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**THE EFFECTS OF DIALOGUE JOURNALING  
ON STUDENT MOTIVATION:  
OR WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE SOCIAL STUDIES  
A PART OF THE STUDENTS' REAL LIVES?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study documents the observations and effects of using dialogue journals to improve motivation in a fifth grade Social Studies class. A regular education teacher with the support of a Learning Support teacher used a class comprised of eight regular education students and ten Special Education students to compile information on the effects of communication through journaling. Located in a diverse urban-suburban- rural school district, the class included Latino, African American, Caucasian, and Indian students from middle and lower income households. The study focused on motivation, the active involvement of students as shown through both verbal and written participation both in and out of the classroom, and how dialogue journaling would help to increase the motivation to be involved. The journaling took the form of a designed booklet in which the students wrote notes for the class and discussed the notes with a parent/guardian /partner who then wrote back to the teacher. The teacher then responded to the parent/guardian/ partner's note in writing. Participating students had the opportunity to share their partner's writing in class. The results of the study imply that students who are given the opportunity to share learning with a partner and then report those conversations to the class were more attentive and involved in Social Studies lessons. The author uses the students' response journals to illustrate the changes and growth in conversation inside and outside of the classroom throughout the period of the study.

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Meeting each week with my Moravian classmates and professors stopped me from giving up on this, at times, overwhelming project. We were all in this boat together and when one of us needed a push, we were all there to give it.

I need to thank my 'kids' and their parents for helping me to find a different myself, as they allowed me to get to know them. As expressed so well in this poem...

*How can I explain who I am without seeing your face?*

*How will you understand without seeing mine?*

*How can I express how I feel without knowing your heart?*

*How will you understand without knowing mine?*

Florencia Garcia, eleventh grade student researcher, Southern California

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## INTRODUCTION

A new year, a new grade, a new room... day 3 of the year...

*“I have a student who hasn’t shown up yet. Do you know anything about*

*Damien Sanchez?” asked Mrs. Hunt.*

“We just got a call from the parents today. They said that they had gotten lost on their way back from Mexico,” replied the guidance counselor.

*Mrs. Hunt laughs, “They got lost? You’re kidding!”*

“No. They drive down to Mexico each summer to work and then drive back up here each fall,” explained the counselor.

*“Wow, this will be interesting,” sighed Mrs. Hunt.*

Damien was my first ESL student. Looking back I don’t think I ever really worked to understand what school meant to him or his family. I remember his mother coming in for a meeting. We talked about Damien’s progress through an interpreter. I seem to remember sharing my expectations for him, but not asking for her input.

After Thanksgiving break of that year as the class shared what they had been doing, Damien mentioned that he and his family ordered out Chinese food for Thanksgiving dinner. Up until that day I had never considered that people living in the United States did not cook a turkey on the last Thursday in

November. I'd like to say that I used the opportunity to learn about Damien's different traditions, but I didn't. I remember thinking, "How sad that they live in this country and don't share in this tradition." I did not see how my own upbringing affected, and continues to affect, my perceptions of my students. It would be many years before my eyes would be opened

I began to realize the level of my own heretofore unknown ignorance after taking a graduate course on English Language Learners, Families, and Communities. It finally became apparent to me that I would need to change my approach to teaching students who have varied family and neighborhood differences. A look back at last year illustrates this point.

It was obvious to me that my basic level, fifth grade American history students had a great deal of potential, but it took about two months for me to build enough trust to get some of the students to talk in class. These students were consistently on task and could participate in a conversation with relevant comments, but they often chose not to share. Even with teacher encouragement, only eight of the twenty-eight students would voluntarily participate, a dismal outlook if I wanted the students to be actively involved in their study of American history.

What caused this to happen? Over the course of a year the Learning Support teacher and I charted behaviors, wrote and implemented varied behavioral and academic plans, and assessed the success of these plans. We

found that there were at least two reasons for our students' lack of involvement: my delivery of the lessons and the students' lack of connection to the content. We began by recognizing that we were allowing the class discussion to be controlled by deliberate non-participant behavior from several students as evidenced by a sociometric matrix completed three months into the school year. The analysis showed that several students were controlling the amount of involvement by passively refusing to participate and be involved. My delivery of the lessons using a lecturing style, although intended to help control the behavior, led to fewer opportunities for these students to be positively engaged participants. The rest of the class then followed the negative behavior model that developed. We, meaning the students, and the teachers, had to work to channel the behavior in a positive direction.

First, to increase the opportunities for students to participate, the delivery of the lessons would need to be changed. Having another teacher and an aid in the classroom gave us the opportunity to move into small group work several times a week. Through the use of these small groups more of the students became actively involved in class. This took weeks of modeling and positive reinforcement.

Next we began to implement a two part behavioral program, and thanks in part to this program and to the small group work, we saw a positive change. The program allowed for one warning before the student was removed

from the class. The students' behavior changed in that two of the three students became more cooperative and less disruptive, but not more engaged. The third child did not respond to varied programs and was placed in alternative education program. Although this behavior plan had helped to allow us to focus the class on the content of the subject instead of daily disruptions, this was not a positive way of resolving a student's non-participation and did not answer the question, "Why did this happen?" Now I needed to think about why the students were disconnected from the learning experience to begin with.

I had a 'gut feeling' about why it had happened and had begun to look for research that supported my assertion. The key non-participants, At-Risk students, each brought a variety of deep social and economic difficulties to school each day in addition to academic stresses. Making logical, real, connections to events in history was not easy for these children. This was my first year teaching academically struggling students. Would helping the students to see the direct connections between events in history and their world increase participation and involvement?

In addition to my concerns related to participation, all three boys were highly defensive in their reactions to guidance from teachers. When asked to participate individually or as a part of a group they would slump around the edge of the group but not contribute. When we would attempt to

engage one particular young man his body would sink into a chair, chin down on the chest, and arms crossed. I wondered, “Why does he do this? What is he thinking? What can I do to understand him better?”

This led to the realization of a second component to my dilemma not related to my delivery of the lessons. As I look back on the difficulties that all five teachers on the team had with these students, a commonality appeared. None of the five teachers lived in any of the students’ neighborhoods, or a neighborhood remotely like the student’s ‘home turf’. All five teachers are white and live in middle class, suburban neighborhoods. The team lacks a connection to these students’ home environments, myself most of all. Was this causing our students and their parents to step away, both physically and emotionally, from developing a deep involvement in the learning experience? How deep was my lack of understanding of my students’ lives?

To say that my hometown was not diverse is an understatement. In 1974 I was a junior at my suburban, all-white, high school when the first African American family moved into town. The father was a doctor and had a son who was in my class. He was the only African American student in my school. I remember how we had a school dance and everyone wanted to watch, naively thinking that all black kids could dance like they did on Soul Train.

Growing up in isolation was a detriment to my understanding others. As an adult, and an educator, I now find that I enjoy working at continually

growing by learning from my friends, students, and colleagues who have different experiences from my own. Often I find that the differences are much smaller than I had imagined.

How can teachers with backgrounds such as mine encourage all students to draw upon and productively incorporate their life experiences into their school learning? Or are we sometimes unwilling to accept each student's field of reference? Why would or should any student trust an adult who has little knowledge and interaction with his/her surrounding community? I needed to learn about the different community environments and fields of experience in order to help my students to learn. Of course, this would require me to continue to step outside of my comfort zone.

I felt that my students in at-risk situations really needed the constructive help of an adult who lives with them or sees them daily to make connections between the home community and the subject content taught in school. Working with the adults in these children's lives to find a way in which they can be a part of the child's schoolwork in a manner that is compatible with their own experiences would be a cooperative effort.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND TRUSTWORTHINESS STATEMENT**

How does using dialogue journaling motivate both students and parents to be more involved in the world of schooling? The examination of this question became a cooperative effort between the students, their parents and me. At times I asked the Learning Support teacher and her aide to help with observations and recordings. The students and their parents completed surveys and participated in group interviews. I assessed student work for both completion and effort shown and also watched to see if there were positive or negative affects that correlated with homework completion. I used student-partner-teacher journals to initiate involvement and communication between student, partners, and teacher. Each of these data collections methods will be explained in detail below.

### **Data Collection**

I introduced the study at Open House Night. Our school traditionally has had an evening for the parents prior to the beginning of the new school year. At Open House I offered an invitation for parents to join in having an active role in their child's school by participating in a weekly activity in the Social Studies class. The objective of this invitation was to encourage the parents to have a voice in the school environment. Parents had reported that the

lack of opportunities to be involved in the academics of our school as one of the top five criticisms of the school during a parent survey given last year. The study would include all of the students in my basic level Social Studies class. I was particularly interested in trying to impact the parents of the African American, English as a Second Language, and lower socioeconomic students, since students from these groups had shown the least interest in being involved in my Social Studies classes in the past. As I thought that I would need a parent who is bi-lingual to help with the group, this evening was an opportunity to admit my linguistic shortcomings and ask for help. Through interviews with one of the directors of a local social service agency, I learned that bi-lingual parents with English as the weaker language often feel the most threatened by the school environment. By asking for their help and input I hoped to see an increase in the focus on academics by their children.

Both the Human Subjects Internal Review Board at Moravian College and my principal had given their permission for this study (Appendix A and B). While the overview of the study was presented at the Open House, the consent forms and detailed information for the parents would be sent home with the students from school, since not all parents attend the Open House (Appendix C and D).

## **Surveys**

During the first week of the school and the last week of the study I surveyed the students and parents about their learning of American history. (Appendix E and F) These surveys helped me to hone in on what to look for and change as the study progressed (MacLean and Mohr, 1999). I evaluated the results of these pre- and post- study surveys and shared the results with students and parents. Through these surveys the students and parents made suggestions to help improve the approach to teaching the subject. Both parents and students liked that they could make decisions that affected our classroom. The end of the study surveys showed me if there had been a change in attitudes in both parents and students.

### **Journaling**

Once each week the students and parents reviewed and completed journal entries about the current topic. The parent and child chose which night of the week their schedule at home allowed for time to complete the assignment. The entry included their interest in the subject, comments on the current method or class structure, and input from their parents. This final part is where I hoped to see the parents becoming more involved with their children. Morningstar (1999) had found that journal writing helped his parents to see where their children stood developmentally and understand the role that they have in the educational world.

I read, scored, and recorded the journals for completion and connection to content (Appendix G). As the journals were not a formal assessment there was not any type of score or grade written in the journal. I wrote comments in return to those written by the student and parent. As the study progressed and some students changed from a parent partner to a peer partner, I recorded the changes in their responses.

### **Interviews**

Throughout the study I informally interviewed individual parents and students. I also completed whole group class interviews. Hubbard and Power (2003) noted that informal interviews may occur naturally throughout our research process. I found these informal interviews to be particularly useful since the students were often more relaxed and open. As MacLean and Mohr (1999) point out, small group and individual interviews give a teacher researcher the opportunity to focus on several key participants and use their repeated interviews to show changes throughout the study as a whole. In particular the student and group interviews, completed every other week, offered input related to the uniqueness of the personal dynamics of the specific class and changes in their attitudes toward school and learning history.

### **Field Logs**

Recording observation made in the classroom gave me a diary of the reactions of my students to the history being presented and to the changes in

our routine. As the class moved through learning how to journal, experimenting with journaling, and revising our own routines in journaling, the field notes served to show patterns in involvement both for the class as a whole and for individual students. Most of the field notes were participant observation as I was involved in the class while noting changes and reactions. On a bulletin board in the front of the room the students became active participant observers by tracking their own improvement and consistency through the visual display of stars earned for participation in the journals. We had open discussions on how we could help the students who were not earning stars to become more consistent in their involvement. As the study progressed, I coded the log to reflect the differences between teacher observation and teacher commentary. Coding the log and discussion with my advisor Dr. Shosh helped me to come to terms with some of my biases which were hindering the progress of the study. MacLean and Mohr (1999) explain that the data from teaching need to be recorded and field logs serve that purpose by providing data that can then be shared with fellow researchers such as research groups. This rang true as my fellow researchers guided me to see that it was necessary to allow the study to chart its own course and not take the exact form that I had planned.

