a deeper understanding of learning styles and thus a more effective approach to teaching.

As part of my study, students will be asked to use drama as a learning tool, including writing in role and keeping reflective journals. Using the language arts curriculum, students will also utilize theater activities as context building conventions.

I will be collecting samples of student work the children have shared in the classroom. I will be keeping my own reflective journal, as well as interviewing interested students about their feelings towards creative dramatics and the literacy program.

All children in my classroom will continue receiving their education in the same manner as already previously established. All of the aspects above are part of the regular curriculum. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect your child's grade in any way. Your child may withdraw from this study at any time. If the child is withdrawn, I will not use any information pertaining to your child in my study. Regardless of participation in the study, all students will be given the opportunity to provide feedback to me, the teacher.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. Your child's names will be kept confidential. Neither your child's name, nor the name of any other faculty member nor public school will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details of the student's writing may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be secured in my home, including parent approval forms. Upon completion of the study, data will be destroyed.

Any questions you have about the research can be directed to me, Mrs. Kelly Franco, (908) 213-2510, kfranco@server.pburg.k12.nj.us, or my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, (610) 625-7958, crzales@moravian.edu. My principal, Dr. _____ has also approved of this study and can answer questions, if necessary. The guidance counselor is also aware of this study and can be contacted at (908) 213-2510, throughout the duration of the study.

Thank you for your support in this endeavor.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Kelly Franco
Mrs. Kelly Franco

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian signature _____ Date _____
Name of student _____

APPENDIX B

September, 2005

Dear Dr.:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices to take place from September 6th through December 15th. This semester I am focusing my research on the field of special education, documenting the experiences of special education students when creative dramatic strategies are implemented into the language arts/literacy curriculum. Researching and documenting these experiences can lead to a deeper understanding of learning styles and thus a more effective approach to teaching.

As part of my study, students will be asked to use drama as a learning tool, including writing in role and keeping reflective journals. Using the language arts curriculum, students will also utilize theater activities as context building conventions.

I will be collecting samples of student work the children have shared in the classroom. I will be keeping my own reflective journal, as well as interviewing interested students about their feelings towards creative dramatics and the literacy program. Prior to conducting any interviews; student participation will be approved by a parent or legal guardian.

All children in my classroom will continue receiving their education in the same manner as already previously established. All of the aspects above are part of the regular curriculum. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the child's grade in any way. Any child may withdraw from this study at any time. If the child is withdrawn, I will not use any information pertaining to that child in my study. Regardless of participation in the study, all students will be given the opportunity to provide feedback to me, the teacher.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. All of the children's names will be kept confidential. Neither the children's names, nor the name of any other faculty member or public school will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details of the student's writing may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be secured in my home, including parent approval forms. Upon completion of the study, data will be destroyed.

I welcome questions about this research at any time. Any questions you have about the research can be directed to either me or my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, (610) 625-7958, crzales@moravian.edu.

Thank you for your support in this endeavor.

Sincerely,


Kelly Markus Franco

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher participating in the research study and that I read and understand this consent form, and received a copy. Kelly Markus Franco has my permission to conduct this research at Phillipsburg Middle School, Phillipsburg, NJ.

Principal's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C



September 7, 2005

Kelly Markus Franco
131 Nelson Ave.
Easton, Pa 18040

Dear Kelly Markus Franco:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has reviewed your proposal: *Implementing Creative Dramatic Strategies into the Language Arts/Literacy Classroom for Students with Special Needs*. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

A hard copy of this letter will be sent to you through U.S. mail shortly. If you do not receive the letter by the time you need to begin gathering data, please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, please retain at least one copy of the approval letter for your files. Good luck with the rest of your research.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415 (voice)
medwh02@moravian.edu

APPENDIX D

In Flanders Fields

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields*

John McCrae

APPENDIX E



APPENDIX F

I AM

FIRST STANZA

I am (two characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are actually curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

SECOND STANZA

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

APPENDIX G

Informal Reading Inventory

1) Tell me your thoughts about reading.

2) For what reasons do you read?

3) What is your favorite reading book of all time? Why is it your favorite?