### **Looking at the Data**

Multiple sources of information help to support the reactions and conclusions drawn from the data collected (Hubbard and Power, 2003). I reflected on the information collected from the surveys, interviews, field log, and journals to create the story of my study. I drew upon the incidents from the field for further reflection. These were often critical incidents that suggested important changes were occurring. I wrote reflective memos from which emerged retellings that I used to question myself. Hubbard and Power (2003) suggested that such memos would be especially useful in the beginning of a study, moving the teacher researcher to examine data from different angles. I found that my memos were frequently about the need for peer partners, and the motivational affect of reading the journals aloud.

I surveyed the parents and the students at the opening and closing of the study. I used surveys at the beginning of the study to gain an understanding of the student and parent view of learning about history. The results helped me to plan and then reorganize the study as needed.

Through the period of the study I also compared the level of participation by the students and their partners. I also compared the level of participation to the results of standard assessments. I hoped to see an increase in the level of success for the students on the assessments as the level of parent/partner involvement increased. Through the use of the journals I hoped to see the parents/partners and the students begin to be actively excited,

engaging in talk about history. I hoped to awaken curiosity in my students who seemed to look at all new ideas as work and not fun.

### **Research Groups**

Having a research group of three colleagues who could meet and discuss the process and findings of our research was invaluable. Classroom research is not a straight path, but one with many twists and turns as days did not always go as planned, and responses were not always as anticipated. Having colleagues from different disciplines who could look at the work from the outside provides balance to the research (MacLean and Mohr, 1999). Our weekly meetings gave us a forum to give suggestions for improvements as well as encouragement. We pushed one other to move outside our comfort zones to make forward movement. Our colleagues help us to see and make connections that would otherwise be missed (Hubbard and Power, 2003).

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

This research design includes several types of data collected on separate time schedules. The varied types of input guided my research study. Through journaling I understood the student's attitudes toward history as a subject in order to better understand how to motivate them through effective teaching. Parent input would help both the parents and me to better understand how the student thinks historically and the effect of parent involvement on student motivation to be a more active learner.

I used parent and student surveys were used at the beginning and the conclusion of the study. The comparison of the responses allowed both the teacher and the parents to reflect on the benefits of the journaling activity and how their involvement affected each student's motivation.

The students and parents had opportunities to be co-researchers by offering suggestions to improve the study, its methods, and the teaching of history. I shared data with parents through discussions and newsletters. Student and parent comments collected through the surveys, journal entries, and informal meetings were shared with identities masked to protect privacy.

Learning is a two way street. As this study progressed I found that I had to reflect more upon my own biases and myself. As Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul wrote, "When researchers scrutinize themselves they tend to find a mix of cultural, social class, racial, gender and other group identifications, perhaps taken for granted. (2004, p.359)"

Discussions with my research group and professor led me to recognize the subconscious influence that my own memories of my parent involvement in school played on my evaluation of both the study and data collected. I needed to keep in mind the fact that my own experiences and understanding affected my interpretation of the observed and reported events (Ely, 1997). As a researcher I found that it was necessary to use the time to think

introspectively in order to allow the study to be analyzed in a trustworthy manner, in turn, allowing me to see my students in a new light.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review examines research on the effects on student learning, cultural influences, and journaling between students and parents in relation to student involvement in the classroom.

John Dewey (1938) lays out the impact that experience plays on a child's development specifically related to the world of schooling. His statement, "... the principle of continuity of experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of what comes after," speaks directly to the need for educators to understand how the experiences that a student brings to the school environment will directly affect the learning which takes place (p.35). The empowerment of students through the validation of the experiences that shape them both inside and outside of the school environment commit teachers to develop classroom activities that are inclusive of all students (Triece, 2002). Triece (2002) found the classroom an appropriate place both to challenge the place of dominant ideologies and to acknowledge and overcome the exclusion of real life experiences which affect the learning experiences of students. The response to the language used by students to express knowledge, the validation of the out of school experiences, can cause students to accept or reject both school's

language and school life in general (Delpit, 2002). The dominant ideology, language, and experience base in classrooms is that of white, Anglo-Saxon teachers. Exclusion of minority outside experience and language is prominent in classrooms with white Anglo teachers and minority students (Triece ,2002; Delpit, 2002).

Many researchers such as Honaker (2003), Powell (1994), and Oldfather and Moje (1996) have gathered information on student involvement from the point of view of both the student and their respective cultural communities. Honaker (2003) examined how instruction by white female teachers affected the academic success and involvement of their African American students. Honaker based her study on the theory that a classroom is a social system shared by all of the people in the room (Powell, 1996). This is paired with the work by Oldfather (1994) and Moje (1996) showing that literacy is interwoven with the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural influences in a setting. The outcome of this work was the suggestion that to engage students, their cultural experiences should be used as a springboard.

MacPhee, Fritz, and Schubert (1998) conducted two studies on the use of community services by minority parents. These two studies of Hispanic, Anglo, and Native American families found that both the Hispanic and Native American families were more hesitant to use community services and for the children. I was very interested in this idea as I had found through my fourteen

years of teaching that the Latino parents were often least trusting of the school personal. This study showed that the main reasons for this were scheduling, proximity, and a fear of being judged negatively. Arzubiaga's (2002) study added additional information by finding that the emotional energy and stress of home life also caused families to be less able to help students. Political issues such as the immigration procedure also affected the amount of involvement which parents were willing to chance, making trust a strong factor.

As Byrk & Schneider concluded after a 2003 longitudinal study,"... because of the class and race differences between school professionals and parents in most urban areas, conditions can be ripe for misunderstanding and distrust. Effective urban schools need teachers who not only know their students well but also have an empathetic understanding of their parents' situations and the interpersonal skills needed to engage adults effectively" (pg.44). If trust is developed between the school and parents, then support from the school such as direction to outside support services might be accepted.

This research in-turn led me to look at the impact of community as a whole on the student and classroom. In Education and Experience , Dewey (1938) lays out the impact that experience plays on a child's development specifically related to the world of schooling. His statement, "The principle of continuity of experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of what comes after" (p. 35), speaks directly

to the need for educators to understand how the experiences that a student brings to the school environment will directly affect the learning which takes place. The term commonplace, or the combination of people, place, things, and ideas that create and affect a teaching community (Schwab, 1983), overlaps with the term experience. Schwab called these factors, “desiderata” which is defined as elements viewed as a necessity. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) referred to these factors as subject matter, milieu, learner, and teacher. This is deceptively simple sounding. All of these variables, particularly experience, commonplace, and milieu, cause change within the classroom and effect the teaching therein.

Increasing motivation of At Risk students is a topic that many researchers (Carger, 1997; Leake & Leake, 1992; Honaker, 2003; Powell, 1996; Oldfather, 1994, Moje, 1996) have explored. Teachers must reach out and learn about the cultures within the community of their schools (Carger, 1997). In inner city schools this area of concern is complicated by the diversity of the student population. A broad heading of ‘At-Risk’ students refers to economically disadvantaged students who live in violent neighborhoods with a high percentage of single parent households. Within this heading are sub groups of Latino and African American students. Each ethnic or cultural group has views of education that are shaped by their ideals and beliefs.

Working with a student population that is one third African American and one third Latino led me to discover what others had found to be motivating factors with these students. The results varied from a pilot school in the Milwaukee Public School System (Leake & Leake, 1992) which wrote the curriculum of the Malcolm X Academy, grades 6-9, to be built on the elements of the Nguzo Sabathe or the seven principles of Kwanza. This curriculum was developed to connect the academic experience directly to the cultural influences taught in the African American homes of the local neighborhood. Possibly a case could be made that this 10 year experiment is a warning that total immersion into one specific cultural influence may not strengthen the school. This school's state test scores are the lowest for the Milwaukee District in Reading and second to the bottom in Math. This was an extreme example of total immersion in student culture to support motivation.

African American students may be hesitant to be involved in classroom activities and discussions. This was discussed by Pennington (2002) in the context of a college level Interracial Communication class. She found that the African American students did not sense that they could speak openly about their viewpoints until a solid base of trust had been built.

Also necessary was the need to promote what Pennington terms 'relational empathy' which includes negotiation and building shared meaning. The African American students' motivation to participate was directly

connected to the sense of understanding by their fellow students. The freedom and manner in which African American students express themselves when participating in school is many times misinterpreted. The vibrant style of speech, 'preacher style', by the adults in the African American home community clashes with the typical calm, reserved manner of speech in most classrooms (McConnell, 1994). In some cases misinterpretation of student involvement appears as calling out or disruption and leads to a negative response that, in turn, deflates the student's motivation instead of building upon it. Cultural connection, feeling of empathy, and familiarity of speech style all affect motivation in African American students but are not exclusive to this group.

Latino student motivation to be involved in the school world is also greatly affected by the cultural environment. The emphasis within the home is often placed on family pride and not individual competition or achievement. (Coballes-Vega, 1990) As such consideration must be given to the view of the achievement goals for Latino students relative to the level of involvement in academics (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). In some instances it is also necessary to address the additional communication problem between parents, students, and teachers due to the language barrier. Encouraging both students and parents to be involved in school is a difficult task when the parties do not share a common language.

This past October my team of teachers hosted a pot luck dinner as an opportunity for the families of our students to meet. The Latino parents organized the food through the donations from local Latino restaurants. This enabled this substantial minority group to bring their outside community to the school. The affect was the empowering of the parents, both English and Spanish speaking, to be a valid part of the school world. An organized, structured system of welcoming and encouraging continued participation by the parent will benefit the student socially and academically by motivating the parents to take a stronger interest in the school world (Comer & Haynes,1991).

If teachers can work to help their students and parents understand that the school environment is one in which they have ownership and a voice there is a base to build upon. From here, a seldom discussed aspect of student involvement and motivation comes into play. Academically, parents of At Risk students may struggle to help their child due to their own limitations. Parents generally expect their children to reach the academic level which they themselves achieved. Kaplan & Kaplan (2001) found that parents who had a high level of negative self-feeling were more self- absorbed and tended to focus only on their strengths and avoid their weakness academically. This sets a pattern for their children to follow, thinking about the things that they are good at but not bothering with the things that were difficult. How to engage

parents in a productive activity with their children in a non-threatening format led me to examine journaling.

Farris, Howe, & Fuhler (1998) and Morningstar (1999) linked writing between parent and student to improved parent support and involvement in activities. This suggested the impact which journal writing might have on the involvement of students. Farris, Howe, & Fuhler pointed out that parents began to look at the thinking process used by their children when they actively discussed and wrote about subjects studied together. Morningstar used the journals to have the parents record when and what they observed their children reading. These parents began to look at their children developmentally and thus set realistic expectations for their child's growth. In both of these cases the journals were the connections between home and school.

Parents of students in my class have often reported that they help their children at home. A long term, 14-year study by Connell, Spencer, & Aber (1994) gave information about the idea of the influence of parental help. This study exposed a cycle of negative interaction which resulted in lack of success for the student. This cycle looks like this: Lack of student involvement leads to less parent involvement, which leads back to negative self-appraisal by the student, which in turn swings back to less desire to be involved. Parents do not realize that their comments may be damaging. The damaging effects were not limited to parents as found by Wentzel (2002). Wentzel's longitudinal study on

teaching styles found that setting high expectations for student achievement increased student interest and personal goal setting, while negative feedback was a factor in both negative performance and behavior. Both parent and teacher attitude affects student level of involvement.

Baker (2003) studied the parents' role in motivating middle school students to read by actively reading with their children. Baker recommended offering parents guidance, through counseling with a reading specialist, to help their child through periodic frustration and to understand their own struggles to help their child. Parents' attitudes toward reading and school in general improved through this process. This same study confirmed for me that the idea of journaling between student, parent, and teacher would help to break a negative cycle.

## MY STORY – PART 1

“Human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation.

And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it” (Freire, 1970, p.109).

This statement is about movement, movement from the recognition of a situation in which one exists, to the reflection upon that existence, and finally to acting upon that reflection. Freire discusses the need for people to emerge from submission, and intervene in reality. So this becomes a conscious act that requires understanding that one is being submissive reflection on the reasons for the submission, and then acting on changing the reality that caused it.