4) Do you have a favorite type of book you like to read? Examples: romance, comedy, mystery, non fiction.

5) Are there any authors you know? If so, please name them.

6) Please list the reading you have done in the past month. List any and all reading, including comic books and movie reviews, magazines, or newspapers as well as novels.

7) Please complete the statement "Reading is..."

APPENDIX H

Student Booklet

Mike Fink

Level 60, Page 1

Name _____

Date _____

School _____

Grade _____

Before Reading

Prediction

What are several things that you think might happen in this story?

List several questions that you think might be answered as you read.

Let your teacher know when you have completed this page.

2. Literal Comprehension

Tell what you learn about Mike Fink.

3. Interpretation

How do you think Mike Fink feels when he and Jack Carpenter head west?

What happens in the story to make you think that?

4. Reflection

What do you think is the most important event in this story?

Tell why.

5. Metacognitive Awareness

Check the comprehension strategies that you used to help you understand this story.

- I thought about similar experiences and/or stories. (Making connections)
- I asked myself questions as I read. (Questioning)
- I pictured what was happening. (Visualizing)
- I thought about the reasons why things happened. (Inferring)
- I understood the character's feelings. (Responding emotionally)

Tell how you used these strategies by giving examples of what you did as you read the story.

Name	Date
Teacher	Grade

Text selected by teacher student

This page is completed after pages 2–6 of the form have been done.

Once the DRA 4–8 Continuum on page 6 is completed, record the scores for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension skills/strategies in the designated spaces on this page. Add the scores to obtain a DRA total score.

DRA Text Level	60/80
DRA Reading Engagement Score	___/8
DRA Oral Reading Score	___/16
DRA Comprehension Skills/Strategies Score	___/24
DRA Total Score	___/128

Check the appropriate DRA stage.

√	Total Score	DRA Stage	Grade Level
	64–73	Extending	Third
	74–83	Intermediate	Fourth
	84–93	Advancing Intermediate	Fifth
	94–103	Middle School	Sixth
	104–113	Extending Middle School	Seventh

TEACHER CONFERENCE/ORAL READING**Introduce the text.**

T: *This tall tale, Mike Fink: King of the Keelboatmen, is about how Mike Fink becomes a legend. Please read aloud the first page. Show the student where to stop reading.*

Record the student's oral reading behaviors and mark any miscues as he/she reads aloud. Note the student's fluency (phrasing, expression, and rate). Time the student's oral reading so you can determine the student's reading rate.

"I'm King of the Keelboatmen!" Mike Fink boasted as he traveled the waterways to New Orleans. "I can out-keel any man east or west of the Mississippi River and can haul more cargo than a dozen oxen pulling a herd of elephants! I can outwit, out-wrestle, and out-shoot anybody from here to the Rocky Mountains!"

And do you know what? He was right!

Mike Fink was born right outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, near the Allegheny Mountains. From the beginning, Mike's parents realized he was going to be a handful. When he was only 7 days old, he jumped up in his cradle and hopped out the window. He ran like lightning through the woods and chased the animals. When he was just 7 weeks old, he crowed his first "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" loud enough to wake the bears that hibernated deep in their caves. When he was 7 months old, he grabbed his mama and papa and lifted them high over his head, one in each hand.

At the age of seven, Mike began to show off his talent as a marksman. He used the family rifle, Bang-All, to practice his sharp-shooting skills deep in the forest. Mike amazed even the best shooters. He could knock the stinger off a bee without killing it. He also could

shoot the curly tail off a pig from far away. He could shoot an apple off a tree at the stem, then sit under that same tree, catch the apple, and take a bite before the apple could hit the ground.

Word Count: 253

Time: _____ seconds

Count the miscues that are not self-corrected.

On the chart below, circle the number of miscues not self-corrected and the percent of accuracy.

%	100	99	98	97	96	95	94	93
Miscues	0	1-2	3-5	6-7	8-10	11-12	13-15	16-17

If the student has read the oral reading passage below 97% accuracy, select a lower level text for the assessment.

If the student scored within the shaded area, give the student the accompanying student booklet (on pages 101-104) to record his/her predictions.

Note: Students are not to use the text during the prediction section of the assessment, but they may use the text as they respond to the questions/prompts after reading the entire story.

T: Follow the directions on the first page of your student booklet. After you have finished your predictions, come to me (or raise your hand).

While the student completes the page, you may do the analysis of oral reading fluency on the next page.

TEACHER ANALYSIS OF ORAL READING FLUENCY

Determine the student's oral reading rate.

253 (words) ÷ _____ seconds = _____ WPS × 60 = _____ WPM

Check the student's reading rate range below.

<input type="checkbox"/> Slow	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Adequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Very Good
Less than 95	95-119	120-140	Greater than 140

Use the student's behaviors recorded on the oral reading record to check the appropriate responses.

Student problem-solves words using:	Miscues interfered with meaning:	Miscues included:
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter(s)/sound(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Never	<input type="checkbox"/> Omissions
<input type="checkbox"/> Syllables	<input type="checkbox"/> At times	<input type="checkbox"/> Insertions
<input type="checkbox"/> Rereading	<input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> Reversals
<input type="checkbox"/> Pauses		<input type="checkbox"/> Substitutions that were
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Visually similar
<input type="checkbox"/> Not visually similar		
Comments: _____		

Select the statements that best reflect the student's oral reading behaviors on the DRA 4-8 Continuum on the last page of this guide.

STUDENT READS AND RESPONDS INDEPENDENTLY

After the student has completed his/her predictions, give the student the text.

Note: You may continue with the assessment if time permits, or you may have the student complete the assessment on the following day.

T: *Read the story, and then complete the student booklet.*

Show the student the remaining pages of the booklet.

Write a summary of the story on page 2 and respond to the other sections on pages 3 and 4. If you have any questions, please come to me (or raise your hand).

TEACHER ANALYSIS OF READING SURVEY AND STUDENT BOOKLET

Use the information from the Student Reading Survey to complete the Engagement section of the Continuum. After the student completes the student booklet, select the descriptors that best reflect the student's level of achievement in comprehension skills/strategies on the DRA 4–8 Continuum.

Determine scores for each section on the DRA 4–8 Continuum, and record the results on page 1 of this Observation Guide.

FOCUS FOR INSTRUCTION

Use the student's profile of reading behaviors on the DRA 4–8 Continuum to identify the student's strengths and needs. Use the form on page 206.

Choose three to five possible interventions on the DRA 4–8 Focus for Instruction.

Engagement	Intervention	Instructional	Independent	Advanced
Wide Reading	1 General reading materials (e.g., chapter books, comics)	2 Titles generally below grade-level; limited reading experiences	3 Some titles within 2-3 genres or multiple books within a genre; generally on-grade-level texts	4 Wide variety of titles across 3 or more genres; many on- and above-grade level texts
Self-Assessment and Goal-Setting	1 Vague or no strength and/or goal; may not be directly related to reading	2 Vague strength(s) and goal(s) identified; vague or no plan	3 Strengths and goals related to the reading process/behaviors; relevant plan	4 Multiple strengths and specific goals related to the reading process/behaviors; multiple step plan
Score	2 3	4 5	6 7	8
Oral Reading Fluency				
Expression	1 Little expression; monotone	2 Some expression that conveys meaning	3 Expression reflects mood, pace, and tension at times	4 Expression reflects mood, pace, and tension most of the time
Phrasing	1 Short phrases	2 Longer word phrases some of the time	3 Longer, meaningful phrases most of the time	4 Consistently longer, meaningful phrases
Rate	1 Slow with long pauses and repetitions	2 Moderate with some pauses and repetitions	3 Adequate with a few pauses and/or repetitions	4 Very good
Accuracy Rate	1 90-94%	2 95-96%	3 97-98%	4 99-100%
Score	4 5 6	7 8 9 10	11 12 13 14	15 16
Comprehension Skills/Strategies				
Prediction	1 Illogical or unrelated prediction and/or question	2 1 or 2 reasonable predictions and/or questions related to the text	3 Several reasonable predictions and questions related to the text	4 Several thoughtful predictions and questions directly related to the text
Summary	1 1-2 events in own language and/or copied text; may include incorrect information	2 Partial summary; generally in own language; some important characters/events; may include misinterpretation	3 Adequate summary in own language; important characters' names, many of the important events, some details/vocabulary	4 Adept summary in own language; important characters' names, most important events, details/vocabulary
Literal Comprehension	1 Little information from the text and/or included incorrect information	2 Some information from the text; may include misinterpretation	3 Included information from the text that accurately responds to question(s) or prompt(s)	4 Important information from the text effectively responds to question(s) or prompt(s)
Interpretation	1 Little or no understanding of important text implications	2 Some understanding of important text implications; little or no details	3 Understands important text implications; relevant supporting details	4 Insightful understanding of important text implications; important supporting details
Reflection	1 Insignificant or unrelated message or event	2 Vaguely related or less significant message or event; general or no statement(s) to support opinion	3 Important message or event; relevant statement(s) to support opinion	4 Significant message (beyond the literal level) or event; insightful statement(s) to support opinion
Metacognitive Awareness	1 Vague explanation of the use of 1 strategy or unrelated response	2 Brief explanation of the use of 1 or more strategies; vague or general statement(s)	3 Adequate explanation of the use of 1 or more strategies; specific examples from the text	4 Effective explanations of the use of more than 1 strategy; explicit examples from the text
Score	6 7 8 9 10	11 12 13 14 15 16	17 18 19 20 21 22	23 24