In the United States the model of a good, responsible citizen is one who takes an interest in the surrounding world. “How will these things affect me? What is my stand? Do I have a role?” People who are oppressed are often the least involved of our citizens.

As a teacher of American History I want to see my students carry away with them the understanding that they have a role in the present, the past, and the future. By creating a direct connection to the parents through journaling, I hoped that both the parents and the students would become more involved in school and beyond. I hoped that they might also see that through history

individual people have caused the changes and improvement within our country. Simple people intervened.

### **Anticipation**

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005: day one of my study. I had been waiting and waiting to introduce my journaling activity to this class of 20 fifth graders. The first two weeks of school had begun with schedule interruptions, assemblies, and getting to know you activities. Finally, I felt the children knew me well enough to hear about the journaling project that would be the mainstay of our Social Studies program this year. The students and parents would be using journals as a means to contribute to thoughts and write comments about the events that the class would be studying. I envisioned the journals providing a space for the students to share our history talks with their parents. I asked the parents also to write back to me to ask questions, comment, or make suggestions. I hoped to see my students' interest in history grow as they shared their knowledge with their parents and received a positive response. My highest expectation was that through the journaling parents would begin to see history as a part of their lives and then help their children to see this, too. Now I was ready to share this idea with the class.

As I prepared to introduce the idea of our special journals I hoped that the students would sense my excitement and jump on board. After all, I was up on my wagon beating that drum to lead them all on our way.

The drum sounded, but the feet didn't start walking to it. While I explained how and why they would be using journals to write to their parents about the events in history that our class was studying, I looked around the room. Reading from the parent consent form, I was met with blank stares, shoulder shrugs, and quiet. A damp rag had been thrown over my shoulders and I tried not to shrink under the clammy weight. Then one young man piped up, "No one at my house will write, but maybe my neighbor will." A ray of light.

My initial planning for the journals had been dependent on the students discussing and writing with a parent. At this point in the year I still did not know how many of the 18 students lived with parents, or if those parents could read or write in English. My school district is a blend of inner city, suburb, and rural areas spanning the full socioeconomic spectrum, and this class reflects the district blend. Another component of the class is the combination of ten Learning Support students in with eight regular education students. These ten students each had Individual Education Plans designed to help them succeed. I found that I needed to make adaptations to meet these needs.

This was also a very ethnically diverse group with seven African American students, five Latino students, one Indian student, and five white students. Vern, one of the Latino children, stared at his lap as I mentioned that some parents might read and write in Spanish. His head snapped up when I

said that writing in Spanish was fine, as I could have someone translate for me. He sat straight up and smiled. A second beam of light.

Later that day I thought over the reactions of the kids. Already two road- blocks had thrown themselves into my path. I had anticipated the language barrier and had already contacted a local college for students who might be able to help with translations once a week. The thought of parents who just would not be interested or available to sit with their child to talk about the school day had not occurred to me. In fact the research I read had shown that parents reacted positively to invitation to be active participants in such assignments (Farris, Howe, & Fuhler, 1998). I wanted to find out if talking about history at home, using the journal as a medium to transport those thoughts, would help to motivate the students to be more involved, but what if there wasn't anyone to be that contact at home? I began to think that the consent forms that I had just sent home would hold much more information than just a signature.

### **Rewrite, Recopy, Redistribute ... Renewed hope?**

#### **Forming that parent connection.**

By the end of that first day I had rewritten the letters explaining the purpose of the study, made sure that the language was at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, and copied it just in case the response was as cool from the parents as it had been with the students (Appendix H). I will admit to being frustrated and

angry when after the third day after our big introduction to the plan I had only two of the original consent forms returned to me.

Regrouping, Nadene, our Learning Support teacher, and I explained the program again, handing out the journals that we would be using. We reinforced that everyone would be doing the journaling even if they did not participate in the study, and redistributed the new consent forms. Handing out the journals excited the students. The two students who had brought in their consent forms wanted to start writing right away. Like most children, possessions, such as the journals, are important. For the students to claim ownership they needed to write in them.

***“No one else has to do this?” asked Tom.***

*[Referring to the other two Social Studies classes.]*

*I replied, “No, but the other classes will have more regular  
assigned homework.*

*This will be your homework instead of other assignments.”*

***“So you’ll write to us after our partner writes?” asked Di.***

*“Yes,” I answered,*

*“Each week I will write a note back to you and your partner.”*

The idea that each week they would be handed a note written to them from the teacher seemed to be important. This was not something I had thought to be a motivator.

By day seven, all of the consent forms had been returned! Only three students' parents declined to have their child's responses used for the study. Of course, I was relieved to find that 83% of my parents had provided consent to be a part of this study designed to help students be more involved in learning about history. This second set of letters also asked the parents to choose the one night of the week that they would commit to writing. By recognizing that we all live busy lives and some nights are busier than others, I hoped that by self-selecting the response night that parents might feel less pressured to have to make a time to sit with their child. Now, would the parents feel comfortable enough to enjoy this activity or would it become just another homework struggle?

### **Can I write tonight?**

*"Mrs.Hunt, can I start my journal tonight?"*

*I brought my slip back. Can I write, please?" Sue pleaded.*

Although I loved telling Sue that she could go ahead and write even before the whole class got started, I knew that we would need a lot of modeling

and practice to make the journaling work. The smile on her face when she came in the next day and quietly handed me the journal during homeroom, four periods early, told a story of pride. Sue's mother would become one of my most active parent writers.

We began the first week with a conversation about journaling and what prior experiences they had had with journals. Most of the students with experiences were able to connect the journals more to their reading than any other subject.

The first organized writing week began with structured lesson and note taking. The plan was to get started with a new chapter, have the students copy some notes each day, and then at the end of the week work together to write our first journal entry. I was concerned that the kids would not be up for starting the journals if they had to copy a lot of notes first. Our first assignment was to copy three vocabulary words into their notebooks with basic definitions. They hung in there and didn't complain. As we worked through the week, the notes grew in length.

Finally we reached the day for our first paragraph for our journal. With notebooks out on the desks we worked together to construct a paragraph retelling what they found to be the most important of our notes. The class created a paragraph that I recorded on the board and the students could choose to use some, all or none of the paragraph.

*“We have been working on a project about our cultures and family traditions. Most of us are not from different countries, immigrants, but we all have traditions, ” wrote Ted.*

Nadene, Nadene’s Learning Support aide, Don, and I cruised around the room prompting, encouraging, and nudging students to get a full paragraph in the journal before the bell rang. With journals in hand everyone left with the assignment to have their parents read the journals, talk with them, and then write back.

I e-mailed Nadene, and her aide Don my thoughts on the first few days of note taking.

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*Hi Nadene and Don,*

*I was just writing up some notes on this week about our kids. I think that they have done well considering we've had them writing extensively for five days. As I was jotting notes about each of the kids, and my impression of how they are thinking about Social*

*Studies right now, I had some concerns.*

*Nadene, watching Ned and Jed physically write... do you think that the act of having to write 1-2 paragraphs in the journal will work against the purpose of encouraging involvement? The whole idea of the journals is to get the kids to be personally involved in the subject matter by having the freedom to connect to it any way they can. But if writing is so stressful for these two little guys, what about allowing them to dictate their entries to someone? Another student (from the proficient group?) or an adult volunteer?*

*They are both nice kids, and I am hoping that this will help them understand stuff easier. It shouldn't be so stressful that it defeats the purpose. I was thinking about how last fall we tried having the kids talk with a partner about their notes before tests. One of the girls comes to mind and I think she responded to being able to orally retell. Even if her grades didn't go up, I remember her being a positively involved member of our class.*

*Any suggestions?*

*Polly Hunt*

*Team 5-E*

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*Figure 1. E-mail to the Learning Support Teacher.*

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Hi Polly,

I think that Ned, Jed, and Ted might have trouble writing in their journals for an extended amount of time and might have trouble recalling what to write about. Maybe we could have them type the response, or allow a parent to write for them. In order to ensure a response to what you are looking for that week, maybe we could do a paragraph starter or give them a topic to write about. The 3 students mentioned above have great parents who would be happy to help

anyway, anyhow.

About the writing...Ned has trouble physically writing. Jed can write physically but needs lots of reassurance and emotional support. Ted can physically write but rushes to get finished and therefore it becomes really sloppy. All 3 have to type long assignments or to have a scribe in their IEP's when necessary. That doesn't mean daily things. I will have a typed out list of all the class notes for them by the time they need to use their notebooks for a test. Or maybe to alleviate the parents, a proficient partner during 12th period could be beneficial. They would only need 15-20 minutes of the period.

OK, after thinking about this, maybe we could have 3 proficient helpers and they can earn a paw print a week for their services :) On their journal day they could come to me 12th period and start picking their brains as what to write. I will instruct them to write what the

students are saying only, not to include their personal feelings/knowledge.

What do you think? I like this idea b/c then they will look like the class and have the journals. Then at home, the student can expand on what they talked about and wrote about 12th period. That way, the writing won't be so extensive, just a couple of sentences. What do you think??

Let me know if this helps,

Nadene

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*Figure 2.* E-mail from the Learning Support Teacher.

I would need Nadene's input throughout the study in order to help gauge involvement and motivational changes within the Learning Support children. Nadene stays with these children all day, whereas I only interact with them for 40 minutes each day. I asked for volunteers from our team of students to act as scribes for these three students. This was an accommodation recommended in their I.E.P.'s. The volunteers from another Social Studies class met with their

Learning Support partners to write the paragraph as it is dictated to them. One set of partners was already friends and in the same homeroom. The other two sets were just other students who like to help out. The helpers had returned signed consent forms for the study and seem pleased to be included. Nadene and Don had also signed teacher consent forms (Appendix J).

### **Mixed Reactions**

*“Ted really seemed to enjoy this project. It was funny to see him guess where our families are from. He says he wishes we were from Mexico.*

*Ted also liked the Irish Soda bread, and was surprised to learn that his grandmother makes it every St. Patrick’s Day.*

*He doesn’t remember that I ask him to try it every year and he says, NO!” responded Ted’s Mom.*

The first two weeks I helped the kids get into a pattern of just taking the journals home to have a partner respond. It was a sketchy response. Some parents were very strong writing partners, some wrote half heartedly, and some did not write much if at all.

Some students like Neil wanted to participate but did not do the writing for different reasons. Neil would only do what was asked if an adult was near

him. We started a plan for him. He put his head down every time we started something that required writing and pouted until someone addressed him directly. I asked all of the teachers to ignore this and praise the students around him who got right to work. The first time this was tried he started working within 30 seconds after the positive comments went to those around him. This was a student whom I hoped would respond to the attention garnered through working with his mother. This is also an example of the complexity of motivating these At-Risk students. Each individual brought into the classroom personal issues which affected learning. Yet, Neil's mother wrote at length regularly.

We decided to set up the journal for the week with the students. We began with a starter sentence to give the partner a sense of the broad topic "This week we are talking about how our government works." We asked the students to add on two sentences. This did not happen. The point was to have the students reinforce the class work by retelling what they learned in their own words, then talk to a partner about it, and have the partner write back.

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Week of September 19

"We have been working on our project about our culture and family traditions. Most of us are not from other countries, immigrants, but we all have traditions," wrote Neil.

*"Sometimes the little things that we do for birthdays and holidays are things that we don't consider traditions. It's always nice to know what other familys do for traditions or holidays. Maybe other familys can take something from each other and make it their own traditions, too."* responded

*Neil's Mom.*

I really liked the idea that you mentioned of families taking parts of new traditions and adding them to their old ones. I was hoping that the kids would look at their friends as each having something special about them because of their sense of family.

Thanks for writing!", replied Mrs. Hunt.

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Figure 3. Journal examples- Neil

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"Today I had Fun in Social Studies. We did are Traditions. I had to rush because I was not done. It was fun but confusing. I still need help. I will get it some day.

I Learned about ower tradtions, and are Flags," wrote Sue.

*"I want to know what brought about the idea of using each student's family tradition as a topic for class this week. Is there going to be a connection with the future social studies lessons? I think that sharing traditions is a great lesson. It gives history a face and sense of existence," responded Sue's Mom.*

"Thank you for writing! This idea of exploring cultures came from two different places. Our team has always started with a writing project that all students know about... themselves. A few years ago I took a class at Moravian College that made me aware of how much the kids have available to 'teach' each

other through their own unique experiences. American History is founded on people moving from place to place, carrying their cultures and traditions with them!

I hope to help the kids see that the people's decisions to move in the past are not that different from people's reasons today," replied Mrs. Hunt.

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*Figure 4. Journal example- Sue*

While the responses from these mothers were encouraging, I looked for improvement in the initiative on the parts of the students. I did not initially penalize students for not writing the full paragraph or two as assigned, but I later found that it was necessary to give out some 'not acceptable' homework notes. These notes were sent home to alert the parent/guardian that their child was not putting enough effort into the assignment. Some partners had written that the student(s) had not written enough information to understand what we were studying. The students appeared to be willing to participate in the project but were not motivated strongly enough to gain academically. What could I look at to help motivate them?

## **The Neighborhoods**

Continuing our lessons about differentiating between culture and ethnic groups, the class tried brainstorming examples of each. The kids had the choice of using an outside ethnic group or one from in the class. They began shouting, “Use Latino, Latino!” We chose Latino and tried to match a cultural similarity with a related ethnic topic. We began with, “Language?”

Spanish!” yelled Jim.

I was bombarded with, “No! No!” as the response when I threw out to the group, “All people who speak Spanish come from Spain. Right?”

None of the five Latino students had Spanish heritage. I was glad to see the connection made as they began to name the countries that they knew of that spoke Spanish. They had their own personal connections with Mexico, Costa Rico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. We continued , “Food?”

“Rice...Beans.”

These students from varied backgrounds were now put into the position of classroom experts. The teachers asked them to share first hand knowledge of places that the adults in the room had not seen.

Ira, who is Indian, was really excited to review culture and yelled out, “What about religion?” Some of the students do not attend a church, so religion was not a connection for them. We hit a snag and another question, “Does faith play a role in their lives? And can it affect the level of interaction

at school?” Maybe this is a question for another study.

To continue, Ira really wanted to share a story about his ‘church’. He really needed us to know where the church was located in order for us to understand his story. The two teachers couldn’t figure out where it was, but we promised to drive around in the afternoon to look for it. The reaction to the idea that we would go look for this building just to know where Ira goes to service shocked them.

*“Like you’re going to drive around and waste gas  
looking for that!” Di shrugged.*

*“You’ll go out of your way to drive there?” asked Cal.*

Their expectation of how involved teachers are willing to get in their ‘outside of school’ lives is pretty low. Working at this richly diversified school has been an education for me. Each area of our community seems to have its own personality. The individual elementary schools encourage some rivalry between the communities, and the neighborhoods in which they are located are vastly different. From million dollar homes with pools to government-subsidized housing they have one common factor; all of the children claim ownership of their neighborhoods.

Ira, from the suburbs, listens as Jim talks about walking down to Tito's to get empanadas after school.

*"You can walk there by yourself?" asks Ira.*

*"Sure, if I go with a friend.*

*"Why not?" answers Jim.*

*"You don't have to drive?" wonders Ira.*

*"No. It's across the street! But I can only walk over there before dark. Too dangerous after dark."*

The flavor of our neighborhood affects our children in many ways. As I began to listen to the students talk about what they do after school I started reading about the effects of the community environment on students. Already I had noticed hesitancy in the participation of my Latino parents in the journaling. I found that emphasis within the Latino home is often placed on family pride and not individual competition or achievement (Coballes-Vega, 1990). I wondered how I could foster involvement by showing the students how in-school lessons apply to the real life setting as suggested by McInerney & McInerney (1998). Could I use the real life expectations of the different cultures to build involvement?

With permission from the school, I planned a neighborhood mapping activity to take place after school hours. Individuals or groups of students met me in their neighborhood outside of their homes. We took walks and mapped the important landmarks in their neighborhood. I silently thought about these questions as we walked. Could I see their neighborhood through their eyes? What was important to them? What is the 'feel'? What makes it special to them?

Most teachers follow the lead of the teachers around them. Ladson-Billings shows a need for teachers to change their approach to teaching, adapting it to the specific needs of the group. Each particular group of students has a personality that needs to be evaluated and from there built upon in order to make the learning relevant to the students (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002).

Over the next eight weeks I visited twelve neighborhoods and the homes of fourteen students. It was an amazing project that empowered the students by allowing them to introduce me to their world away from school. I saw a change in the way that the parents connected to the lessons with their children through the journal entries.

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Holly wrote, "We've been talking about... needs are things like water, healthy foods, and shelter. Wants are things you want like

video games, candy, and cars. (Businesses give us needs like water and healthy foods.) They keep thinking of new ideas to make. The businesses make the customers have to know when they are open, what kinds supplies they are selling. I think that needs are more important than wants. Needs help you survive."

Holly's Mom replied," Someone once asked me why I shop only at Walmart, well my reply was because they have Everything I need at a great price and it is convenient and open 24 hrs. They knew exactly what they were doing when they came up with Walmart. Holly knows her Mom goes for great prices, and she knows the difference between a lot of stores. They all offer things you need and want, but Look at the prices and quality. Sometimes cheap isn't always GOOD!"

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*Figure 5. Journal example-Holly*

By visiting the students' neighborhoods I gained some understanding of what was important to my students. Ladson-Billings helped me see that I

needed to notice more about my students and their outside-of-school lives. Although I made a greater connection to this class than any other in the past, I saw that I needed to notice more. I needed to sit back and listen to their conversations to hear what is important to them, their interests and disinterests. From there I might grow to understand how to connect more of my topics to their worlds.

## **MY STORY**

### **PART 2- TRANSITIONS**

*Dave writes, but his mom and dad struggle to find the time.*

*Ted writes, but his mom doesn't.*

*Jim writes when he feels like it and step- mom answers when he can catch her.*

*Mary writes volumes, and sometimes her aunt adds in...*

*I'm trying to make heads or tails of it all...*

Dave, Ted, Jim, and Mary were all involved verbally in class, but were also noticeably quieter when journal-sharing time began. They did not wish to share their own writings unless they also had a partner response to read, and although they themselves would write, their parent/adult partners were not reliable. I hesitated to use the word unreliable because it is so strong, but it is out there and there it will stay. It illustrates my level of confusion and

frustration at that point in the study. These students wanted to be active, fully vested participants and were not, due to no fault of their own.

These students had this journal assignment to complete one day each week. One night each week I asked these adults to find five minutes to sit and talk with their child—five minutes to have one-to-one contact with this young person. Show an interest, share a thought, be a part of the learning experience. I had no control over this element of the activity and it was frustrating.

Dewey (1938) stated, “When pupils were a class rather than a social group, the teacher necessarily acted largely from the outside, not as a director of processes of exchange in which all had a share. When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator, but takes on that of leader of group activities (p.59). I realized through an interview with the boys in this group that I needed to lose the position of dictator and become a guide. In order to make that change I needed help, help from these ten year old students. I had fallen into the trap of setting the path for the study of using the journals and had missed the point that the path could change.

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Setting: A hallway corner during a study hall

Characters: Tom, Dave, Jim, and Mrs. Hunt

**Mrs. Hunt:** So what's the deal with your journals? How come your partners don't write?

**Jim:** She [step-mom] don't know what to do. She's not around to do it.

**Mrs. Hunt:** Is she too busy or not interested?

**Jim:** She doesn't know what it means... Why she has to do it.

**Dave:** Yeh, my mom doesn't see *why* she needs to write.

**Mrs. Hunt:** Well, I was hoping that when you would talk with them they would like hearing you explain what we do. Would it help if I made copies of someone's journal so that the parents could see what was happening?

**Jim:** Maybe.

**Tom:** Sue's mom writes a lot. So does Diana's. My mom doesn't. She works at night. I take care of my little brother. Sometimes I don't see her for two or three days.

**Dave:** Yeh, well, her mom is just a lunch lady for an hour a day. She has more time.

**Mrs. Hunt:** Actually, she is an aide in the classroom just like your mom.

**Dave:** She [his mom] doesn't understand what I try to tell her about. She doesn't have time anymore. Now that The Community Club is open until 8:00... like last night we didn't get home until almost ten o'clock.

**Mrs. Hunt:** So what hours does your mom work?

**Dave:** She's here until 12 o'clock and then goes to St. Anthony's until 8 o'clock.

**Mrs. Hunt:** That's a long day. I can see why that would make it hard for her to help.

**Dave:** She told my dad he shouldn't write with me. She was mad about when I wrote in my journal [next to her writing]. *Pause.* My dad might write. Why can't I just write with another kid on our team?

**Mrs. Hunt:** I can tell that you are frustrated. Your Dad and Mom are really busy. We'll work something out.

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*Figure 6.* An interview with Dave, Tom, and Jim.

Through this group interview, I realized that I judged these parents for not making time to do this activity with their children. Not only was this unfair, but also it was a common problem in education. I viewed school from the school view looking back out to the home and not from the view of the home to school. Lisa Delpit (2002) speaks to the need for respect when she says, "Teachers seldom know much about the children's lives and communities outside of the classroom and either don't know how to or aren't willing to connect instruction to issues that matter to the students, their families, or their community" (p.41). I thought of my comment that the parents were unreliable

and decided that I hadn't allowed for the reasons why they might be unable to make the time to write.

In class I noticed a negative change in some of the students. Instead of helping them to become more involved, the journaling, or lack of journaling due to the partnering issues, was causing them to be less involved. A layered story about Mary gives a look into how this evolved.

### **A Layered Story**

Mary was one of my strongest personalities. A beautiful, statuesque African American young lady, Mary came from a local family whose grandparents were sages in the African American community. Mary had much to offer her classmates both intellectually and socially. At the beginning of the year Mary was a quiet participant who chose her words with care. She waited for times when she was sure that her input would be welcomed and valued by this group of predominately boisterous boys.

With only four girls in the class I found the girls less likely to force their way into a discussion. When called on Mary didn't hesitate to answer, but rarely volunteered. As the journaling moved into full swing it was apparent that Mary's partner was unreliable. Mary became increasingly embarrassed when called on to share writings. I made a note in my log about Mary at this

time, “I am worried about Mary. She is in a downward spiral.” She did not want others to know that her aunt was not writing. Mary shared her thoughts with me in a private discussion.

“Mary, how come you don’t want me to read your journal in class anymore?”

“I don’t know, Mrs. Hunt. My aunt just doesn’t write the stuff that Sue or Jim’s parents write. She doesn’t talk about the same things. It’s embarrassing. She writes about what she wants and doesn’t listen to me when I tell her it’s not the right stuff.”

These other students had parents who were active in the journaling in a different way. They would talk with the students about the notes in their journals. Sometimes they even went on to look up information and write back to me about it. The funny thing was that Mary wrote more and more herself, even as her class participation started to drop. She was willing to share with me privately even if not publicly, but her increasing lack of attention and involvement began to show in her grades.

As the study progressed I discovered that Mary’s wonderful family was very busy. The aunt with whom Mary lived had several other children to care for, a full time teaching job, and a growing art career to manage. This busy woman had her own system of how to give each part of her life the time that she could spare. My view of Mary’s aunt became clearer and I saw that Mary

needed my help to manage this activity.

I set Mary up with a peer partner. The peer partners, for not only Mary but also several other students would need them, had consent forms to be signed (Appendix I). This seemed to help Mary feel more comfortable with her journaling. The peer whom she worked with was from another class, but not as strong a student. They liked talking about the topic of the week and her partner would write back, but somehow having a peer partner who wrote direct but weaker connections was more acceptable than having a parent partner who was unconnected. Mary began to smile in class again after the first few weeks with her partner. We would need to meet again to iron out some logistical issues, but overall the pairing was positive.

The boys, Dave, Jim, and Tom, helped to remind me that I needed to look at what I asked from their parents' point of view. Nadene and I talked about using peer partners and although I really wanted this to be a shared experience between an adult and the child, the time had come to follow the lead offered by the students. They were willing to participate in class and through the journals, and now I offered to adapt the assignment, so that they would be able to do just that. I would find partners for each student who was without a regular partner.