Add the circled numbers in each section together to obtain scores for reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension skills/strategies.

APPENDIX I

Drama Profile

Name: _____ Date: _____

For each question, place a check mark in the column that you think best describes your feelings about working in drama.

	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
1. I enjoy drama	_____	_____	_____
2. I enjoy playing games	_____	_____	_____
3. I enjoy working with different partners	_____	_____	_____
4. I enjoy working in small groups	_____	_____	_____
5. I enjoy working in whole-class activities	_____	_____	_____
6. I felt comfortable working in role	_____	_____	_____
7. Drama gives me the chance to share my ideas	_____	_____	_____
8. Drama helps me to solve problems	_____	_____	_____
9. Drama gives me the opportunity to deal with emotions	_____	_____	_____
10. Drama is for everybody	_____	_____	_____

Circle three qualities that best describe your success as a drama student.

- trustworthy
- co-operative
- confident
- imaginative
- curious
- playful
- conscientious
- leader
- good listener
- risk taker

Put a check mark beside three qualities that you wish you had.

What does drama mean to you ?

APPENDIX J

Drama Reflections

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which game(s) did you enjoy playing the most?

2. Which drama activity/activities appealed to you the most?

3. Which do you prefer - watching others role play a character or taking part in role play?

4. What does role playing teach you?

5. How does drama help you build your imagination?

6. How does drama help you to co-operate?

7. What advice would you give to someone who wants to take a drama course?

8. What did you learn about drama by participating in drama activities?

9. What did you learn about yourself by participating in drama activities?

10. What do you like most about drama?

11. What do you like least about drama?

12. I would improve ...

APPENDIX K

How Is Your Teenager Feeling Today?

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO THE FACIAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE SPECIES

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MELLOW



BUMMED



STOKED



FUNKY



DUMPED



FRIED



RATTLED



BORED



TORQUED



SNARKY



SPACY



AMPED



WOUNDED



SURLY



CHEESED



CRUSHED



QUEASY



TIRED



JIGGY



WHATEVER

ZITS

© 1999 ZITS

APPENDIX L

September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling _____. I am feeling this because I really _____ and _____. One thing that many people don't know about me is that I _____. When I think that I have to read it makes me _____. One thing that I am excited about this year is _____. But I am really nervous about _____.

_____ . My goal for this year is to _____ and I will try to accomplish that by _____.

_____ . What is one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can _____. Is there anything that you hope we can do? I hope we can _____. Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be _____, because _____.

The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher would be you _____.

_____ . So please try not to ever do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.

APPENDIX M

September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling Nervous. I
am feeling this because I really want to know, who I have
for class and

One thing that many people don't know about me is that I
hate bugs. When I think that I
have to read it makes me mad. One thing that I am
excited about this year is to make new friends.