Before school started I contacted a local college to ask for community volunteers. Even though there were many student volunteers, the college

coordinator explained that most of the students were not available until after 3:00 in the afternoon. This would not help me and I decided with some hesitancy to ask for student volunteers from my other two Social Studies classes.

### **Parents or Peers as Partners?**

I did not initially embrace the idea of the peer partnering. Most of the research that I had read such as Nesman (2000) had found that students at risk for dropping out of school many times had parents who were not involved in school and peers who exerted pressure to do poorly in school. I was concerned that the lack of parent involvement would be a strong negative factor. I had a hard time accepting that the parent partnering was not working and that I had to move on quickly in order to encourage those students who needed partners.

At about this time the *Los Angeles Times* printed an article that gave me confidence to proceed. The article reported on a study by Williams, Kirst, & Haertel (2005) entitled "Similar Students, Different Results". This study found that low-income students could be very successful without parent involvement in school. The California school districts studied had improved Academic Performance Index score, a state-wide assessment, even when the student population had many challenges to overcome, including a lack of involvement by parents.

The second issue of negative peer control was also a concern but controllable through the choice of peer volunteers. I had my own study on which to reflect and plan the change to peer partners.

### **A Look Back on a Past Study**

The tactic of pairing students is common in teaching. I often required students to use peer partners for researching or project based activities. The reason for the peer pairing this year was different but not completely uncharted ground for me. In a prior study completed with a class demographically similar to this year's class, I had looked at the pairing of students to review orally prior to taking tests.

On a test day the partner students would have five minutes prior to the test to orally ask each other questions to refresh their memory before writing. The students enjoyed the reviewing with a partner and did show improvement on their test scores. I concluded that oral discussion between students helped to organize thoughts prior to test taking.

Several key students had completed exit interviews at the end of this study. All of these students wanted to continue the partnering but asked to switch partners periodically. It was interesting that one of the focus students asked not to be paired with a friend since this would be distracting and they would not work well together.

Reflecting on what I had learned from this past study helped me to make decisions regarding the pairings. I looked closely at the volunteers and chose the pairings using three main factors. First, I chose compassionate students who showed an understanding of how to work with another student with patience. Second, I chose students who were solid academically but not so strong that they would overwhelm their partner. Finally, I made sure not to pair students who were already close friends as partners.

### **The Neighborhood Visits Continue...**

As I modified the journal writing partners, Jed and Neil took me on an extensive walk around their neighborhood. We visited the local Boys and Girls Clubs, the park where they play, and a local eatery, Tito's, to share some empanadas. I was invited into their homes and met Neil's mother and Jim's sep-mother. It was eye opening to see how the boys operated in their own community, the government housing section of our town. It was rough. One of the parents flat out told the boys not to take me to certain parts of the area. Yet many of the adults greeted these boys by name. Neil went over to speak to a group of particularly tough looking men with a toddler nearby. Neil greeted the men and picked up the little girl to give her a hug which she returned. It was a side of this young man that I hadn't been aware of; he was a natural politician.

These visits to the neighborhoods were spawning ideas left and right. Delpit (2002) had shown that students learn more effectively when the lessons

are connected to what they understand. What they understand best is themselves and their home community. I needed to tie our lessons in school more directly to their communities. Could the parents connect complex ideas to examples within their community in a way that makes sense to their children? I wanted to give them the opportunity to try. First, I needed my parents to see that I recognized that I did not have the depth of understanding about every different ethnic or cultural community within my school district. Then maybe they could help me make the depth of connections that would help my students to grow in understanding.

Our next unit on economy and business led us back into the neighborhoods and reignited an interest in the journals by the parents. Would the peer pairings help to give voice to Ted, Dave, Mary, and Jim as we tried to teach through the community itself?

## **MY STORY**

### **PART 3**

#### **A Need for Volunteers**

I teach three levels of Social Studies classes, a basic level including Learning Support children, an average level group, and an above average class. Neither the average or above average classes were given the opportunity to journal. I also did not offer to do neighborhood visits with these classes. There just wasn't time.

*“How come we don't get to do those journals?”*

*“What's with that?”*

Tapping into the interest that some of the students from the non-study classes had in the journaling, I asked for peer volunteers from these classes, explaining, “You will need to give up part of a study hall once a week if you want to be a peer partner. As a peer partner, you will listen to your partner explain what we have been working on in class, read what they wrote in their journals, talk about any questions you might have or ideas that you found interesting, and then write back to me about what ever you would like to tell me about your talk.”

Within a day I had twice as many volunteers as I needed. It was interesting to see these students who don't know each other, or really talk to each other at all saying, “Yeh, I'll work with Tom” or “ I'll help Mary.”

Most of the volunteers came from my average class. The students in this group would have benefited from the journaling activity had I chosen to use it in their class, and as their parents have more contact with the school,

there might have been more parent involvement. All of the students who volunteered were outgoing and willing helpers. They were not, however, consistently strong students. I was interested in seeing if this activity would help these helpers as well as the study students.

The students began working together even before all of their consent forms were returned. Tom, Mary, Dave, and Jim could not wait to start meeting with their partners.

**Tom**

*“Study hall, right Mrs. Hunt? That’s when I need to be in your room. Right?*

*Manny will write with me?” asked Tom.*

Tom had been bothered from the first week by the journal sharing time in class. Through the first four weeks he had completed one out of four assignments. The first few weeks he kept hoping that he could somehow get his mother to find the time to write. Then he gave up writing at all. By the third week his behavior in class turned negative. He disturbed other students by making faces. While we read journals, he was inattentive, sometimes making noises. Once he and I agreed that he needed another partner there was a turn around within two weeks’ time. Tom missed only one other assignment in the next seven weeks.

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Tom

*“This week we are talking about Rosa Parks. Rosa parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger because she was tired. She got arrested for breaking the law. I think I would do the same thing as her. That was a dumb law. The people supported her by not using the bus, this is a boycott. The bad thing was she had to pay a fine that was \$14.00. \$10.00 for one fine and \$4.00 for another fine.”*

Manny

*“Tom thinks that was a stupid thing for blacks to have to give up a seat. Tom told me Rosa Parks went to jail. The fine was \$10.00 plus \$4.00. He said that was a lot of money. Tom said that it took a couple of days to bail her out.”*

Mrs. Hunt

*“What did you two guys think about Mrs. Parks? Was she brave? Or foolish? She risked her life and job to prove a point. Would you?”*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Figure 7. Journal example- Tom and Manny*

**Tweaking It**

The peer pairings were not perfect and several times we met for lunch to discuss how the journaling partnering should look. If the partners were in a rush they began to just write what the basic topic was about as in the above example.

We talked about how I enjoyed when the partners added the extra ideas that came out of their talks such as, “He said that was a lot of money.” This is a short quote but shows that one child had explained a related concept not mentioned in our notes.

In Tom’s class we had needed to have more discussion on how the value of money changes. Tom had shared this with Manny, who had not known as much about this subject as we had discussed it to a lesser degree in his class. Tom had ‘taught’ Manny a lesson. I used this example to illustrate how those discussions were important and should be shared in the journals.

The peer partners gained self confidence and were themselves more involved in their own classes. The Social Studies classes did not move at the same pace. The peer partners’ class was often a week or two further along in a lesson than the class used in the study. The journal writing was a review for the peer partner and a chance to be the expert.

### **A Mention of Grades**

The purpose of this study was to see how involvement in my history class might change through the use of journals. I was not looking for a noticeable improvement in grades, although it would make sense that there would be a link. With ten Learning Support students, eight regular education students, plus two English as a Second Language students, I found that this class had too many dynamic complexities to correlate any results to their assessments.

### **Motivation- Involvement- Understanding**

At about this time I wrapped up the neighborhood visits and moved into a new unit on economics and our neighborhoods. Each of the students, or in some cases a group of students, created a poster-sized map of their neighborhood plotting local landmarks and points of interest. From these maps, each of the students chose a business owner to interview.

Nadene and I were hoping the help the students see how the small businesses in our community are important, but also that it takes work to run a business. The parents and students enjoyed this project and the involvement both in the journals and class grew.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ned

*“This week we used the maps of our neighborhoods in class. We looked to see what businesses provide us with jobs and things we need or want. We are going to interview business owners about running a business.”*

Mom

*“Ned and I spoke about what businesses are in our neighborhoods. T.J.Bart’s Supermarket, Dollar Store, Eckerd’s, Lafayette Ambassador Bank. How these businesses employ the neighborhood teens with part-times workers as cashiers. Also how they supply our wants- groceries, medicine, banking, etc. How the businesses operate. They need customers to buy their goods so that they can employ people, pay them, and make a profit.”*

\*\*\*\*\*

Figure 8. Journal example- Ned

The parent and partner involvement throughout this unit showed that the stronger partners who used the time to talk with the student took the lessons from class and made direct connections to the students home life. Some parents also challenged me, in a positive way, through their responses. The journals gave us a forum for dialogue that helped create a trust level where we were both working to help our students learn.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sue

*“Zheng He, Mansa Musa, and Marco Polo are alike. They all traveled for finding, goods, or spices or silk. They all traveled to different countries. Zheng He, Mansa Musa, and Marco Polo are all different. They rode different things Marco Polo went half on foot. They explored different areas.”*

Mom

*“All three came from different parts of the world. Zheng He- Asian, Mansa Musa- African, Marco Polo- Italian. However, there was something very interesting that I found online. Zheng He was Muslim Hui Chinese. Similarly, Mans Musa was Muslim. They both made a journey to Mecca. Zheng He’s ships (fleets) designs were influenced by Marco Polo. These three individuals are somehow interconnected.”*

Mrs. Hunt

*“Wow! Thank you Wendy. I never came across this information about Zheng He. My books had that China and the emperor at that time were Buddhist. I’ll have to dig some more... This is especially interesting since in reading class we are doing a comparison report on Columbus to see what different books tell us about him. You are terrific! Thanks for the info.”*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Figure 9. Journal example- Sue*

### **Wrapping It Up**

As the study ended I noted two areas of interest for further study. One is varied response level from parents of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. There were noted differences in the willingness to write with the children, the level of connection to the topics, and the level of interest shown. Although I had read studies related to cultural differences and the affect on school involvement, it would interest me to look deeper into research on different styles of parent involvement and the effect of student motivation related to cultural or ethnic background.

It is possible that some of the positive impact of the journaling was that these students had more opportunities to speak about our lessons through meetings, interviews, and impromptu chats. The validation of the individual student's thoughts about a topic was important. The journal writing had positive affects on the motivation of the students. This showed itself in the journal records.

\*\*\*\*\*

	Student	Partner		Wk. 1	Wk. 2	Wk. 3	Wk. 4	Wk. 5
S- 10	Tom	Mom	M	0/0	2/0	3/3 *	3/3	3/0
			C	0/0	2/0	3/2	2/2	3/0
		(Manny)		Wk. 6	Wk. 7	Wk. 8	Wk. 9	Wk. 10
			3/3	3/3	3/0	3/0	3/3	
			3/2	3/2	3/0	3/2	3/2	

M= Motivation level toward completion of assignment.

- (1) Little effort=low motivation
- (2) Acceptable effort= average motivation
- (3) In depth response= highly motivated

C= Connection to concepts

- (1) Showed lack of basic understanding of core concepts
- (2) Showed connection to core concepts
- (3) Showed analytical or critical thinking connection to concepts

\*\*\*\*\*

Figure 10. Sample of journal record for Tom

Tom showed little motivation through the first weeks as he struggled without a partner. He persistently asked for a partner, adult or student, from the very first week of the journaling activity. His motivation to write and his attentiveness in class rose quickly from the first day assigned to his peer partner. Even when his partner was absent or did not fully complete his own task, Tom was motivated to keep his new standing as an active participant.

## METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Analysis is not just the act of reviewing information at the end of a study. But rather analysis begins with the beginning of the observations. As Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) explain, data collection and analysis are interwoven, and the act of conducting analysis throughout the data collection period enhances both acts. Starting with my reflective log I began to organize my data prior to analyzing.

Re-reading my reflective log was like stepping into a wild unknown. I had written all of these notes, comments, and reflections about my students, the class, and the journals. Now, I had to put aside what I expected to see in the notes and look for what was actually there. Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) explained coding itself as the idea of collecting memories to later explore and find connections. The coding was the process of looking at topics that reoccurred throughout the log. I noticed what I wrote about most often and then gave those groups names including, student motivation, student involvement, student resistance, parent or partner motivation, and partner resistance.