But I am really nervous about
having different teachers that I don't
know

My goal for this year is to pass this year
to go to 9th grade and I will try to accomplish that by
getting good grades

What is
one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can have parties
for when we are good. Is there anything that
you hope we can do? I hope we can DO FUN STUFF AND
eat more candy;

Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be a good class, because sometimes we will read. The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher would be you yelling at the kids, giving them an in-school. So please try not to ever do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.



September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling happy. I
am feeling this because I really want you and now I have
you and your the Best

One thing that many people don't know about me is that I

have a bag now. When I think that I
have to read it makes me upset. One thing that I am
excited about this year is you being my teacher

But I am really nervous about

going out with new kids and
having hard test

My goal for this year is to to get A and B+

and I will try to accomplish that by

going to school every day

What is

one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can go out
side sometime or a vacation (is there anything that
you hope we can do? I hope we can go on all the
trips and have fun

Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be good, because you are grate. The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher would be you Tell me to go to hell. So please try not to ever do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.



September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling excited. I
am feeling this because I really wrote to 1487
and

One thing that many people don't know about me is that I
don't like to read. When I think that I
have to read it makes me nervous. One thing that I am
excited about this year is the Dances.

But I am really nervous about

for ever. My goal for this year is to live with my
being in school and I will try to accomplish that by

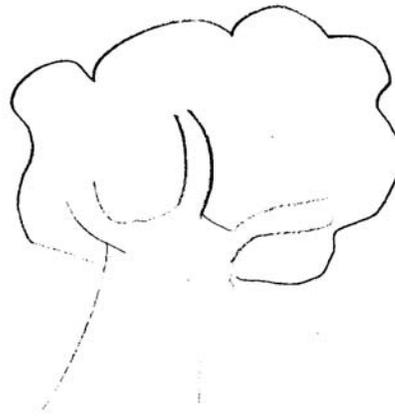
in groups. What is
one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can do stuff

have some field trips. Is there anything that
you hope we can do? I hope we can

Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be the
worst xmas, because I have had
trouble of reading The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher
would be you telling people what I like
to you. So please try not to
ever do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.



September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling Horrible. I
am feeling this because I really dislike school
and I'm not home.

One thing that many people don't know about me is that I

I like black. When I think that I
have to read it makes me tired. One thing that I am
excited about this year is going to have fun.

But I am really nervous about
nothing.

My goal for this year is to a A+
and I will try to accomplish that by

doing work. What is

one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can have fun

Is there anything that
you hope we can do? I hope we can play fast ball

Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be cool
_____, because my teacher
_____. The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher
would be you not working
_____. So please try not to
ever do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.



September, 2005

Dear Mrs. Franco,

Today is the first day of 8th grade and I am feeling good. I am feeling this because I really wanna have a good year and pass 8th and go on to high school

One thing that many people don't know about me is that I

I was in the hospital for trying to kill myself When I think that I have to read it makes me It Doesn't bother me. One thing that I am excited about this year is Grad. morning and getting out of this school But I am really nervous about if I'm going to pass it. I think I won't. Do good tho

My goal for this year is to not get in trouble and I will try to accomplish that by not listening to what other people say

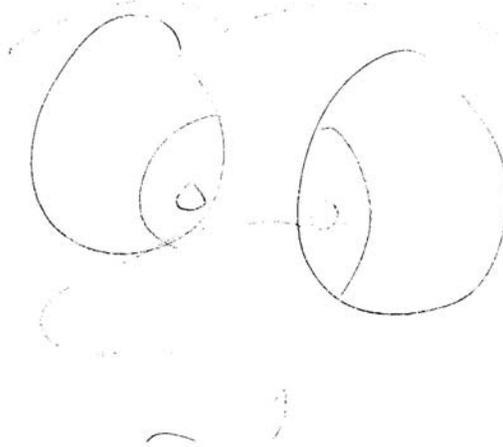
What is one way we, together, can make this class even better? We can be nice to each other

Is there anything that you hope we can do? I hope we can have a nice class

Because of my feeling about reading, I already think this class is going to be not that fun, because I love to read
lots of books. The worst thing you could ever do as a teacher
would be you not to let us read. So please try not to
do that. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Draw a picture of how you are feeling today in the bottom space.