The codes needed to be sorted into categories. MacLean and Mohr (1999) suggested creating diagrams to use to group similar codes. Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) call these coding groups bins. The mental picture of

physically sorting similar codes into the bins helped me to simplify the groupings. Each bin then needed a label or statement much like a filing drawer. Student Resistance and Partner Resistance comments were filed together in a bin labeled 'Resistance'. As with coding, the bins needed to be emptied and refilled as I studied the data and resorted the codes to show a clearer picture of the outcomes.

I wrote a theme statement explaining the contents of each bin. These themes are a way of showing how the pieces of the study fit together to create a whole picture (Ely, 1997). These statements told how the information in the bins when taken together led to answering the research question.

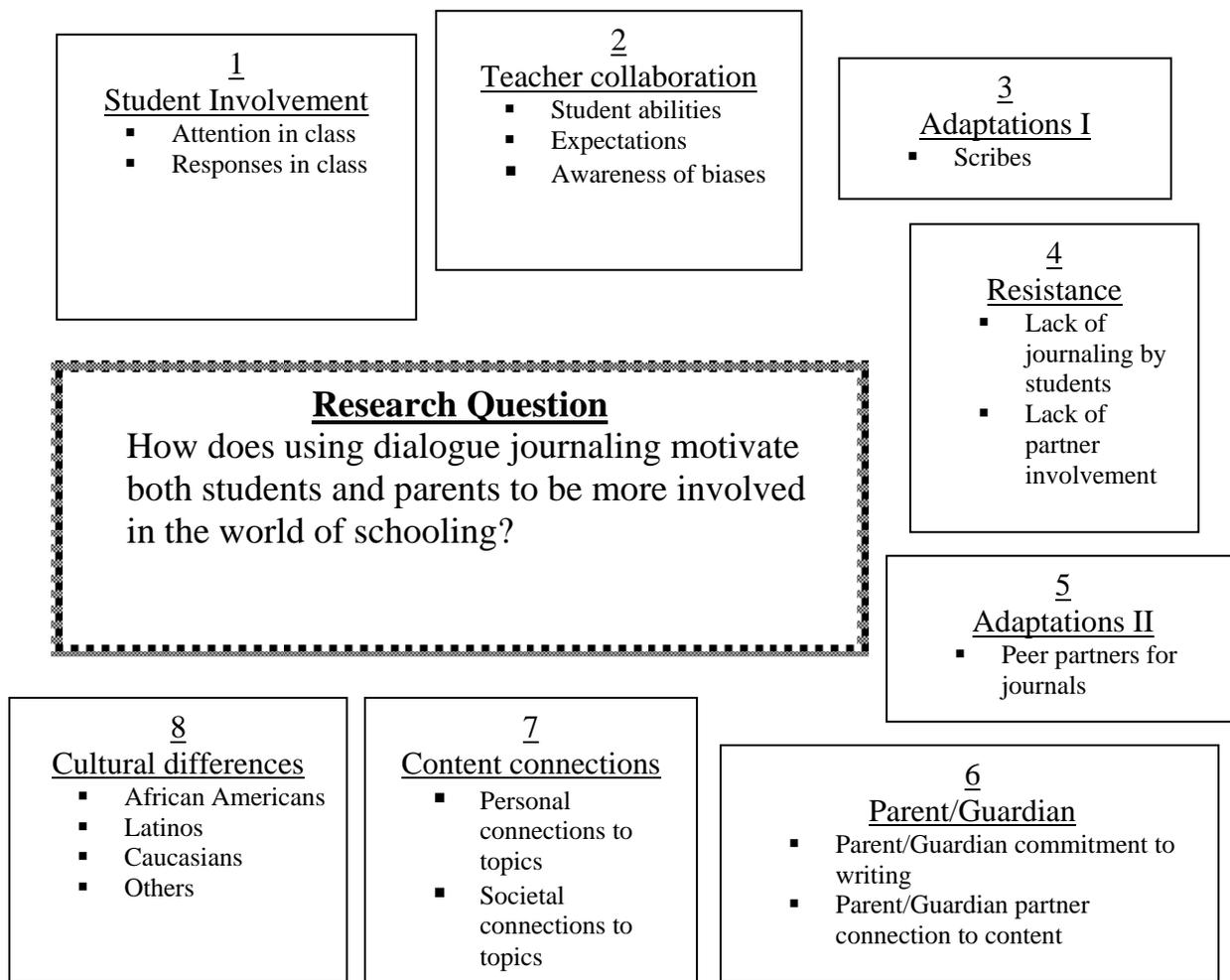
As I read the student journals each week I recorded scores for the level of motivation and the connection to the topic. I gauged the level of motivation by looking at how much the student wrote and the extent to which the student added his/her own opinion into the writing. If the student wrote less than the minimum amount to be considered a complete assignment, he/she received a score of M1. If the student wrote the minimum for a complete assignment then the score was a M2. If the student went beyond the minimum and wrote extra information or their opinion he/she received a score of M3. Similarly I scored the writing C1, C2, and C3, reflecting the level of connection to the content of the lesson. I then cross-referenced these scores with field log observations and grades during the study period to analyze any correlation. I collected the

journals at the mid-year point and replaced them with new journals that the students had helped to design, giving me post- study access to this important source of data.

As I analyzed my notes, I noted the socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural differences played out in these journals, Delpit and Dowdy (2002) helped me to examine my own view of my students and to recognize my own biases. In particular I evaluated my use of figurative language throughout my reflections. I then returned to my data to analyze how my biases were impacting my analysis of data.

The final part of my analysis was the cross-referencing of the journal charts with the students' grades. Although my research question was directed toward looking at increasing student involvement I also wondered how the students' grades might improve with an increase in involvement.

Taking all of these pieces into consideration I was ready to draft preliminary theme statements. I began by examining the main headings that had emerged from my bins. I organized these seven headings chronologically as they had emerged through the study. Reading and reflecting on my notes led to the development of the theme statements related to my findings.



**Theme Statements**

1. Using journaling to dialog increases the level of both attentive student behavior and responsiveness in class, and parent contact with the school.
2. Collaboration on observations and student background between the regular education teacher and other teachers aids in understanding realistic expectations for students in a journaling activity.
3. Useful effective journaling requires flexibility in scheduling and adaptation to student and parent needs.
4. Resistance to involvement in class work and writing does not reflect lack of motivation to be involved in classroom activities.
5. Students without a regular adult writing partner respond positively to partnering with a peer.
6. The level of commitment a writing partner shows directly affects the amount of student involvement in class.
7. Using journaling to make personal and societal connections to the subject matter increases depth of student understanding.
8. Cultural differences affect the level of parent motivation to be involved in the world of schooling.

*Figure 11. Bins and theme statements*

## FINDINGS

As a result of conducting this study, I have determined that *using journaling to dialogue may increase the level of both attentive student behavior and responsiveness in class*. While many students in my classroom were involved in daily discussion prior to the study, other students were clearly unengaged and inattentive. As the use of journals became routine, the students who were more attentive in class wrote more in their journals and were more likely to be willing to share their writing. The sharing of writing, though, became an incentive for the inattentive students to write, thus resulting in greater engagement.

*Collaborating with the Learning Support teacher about our respective observations and discussing student backgrounds with her increased my understanding of how realistic my expectations were for students using dialogue journals*. As suggested by MacLean and Mohr (1999), having three adults in the classroom gave me more insight into the students' reactions and abilities. I had to meet the Individual Education Plans of the Learning Support students as they wrote within their journals, and it was valuable to have discussions with the other teachers to get professional guidance on how best to adapt this activity to allow for success with these special students.

I had read the Individual Education Plans for each of my Learning Support students and found that the Learning Support teacher had useful suggestions on how best to adapt this activity to make it successful for the students. The collaboration gave me added insight into these students' abilities and helped me gauge my expectations appropriately. I found that all of my English as Second language students had one parent who could read and write in English, so that it was not necessary to arrange for any translators.

*I found that in order for the journaling to be useful and effective I needed to be flexible in scheduling and adapting to student, parent, and partner needs.* In the course of the study, we made adaptations to the journal writing process four times. First I found that it was necessary to change the weekly scheduling of the journal writing. The Learning Support teacher and I also needed to address the physical needs of three students. I found that some students needed to be assigned peer partners to replace unavailable parent partners. Finally, the students adapted the journal layout itself.

The first adaptation was to the scheduling of the writing. Initially I had asked the parents to choose the night of the week when they would like to write to allow the parent to fit this activity into the family schedule when he or she knew that there would be time to dedicate to the project. Twelve of the parents chose to write on Monday or Tuesday nights. Within three weeks' time a parent made me aware that assigning the writing at the beginning of the week

when the students were at the start of a new lesson did not give the student or parent enough depth of information with which to connect their discussions. Most weeks I began new lessons on Monday and we did not take notes of any length until Wednesday. Sharing this information with the parents, I moved the journaling nights to Wednesday and Thursday and asked the parents to choose one of these nights. The depth of the conversations in the responses increased when the partners had more information to work from. The students showed more interest in class when there were more details to write about in their conversations. The scheduling of the journals affected the amount of writing and the depth of connection to the topic.

*The parents became more aware of their child's abilities as they journaled together.* As Morningstar (1999) noted, journaling does help parents to understand their child's developmental level. Sending home photocopies of some of the best journals, written by both regular education and special education students, for the parents to use as guides helped them to make comments analyzing their child's writing.

The second adaptation focused on three Learning Support students with identifiable physical needs. These three students did not have the physical ability to take lengthy notes in class and then write fully developed paragraphs. They were paired with student scribes to write for them during a weekly study hall. This allowed these students to participate in the journaling, fully

expressing their thoughts, without increased frustration. Two of the three students consistently kept their scheduled times with their scribes to write weekly. The Learning Support teacher arranged for the third student to have a laptop computer to record his thoughts in place of a paper journal. This student was a consistent participant from that point in the study. Both of these types of adaptations had a positive impact on the student writing and involvement. I recognized that many students have needs similar to these students but are not identified and will consider that in the future use of journaling.

I found it necessary to make a third adaptation when I recognized that the original design of the study in terms of having the students write with a parent or guardian partner was not working for many of the students. I had planned to have the students write with a parent or guardian partner as a way of increasing the parent or guardian's involvement in the school world through conversations with the child at home. It was necessary to evaluate mid-study what was more important, the student's journaling experience without any partner and how it affected involvement in the class, or a journaling experience with a non-home related partner and how it affected involvement in the class. Although the students with home-based partners gained depth of connection to the topics, I saw that the students who did not have partners became less attentive and more disruptive in class. Students who had been disruptive and inattentive were more involved after being paired with a peer partner.

At that point I evaluated my view of the non-participant parents or guardians. I reread my field log, noted my choice of figurative language, discussed my frustrations with my committee advisor, and came to some conclusions. I was judging my parents. I found that my comments showed a lack of understanding of not only the demands placed on parents and guardians today, but also a lack of respect for the understanding which the parents have toward working with their children.

These people, the parents and guardians, care deeply for their children, but many work more than one job and have numerous children for whom to care. I also found that these parents were aware of their child's strengths and weaknesses as students and knew from past experiences what methods of help and discipline they felt benefited their child. This became apparent as some of the students when paired with peers were much more responsive in class than they were when paired with a parent or guardian.

At the end of the study the students redesigned our journal. The class had voted to continue to journal, but they did not like the layout I had designed. The students submitted ideas for new journals as a part of an exit survey (Appendix K). I took the suggestion into consideration and drew up plans for their new journals that they then approved. It was important the students have input into this medium of expression.

Reading and analyzing the journals led me to two conclusions connected to the journals. *The first conclusion was that writing in the journals did increase involvement in class discussions with students who were not previously involved. The other conclusion was that a lack of engagement in writing does not indicate a lack of involvement in the class.* This was evident most often through the sharing time.