APPENDIX N

Informal Reading Inventory

- 1) Tell me your thoughts about reading.

I think reading is a hard
subject for me

- 2) For what reasons do you

read? To make me a better
reader

- 3) What is your favorite reading book of all time? Why is it your

favorite? my favorite book is the
bad french girls because you
will never now what to expect

- 4) Do you have a favorite type of book you like to read? Examples: romance, comedy,
mystery, non fiction. I like all kinds of books

Like the one I'm reading now the
book name is Circle of Magic Danger
In the Palace

5) Are there any authors you know? If so, please name

them.

6) Please list the reading you have done in the past month. List any and all reading, including comic books and movie reviews, magazines, or newspapers as well as novels.

o how moved my cell
o paps gift

7) Please complete the statement "Reading is..."

or
subject
verbally

9/26/05

Informal Reading Inventory

- 1) Tell me your thoughts about reading.

Boring

- 2) For what reasons do you

read? FOR NO REASON [I don't read.
I hate reading]

- 3) What is your favorite reading book of all time? Why is it your

favorite? don't know one I don't have one
because I don't like reading.

- 4) Do you have a favorite type of book you like to read? Examples: romance, comedy,
mystery, non fiction.

ROMANCE is cool because
it shows you how to treat a
Titanic

5) Are there any authors you know? If so, please name

them.

Don't know

6) Please list the reading you have done in the past month. List any and all reading, including comic books and movie reviews, magazines, or newspapers as well as novels.

Dad's gift, Who Moved My Cheese
Newspaper for current events for
social studies.

7) Please complete the statement "Reading is..."

Boring!

APPENDIX O

I AM

by Elly T.

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.
I wonder if there ever was a horse that could fly.
I hear the stomping of a hundred mustangs on the desert in Arabia.
I see a horse with golden wings soaring into the sunset.
I want to ride swiftly over a green meadow.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I pretend to be an Olympic jumper.
I feel the sky pressing down on me as I ride along a sandy shore.
I touch the clouds on a winged horse.
I worry that I'll fall off and become paralyzed.
I cry when a colt dies.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I understand that I will not be able to ride every day of my life.
I say, let all horses roam free.
I dream about the day when I have a horse of my own.
I try to be the best rider in the world.
I hope to ride all my life.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I AM

by Sandy M.

I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I wonder what I, and the world, will be like in the year 2000.
I hear silence pulsing in the middle of the night.
I see a dolphin flying up to the sky.
I want the adventure of life before it passes me by.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.

I pretend that I'm the ruler of the world.
I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders.
I touch the sky, the stars, the moon, and all the planets
as representatives of mankind.
I worry about the devastation of a nuclear holocaust.
I cry for all the death and poverty in the world.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.

I understand the frustration of not being able to do something easily.
I say that we are all equal.
I dream of traveling to other points on the earth.
I try to reach out to poor and starving children.
I hope that mankind will be at peace and not die out
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.

APPENDIX P

I am a wonderful and happy student
I wonder if angel likes me
I hear angels over head
I see heather ever day
I want to go out with angel
I am a wonderful + happy student

I pretend to be nice to people that I don't like
I feel happy when Renee is not here
I touch ever thing I see
I worry about my clothing and that I don't look like a bum when I go
outside
I cry for my real mom
I am a wonderful and happy student

I understand if people don't like me
I say mean stuff to people
I dream about Angel ever night
I try to be nice but I don't like anyone any way
I hope I go to 9th grade
I am a wonderful and happy student.

APPENDIX Q

In Flanders Fields

Mrs. Travers
is the greatest
teacher in
the whole
world love,

In Flanders fields the poppies blow ^{so colorful - looks like blood}
Between the crosses, row on row, ^{on the ground I didn't think}
That mark our place; and in the sky ^{↳ a stark reminder of those who have fought and died. / in}
The larks, still bravely singing, fly - ^{life still goes on amidst the death}
Scarce heard amid the guns below. ^{I think the same way}
We are the Dead. Short days ago ^{how quickly it changes.}
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, ^{I think the same way}
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie

In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe: ^{- will fighting solve this - does the quarrel}
To you from failing hands we throw ^{have to continue? maybe that can}
The torch; be yours to hold it high. ^{it seems like he feels pride in being}
If ye break faith with us who die ^{a soldier. W/4 to go now.}
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields

I thank This is buterful

Do I like
love ones
know they
have died?
How hard
must be
maybe they
don't even know
it or
hold,

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

I don't know what color I just usually are a bright, bright red. Do the poppies?

to do it. Brave, to me, living going on and things are so hard. what do you think? not being so something.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

what does saw sunset glow mean. they saw the ends of days, felt the warmth on their faces and felt ALIVE at one point.

they felt they could not go on no longer there was no point to this war. Someone you enemy. someone you

Take up our quarrel with the foe:

what does foe mean. someone you

To you from failing hands we throw

The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die

what is a torch. - A symbol, I think, what do you think it represents? strength

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields

John McCrae

APPENDIX R

MY DAD

My dad, Brad, is a veteran who has served in the armed forces. He is 73 years old and he started selling poppies on the corner after his best friend died in the war many years ago.

My dad met Joe in the 6th grade where they went to the same middle school. They both shared an interest in learning about wars and one day they said they would join the Marines together. As soon as they graduated high school, Joe went with my dad to enlist in the Marines. They both ranked up as Lance Corporals in boot camp.

After World War II, Joe and my dad came home. Each one got married and my dad had two children. They remained the best of friends and lived in the same town. They thought their lives were perfect. My dad loved being with his family and his freinds. Joe found out that his wife was going to have their first child. But then war came again and their lives were changed dramatically. Brad and Joe were again

drafted into the war but this time they are leaving behind families and they are going to Korea.

This war was different from the previous war. This time Brad and Joe didn't know if they would make it home safely. One fall morning Joe and my dad, with five others, went to secure a building and make sure no one was inside, when they got inside the building they went up to the top floor. Suddenly gun shots rang out and Joe began to think of his wife and unborn child back home. Joe asked Brad to tell his family he loved them if he died in the war. He also made Brad promise to take care of his family if he died and was not able to. My dad made that promise.

Right after my dad promised this wish to his best friend, they both heard a loud bang. The top of the building was beginning to burn so my dad and the Marines began running down the stairs. As they reached the bottom, Koreans rushed in and attacked them. Joe was shot in the leg. He fell. My dad yelled that he would not leave him. Joe was shot again this time in the head. The other Marines ran to save themselves and

left Joe behide, but my dad refused to let that happen. Even while Joe lay there dying pleading to be left behide, my dad said he would't leave him. He told Joe he needed him and his family needed him. My dad carried Joe from the building and carried him to safety. Along the way Joe's head started to gush blood from the bullet wound so my dad took off his bandana and wrapped Joe's head in it to try to stop the blood. Joe began to say that he was feeling cold so my dad coverd him with whatever he had try to warm him up. Joe asked where my dad was taking him so he told him he was taking him to safety.

"You will be fine, Joe," said my dad. "You're gonna make it. You're gonna make it."

"No...", Joe started to say, but then he never got a chance to finish his sentence, because Joe was dead. My dad carried his best friend to a big open field and buried him amongst the poppy flowers. He said a prayer and spoke to the wind saying he would honor the promise he made to his best friend Joe. He would take care of Joe's family.

When he walked back to the camp and told the General what happened, the general told my father that he needed to move on and continue the fight in Joe's honor. My dad continued to fight until the day the war was over.

My dad made it home safely, but the first thing he did was go to Joe's family and tell them exactly how Joe died. Joe's son, who hadn't been born when Joe was drafted was now three-years-old and he burst into tears when he heard the news. My dad kept his promise and always took care of his family. Each year now, on Veteran's Day, my dad stands on a corner and sells poppy flowers so people will never forget his best friend Joe.