The students who had partners with whom they discussed and wrote in their journals volunteered more in class. Of the fifteen students, seven were regular volunteers in class. Di, Mary, Tom, Ira, Jim, Dave, and Neil regularly participated in discussions. Di and Ira had participating partners from the beginning. Mary, Tom, Jim, and Dave were not involved until they were set up with peer partners halfway through the study. Their level of involvement in daily class discussions and work grew as their peer partnering strengthened.

One student, Neil, was a willing discussion participant even though he rarely wrote in his journal. *Neil was an example of a student who resisted writing but was still involved in the classroom discussions.* He had two parents who made sure that one of them wrote each week, even if Neil himself did not write. He was an active participant until journal-sharing time was linked to stickers on a chart. When it became obvious that he was not earning stickers because he did not write in the journal, he stopped participating. I believe that this is related to a possible undiagnosed processing issue since Neil rarely

writes in any class. But his willingness to participate when his partner writes even though he does not show a positive level of involvement showed me the necessity in taking into account special needs that might not be a part of a formal diagnosis.

I found no correlation between the grades of the students and the journal writing. As in the past I found the students in this below average with Learning Support class rarely had consistent assessment scores. During this period of the study even the strongest students in the class fluctuated between 70% and 100%, suggesting that although the journaling increased motivation to be involved in class, this particular type of journaling did not consistently reinforce the comprehension of the content.

*The level of commitment shown by a writing partner, adult or peer, directly affected the amount of student involvement in class.* The students were very proud of their partner writings. As the weeks passed the students recognized the partners who wrote more interesting and connected responses. In the case of Ned, Ted, Sue, and Holly, this was empowering. These are some of the quieter students in class, but through their partners' writings I could hear the discussions that must have occurred at home. After sharing the journals these students would beam from ear to ear and many times led us into extra discussions that they had had at home.

There were also interesting connections made from unexpected partners. Jim's mother, an immigrant who wrote in broken English, was one of the best 'connectors.' It was unusual for her to not find a way to show her son how our lesson was connected to their lives. Although her thoughts were not always written clearly, they always drew interest from the class. When Jim's mom wrote and it was shared, the next few days Jim would volunteer and seemed to be more on task.

This did embarrass some students whose partners wrote little or did not show as much interest in the topic. At no time were the students forced to share either what they wrote or what their partner had written. Mary in particular did not want the class know that her parent barely wrote a sentence in response to her page and a half long entries. Yet she continued to write her own entries. Prior to assigning Mary a student partner she visibly withdrew in class. She would rarely volunteer, and she began to be disruptive. Even though her peer partner was not a strong writer, she had a regular partner. It was more acceptable to have a weak peer partner writing than to have a weak parent partner writing.

*Using journaling to make personal and societal connections to the subject matter increased depth of student understanding.* This was apparent as we studied two particular units. The first unit was looking at how our family's culture corresponds to our respective family traditions. There were five

students whose parents had emigrated here from other countries, one student who was adopted into an interracial family, and two students who live with extended family members instead of birth parents. The journals allowed the guardians to make connection and enrich our studies at a depth that in fourteen years of teaching I had not previously reached. This reinforced the results of the studies by Oldfather (1994) and Moje (1996) showing that understanding, in their case, literacy understanding, is affected by all aspects of the student's lives. The journals helped the students and parents to have this understanding. Not only were the students highly involved, but also they developed a higher level of respect for one another.

This is not to say that all partners wrote at length each week. The journal coding showed that the entries were sometimes weaker or stronger due to the topic discussed. The African American students and their partners were very involved during our Civil Rights lessons. The parents who were immigrants to this country had stronger connections to the lessons on cultural traditions and how they become a part of life in America. Several parents owned businesses and had first hand knowledge of economics at play in their everyday lives which in turn enriched their child's understanding. During the weeks the depth of connection to content varied as illustrated by the fluctuating numbers on the coding chart (Appendix L).

The second unit explored the meaning and examples of economics and economy. The partners took these lessons into the home and connected the idea of economy to things that the students saw at work around them. The students then came to school with examples to share with their classmates. I could not have found all of these connections for the students as many of the connections were personally related to members of their families or events within their community

*There were cultural differences that affected the level of parent motivation to be involved in the world of schooling* and led to preliminary conclusions that I would like to confirm through further research. Out of the five African American students in this class, only one had a parent who wrote consistently and with the desired connection to the weekly topic. Two of the parents physically wrote that they felt that asking the students to connect lessons to family life was an invasion of privacy. Two other parents wrote inconsistently and made few connections to the lessons.

These children initially failed to be involved in class and were outwardly embarrassed by the journal writing activity. After they were paired with a peer partner they became more involved in class. In the case of Tom and Mary, both whom are African American, just the recognition that they were working with a peer partner was enough to motivate them to be more active learners. The coding of their journal responses showed an immediate jump in

the amount and substance of their writing. The quality of the peer writing varied, but did not affect the student's enthusiasm. The drawback to peer partnering was the lack of ability to connect the history lessons to the student's home life. The peer partners could not offer the connection between our history topics and the student's home life which was an advantage for the students with adult partners at home.

It would appear that the African American parents were guarded about home life to the point of their children missing out on the opportunity to connect learning to their home environment. Arzubiaga's (2002) study had found that the emotional energy and stress of home life caused families to be less able to help students and this proved to be the case here. However, the students understood how to adapt and reach out for support, as needed.

The rest of the students had partners who wrote consistently, although connections to the topic varied. There were no other cultural connections that were as strong as the one described above.

These results also show the importance of the recognition of student thoughts and input into classroom discussion. Particularly at this learning level, when the right to share in this class was restricted due to lack of involvement in the journaling, the student motivation to be attentive and involved dropped. The importance of this ability to share became obvious

when the peer journaling allowed those same students the right to share thoughts and attentiveness increased immediately.

The neighborhood visits played an important role in setting the tone for the year. I believe a sense of community and respect developed from the simple fact that I had been in the student's world. I had walked in their shoes. Sometimes it is necessary for you to move outside of yourself to do your best job. As the student and I would then share our visit with the class, the respect grew between the students.

Does using dialogue journaling motivate both students and parents to be more involved in the world of schooling? I would have to answer positively to this question. The students and parent or guardians who chose to be active writers did become more involved in our lessons. The students with parent or guardian partners who wrote became more verbally involved in class and made critical connections to the material studied. Their partners or guardians contributed to the learning in the classroom and the model that they created encouraged the students. Students with peer partners, although they did not gain the added connection of discussion at home, continued to be actively involved in the classroom.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A: Human Subjects Internal Review Board Approval Letter

# MORAVIAN COLLEGE

August 25, 2005

Polly R. Hunt  
519 Trails End Easton, P A 18040

Dear Polly Hunt:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has approved your proposal: Using Dialogue Journaling to Motivate Both Students and Parents in My History Class to be More Involved in the World of Schooling. 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](mailto:medwh02@moravian.edu)

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## **Appendix B: Principal's Permission Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

During the 2005-2006 school year I will be taking courses towards a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses will help me to continue to grow and develop as a teacher and provide the best learning experience for our students.

Moravian's program requires that I study my own teaching practice. I will be focusing my research on how to help my students to understand and enjoy learning about history. I hope to find new ways to make history more meaningful for the students by looking at how our children look at history. This study will take place from September 1, 2005 to December 9, 2005.

The study will have three main components. The first will be surveys for both the students and parents. I will be asking the parents and the students to complete these surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of the study to help me to understand the different ways that you think about history. The second component will be S-P-T journals. This stands for Student- Parent-Teacher journals. I will be asking the students and parents to sign a contract to participate in a weekly homework assignment plan. The last piece will be the student evaluations. I hope to see students show a deeper connection to the stories that we explore in our history class by being more successful in their work.

All of the names of both parents and students will be kept confidential. No real names will appear in any written report or publication of the study. Minor details of writings will be altered to ensure privacy.

My faculty sponsor is Dr Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610)861-1482, or e-mail at [jshosh@moravian.edu](mailto:jshosh@moravian.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at the school or e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_. Please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand this consent form, and received a copy. Polly Hunt has my permission to conduct this study at \_\_\_\_\_.

Principal signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter**

Dear Parents,

During the 2005-2006 school year I will be taking courses towards a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses will help me to continue to grow and develop as a teacher and provide the best learning experience for your child.

Moravian's program requires that I study my own teaching practice. I will be focusing my research on how to help my students to understand and enjoy learning about history. I hope to find new ways to make history more meaningful for the students by looking at how our children look at history. This study will take place from September 1, 2005 to December 9, 2005.

The study will have three main components. The first will be surveys for both the students and parents. I will be asking the parents and the students to complete these surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of the study to help me to understand the different ways that you think about history. The second component will be S-P-T journals. This stands for Student- Parent-Teacher journals. I will be asking you to be a part of a weekly homework assignment with your child. A more detailed explanation will be sent separately. The last piece will be the student evaluations. I hope to see students show a deeper connection to the stories that we explore in our history class by being more successful in their work.

All of the names of both parents and students will be kept confidential. No real names will appear in any written report or publication of the study. Minor details of writings will be altered to ensure privacy.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at [jshosh@morvian.edu](mailto:jshosh@morvian.edu). The Principal, \_\_\_\_\_, has approved my study and can be reached by phone at (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\*.

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at the school or e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_. Please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Polly Hunt

(Please fill in the information and circle DO or DO NOT.)

As the parent or guardian of

\_\_\_\_\_

(Student's name)

I (DO or DO NOT) give permission for any information gathered from this study to be used anonymously by Mrs. Polly Hunt in her research study about motivating students. Writings completed by my child or myself may be photocopied if the names are removed.

-----

I understand that all students will be completing the Student-Parent/guardian- Teacher journaling activity even if the information collected is not used in the study. All students and parents/guardians will be asked for feedback about this activity through surveys or interviews. The journal activity is not a graded assignment, but is a required homework assignment.

Signature of Parent or guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix D: Parent Journal Information Letter**

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This letter will explain the Student-Parent-Teacher journal activity that will be a part of our Social Studies class. I call this our S-P-T journal.

Why am I asking you to be a part of this?

- ♻️ I'd like to be able to have you and your child share with me your thoughts on the events that we study in history. Every one of us has experiences just living day to day that connect to history.
- ♻️ Our students are lucky in that they attend a school that is rich in diversity. We have children who were born in different countries, students and parents who speak more than one language, and have a variety of different experiences and traditions to share with one another.
- ♻️ If this journal assignment is successful it will be used as the only regular homework assignment besides studying for quizzes and tests. I usually give homework three nights of the week.
- ♻️ These journals will let your child, you, and I share conversations.

How does this work? Here is 'the plan'.

- ♻️ You and your child will choose a night of the week that you agree to be your Social Studies S-P-T night.
- ♻️ On this night you and your child will sit and discuss anything that we are studying in Social Studies.
- ♻️ Your child will have written a short paragraph in school.
- ♻️ The at home part will take about 10 minutes.
- ♻️ Sit down together, share the journal entry and discuss any part of the information that interests you both. You may find that the discussion leads you in new directions, and that is fine.
- ♻️ When you are finished talking, parents-guardians, or volunteers, or both together will write a note to me with any questions, comments, or special points that you would like to share.

- ♻️ If your first language is not English, please feel welcome to write in that language which you are more comfortable using. I will find a way to have it translated and translate my response to you!
- ♻️ The journal will be handed in the next day and returned to the student within 2 or 3 days.

If you find that your child does not give you enough information to have a solid talk, and then try some of these ideas as a ‘warm up’. You could look through you child’s notebook with him/her, or you child might read part of a lesson to you, and then just talk about any part of the lesson topic that interests the two of you. Or you might use the newspaper to see if you could find any news connected to our lesson.

By asking you to be an active participant in our learning experience I hope to make this an enjoyable and interesting year for both you and your child. Please sign and return the bottom portion of this paper to show that you understand the program and to choose your journal night.

Thank you,

Polly Hunt

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I understand that I will help my child with a joint homework assignment each week. I agree to be a journal partner with my child.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is the best night for our work. The journal will be turned in the following day.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_,

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_.

Note to Mrs. Hunt:

\_\_\_\_\_ I am unable to work with my child, but we have an adult who is willing to help us. This person’s name is \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am unable to work with my child, and we might need to arrange for a volunteer to help my child.

## Appendix E: Parent Survey

**Parent survey**  
**Social Studies**  
**Mrs. Hunt's class**

**Very stressful (1) -“OK” (2)-Very enjoyable**

**(3)**

- 1) For my child reading a Social Studies textbook is.... 1 2 3
- 2) When a lesson is about something new to my child it is ... 1 2 3
- 3) For my child doing Social Studies homework is ... 1 2 3
- 4) For my child when a Social Studies lesson does not include the culture, religion, or of the country of my family it is... 1 2 3
- 5) When the teacher would start a lesson about an event in history I...  
\_\_\_\_ could not wait to hear about it! I was excited!  
\_\_\_\_ listened in class but didn't really care.  
\_\_\_\_ didn't understand it.  
\_\_\_\_ really disliked history.
- 6) Understanding history was (easy or hard) \_\_\_\_\_ for me because...  
\_\_\_\_ my family talked about historic events.  
\_\_\_\_ I was curious about what history was.  
\_\_\_\_ my family talked about different events than the history in our lessons.  
\_\_\_\_ the lesson did not include my family's culture.
- 7) The biggest problem with helping my child do the Social Studies homework is ...

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---

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8) For me to be more connected to a history lesson the teacher could have ...

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---

9) I felt uncomfortable in history class at times because of what we were learning about. It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_ when

---

---

10) I felt comfortable in history class at times because of what we were learning about. It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_ when

---

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Please add any additional comments on the back! Thank You!

## Appendix F: Student Survey

**Student survey**  
**Social Studies**  
**Mrs. Hunt's class**

**Very stressful**

**“OK” Very enjoyable**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Reading a Social Studies textbook is....  | 1 |
| 2                    3   |   |
| 2) When a lesson is about something new it is ...  | 1 |
| 2                    3   |   |
| 3) Doing Social Studies homework is ...  | 1 |
| 2                    3   |   |
| 4) When a Social Studies lesson does not include<br>the culture, religion, or of the country of my family it is... | 1 |
| 2                    3   |   |
| 5) When the teacher starts a lesson about an event in history I...   |   |
| ___ can not wait to hear about it! I am excited!   |   |
| ___ listen in class but don't really care.   |   |
| ___ don't understand it.   |   |
| ___ really dislike history.  |   |
| 6) Understanding history is (easy or hard) _____ for me because...   |   |
| ___ my family talks about historic events.   |   |
| ___ I am curious about what history is.  |   |
| ___ my family talks about different events than the history in our<br>lessons.                                     |   |
| ___ the lesson does not include my family's culture.   |   |
| 7) The biggest problem I have doing the Social Studies homework is ...   |   |

---

---

---

8) For me to be more connected to a history lesson the teacher could ...

---

---

---

9) I feel uncomfortable in history class at times because of what we are learning about. It makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ when

---

---

10) I feel comfortable in history class at times because of what we are learning about. It makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ when

---

---

Please add any additional comments on the back! Thank You!

### Appendix G: Journaling chart

Journal responses-							
Key	M= Motivation level toward completion of assignment.			C= Connection to concepts			
	(1) Little effort=low motivation			(1) Showed lack of basic understanding of core concepts	(2) Showed connection to core concepts	(3) Showed analytical or critical thinking connection to concepts	
	(2) Acceptable effort= average motivation						
	(3) In depth response= highly motivated						
Student #	Student Name	Journal Partner		Wk. 1	Wk. 2	Wk. 3	Wk. 4
S-Ex	Example	Pard.	M	2	2	3	
			C	2	3	2	
S-1			M				
			C				
S-2			M				
			C				
S-3			M				
			C				
S-4			M				
			C				
S-5			M				
			C				
S-6			M				
			C				
S-7			M				
			C				
S-8			M				
			C				

## Appendix H: Shortened Parent Consent Letter

Dear Parents, Guardians, and those important people in \_\_\_\_\_'s life!

My name is Mrs. Hunt. I will be your child's Social Studies teacher during this school year. Social Studies is a tough subject to teach. I'll bet that many of you think back to your history classes in school and think, "Boring! Nothing but dates and people to memorize." Well, I agree.

That is why I am asking for some help to change how we look at history. History is not just the stuff that happened in the past. Each day the things that happen in our neighborhoods will one day be a part of history.

What am I asking you to do and why should you help me?

- ♻️ I am asking you to chose a set time each week to sit and listen to your child share what we have been doing in class. This will take about 10 minutes. The assignment will be to let your child tell you about our class work. Then I'd like you to write and tell me what was interesting to you and your child.

Why should you do this for me? *GOOD QUESTION.*

- ♻️ I want to find a way to help my students see why history happens, and how we are all a part of it. Sometimes the easiest way to understand something better is to talk about it. Not try to remember it, just talk about what we think.

Why make more work for myself?

- ♻️ During this school year I will be taking classes at Moravian College. I would like to show other teachers that this way of teaching history helps make history more fun to learn, and easier to remember. I will need your permission to use information that I gather during the year in my papers.



(Please fill in the information and circle DO or DO NOT.)

As the parent or guardian of

\_\_\_\_\_

(Student's name)

I (DO or DO NOT) give permission for any information gathered from this study to be used by Mrs. Polly Hunt in her research study about motivating students. Writings completed by my child or myself may be photocopied and used in Mrs. Hunt's report if the names are removed.

-----

I understand that all students will be completing the Student-Parent/guardian- Teacher journaling activity even if the information collected is not used in the study. All students and parents/guardians will be asked for feedback about this activity through surveys or

interviews. The journal activity is not a graded assignment, but is a required homework assignment.

Signature of Parent or guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix I: Peer Partner Consent Letter**

Hi Parents,

I am working on finishing up a research study for my Master's degree in Curriculum Development and Design through Moravian College. I hope to present my results to a board in the spring and graduate in the summer. It has been a long 3 years of extra schooling.

Your child offered to be a peer partner with a student in one of my other Social Studies classes. I wondered if keeping a history journal that the students, parents, and teachers write in would help to keep the kids involved in class. Some of the kids did not have a partner to write with and your child was one of the volunteers who offered to help. Once a week they get together in study hall and talk about our current Social Studies lesson.

In order to include any of the journals, which your child has written in, I need to ask your permission. I would hope that you allow me to use your child's input in helping their classmates. Some of the comments that they have contributed have really helped me to understand how important it is for my kids to talk with someone about what we study in class.

I have already found that the simple act of talking about the lesson of the day in an informal way helps the students to process and remember what they have learned.

Thank you for raising a child who is willing to help a friend!

Mrs. Hunt

As the parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ (Student's name)

I give permission for any information gathered from this study to be used anonymously by Mrs. Polly Hunt in her research study about motivating students. Writings may be photocopied and used as data in the research report if the names are removed.

Parent signature \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix J: Teacher Volunteer Consent Letter**

Dear Teachers and Volunteers,

During the 2005-2006 school year I will be taking courses towards a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses will help me to continue to grow and develop as a teacher and provide the best learning experience for my students.

Moravian's program requires that I study my own teaching practice. I will be focusing my research on how to help my students to be motivated to understand and enjoy learning about history. I hope to find new ways to make history more meaningful for the students by looking at how our children look at history. This study will take place from September 1, 2005 to December 9, 2005.

The study will have two main components. The first will be surveys for both the students and parents. I will be asking the parents and the students to complete these surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of the study to help me to understand the different ways that you think about history. The second component will be S-P-T journals. This stands for Student- Parent- Teacher journals. You may be interacting with the students either during class, as a translator, or as a journal volunteer if a parent is unable to participate.

Teachers and volunteers will have different roles in this study. Teachers, as an adult in the classroom I am asking for permission to use any information that you contribute through the daily classroom interactions. This would include reflections written in my daily journal, documentations, or correspondences between us that apply to the study.

Volunteers will be asked to record short reflections on conversations that you will have with the students. If you are asked to translate for a parent I will ask for your help once each week to sit and translate parent responses from another language into English, and then write my response back to the parent in the appropriate language. Each of these activities will require approximately one hour per week. I also am asking for permission to use any information that you contribute through the classroom interactions. This would include reflections written in my daily journal, or correspondences between us that applies to the study.

At times I may ask for your opinion on the impact this activity is having on our students and their parents or guardians. I hope to see our students show a deeper connection to the stories that we explore in our history class by being more successful in their work.

All of the names of teachers and volunteers will be kept confidential. No real names will appear in any written report or publication of the study. Minor details of writings will be altered to ensure privacy.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1482 or e-mail at [jshosh@morvian.edu](mailto:jshosh@morvian.edu). The Principal, \_\_\_\_\_, has approved my study and can be reached by phone at (\*\*\*) \*\*\*-\*\*\*\*.

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at the school or e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_. Please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Polly Hunt

(Please fill in the information and circle DO or DO NOT.)

I (DO or DO NOT) give permission for any information gathered from this study to be used anonymously by Mrs. Polly Hunt in her research study about motivating students. Writings may be photocopied and used as data in the research report if the names are removed.

-----

Signature of teacher or volunteer \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K: Exit Survey

Some hugs for you for helping with our Social Studies work!  
These hugs are for the partners for helping, the students will get their hugs when they return the survey to school!

One of my goals with the journals is to help students to see that writing what you know in your own words is easier than figuring out what other people want you to know. It also helps to understand history if we think about how it happens in our own neighborhoods. Thank you for working with me.

I will soon need to reorder our journals and would like to ask both the students and their partners for suggestions on how we can improve the journals.

What has been the most helpful part of using the journals to write about our Social Studies work?

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What has been the most difficult part of using the journals?

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Do you think that writing about what we are doing in school is more interesting than using worksheets? Why or why not?

---

Do you think that it is helpful being able to talk about what we are doing in class? Why or why not?

---

Please add any suggestions for improving our journaling or the journals themselves!

Thank you!

Appendix L- Journal Coding Sheet

Journal responses-								
Key	M= Motivation level toward completion of assignment.						C= Connection to concepts	
	(1) Little effort=low motivation						(1) Showed lack of basic understanding	
	(2) Acceptable effort= average motivation						(2) Showed connection to core concepts	
	(3) In depth response= highly motivated						(3) Showed analytical or critical thinking	
Student	Student Name	Journal Partner	9-19 Wk. 1	9-26 Wk. 2	10/3 Wk. 3	10/10 Wk. 4	10/17 Wk. 5	10/24 Wk. 6
S-Ex	Example	Hard.	M 5/P 2	S/P 2	3			
			C 2	3	2			
S-1 <sup>ve</sup>		-	M 3/0	?	?	?	?	?
			C 2/0	?	?	?	?	?
S-2 <sub>DC</sub>		u-	M 2/2	2/2	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
			C 2/2	2/2	3/1	3/3	3/3	3/3
S-3 <sub>MC</sub>		u	M 3/3	None	3/3	3/3		3/3
			C 3/3	None	1/3	2/3		3/3
S-4 <sub>OC</sub>			M	No part.	<del>3/3</del>	3/3	3/3	3/3
			C	No part.	<del>3/3</del>	3/3	3/3	3/3
S-5 <sub>HC</sub>		Mom - Stella	M 2/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
			C 2/2	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
S-6 <sub>MDH</sub>		Val (Aunt)	M	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
			C	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
S-7 <sub>NL</sub>		-Tara Stephens	M 1/3	1/3	<del>1/3</del>	1/3	0/3	2/3
			C 1/3	1/3	<del>1/3</del>	2/3	2/3	3/3
S-8 <sub>AL</sub>		ev Mom	M 2/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
			C 2/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
S-9 <sub>SM</sub>		Mom	M 2/2	?	0/3	2/3	3/2	3/3
			C 2/2	?	1/3	2/2	2/2	1/3
S-10 <sub>TD</sub>		z. Mansour	M 2/0	Part.	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/0
			C 2/0	Part.	3/2	2/2	3/3	3/0
S-11 <sub>TP</sub>		Mom - Patti	M 1/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/1
			C 1/3	3/3	3/3	3/3	2/3	1/3
S-12 <sub>DQ</sub>		tan Donna	M 2/1	2/0	3/2	100% mom	3/2	3/3
			C 2/1	2/0	3/2	mom	3/0	2/3

