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# TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH EXCHANGE

Learning Together:  
Intergenerational  
Literature Circles as  
Sites for Multilayered  
Learning

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# Abstract

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Our findings indicate that intergenerational literature circles were sites where multilayered learning took place for both teacher candidates and young learners. The adult learners developed a deeper understanding of how children read, learn concepts and respond to text and they enhanced their understandings of alternate perspectives. Teacher candidates indicated that co-learning in the context of a literature circle helped them in their transformation into professional teachers as they experienced and reflected on what teaching and learning are about. Young learners also indicated that the literature circles helped them to understand alternate perspectives. They felt empowered by the opportunity to voice their thoughts and to choose ways of representing their learning. The time to explore concepts in depth enabled a deeper understanding to take place. For all learners, social awareness developed through authentic conversations about authentic issues.

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And last, but not least, thank you to the teacher candidates and the grades 4-7 students who were involved in this three year project. It is your voices we have heard and which we would like others to hear in this report. Thank you for your fervent thinking.



# Discovering the Site

## (History/Background to the Project)

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Archaeology can be defined as the science of finding and interpreting the material remains of civilizations to discover how societies in the past thought, felt and acted, organized their way of life, interacted with others and their environment, and met their needs politically, economically and spiritually.<sup>1</sup> In the project *Intergenerational Literature Circles as Sites for Multilayered Learning*, we discovered how teacher candidates and grade-school students felt and acted as they read, thought, and interacted with each other and with a variety of text and how in these interactions they rediscovered and interpreted this material to construct understanding and make meaning.

As educators and researchers, we are continually observing, gathering information, trying to make sense of it, and learning from it. In a sense, we are like archaeologists digging through and among layers at the 'site' to discover learnings. We try to understand why things happen, not merely describe what happened. Archaeologists learn by studying artifacts – the material evidence that people leave behind. In our research project, we studied portfolios, written reflections, learning journals, and student work, which represent thoughts that participants left behind. In order to make sense of it all, we had to dig through these multilayered texts because this is where rich and meaningful data lay. Our interest was not only in the artifacts but in the terrain, the context (the literature circle) out of which each of these artifacts, or statements made by participants, arose. This 'excavation' led to the gradual discovery of themes. Making meaning by digging deeper and keeping in mind the context out of which statements (artifacts) were made is similar to work done by archaeologists.

## HISTORY OF PROJECT

We (Lynn and Marg) met during the 2003-04 academic year in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. In a conversation one day we discovered that we had similar ideas about the importance of using literature and conversation to build conceptual understanding when we chatted about an article we both read, entitled *Reading Autobiographies, Memoirs, and Fictional Accounts in the Classroom: Is it Social Studies?* (Schick & Hurren, 2003). Based on this mutual interest we decided to work together to design a common assignment for the two methods classes we were teaching. The assignment integrated Social Studies and English Language Arts and involved teacher candidates in exploring Social Studies concepts through a literature circle format. Based on the collaborative work we did and the feedback we received, we were convinced that this interdisciplinary approach was of benefit for teacher candidates. When Marg returned to a grade six classroom the following year, we decided to extend the idea of literature circles to intergenerational literature circles i.e., teacher candidates working as co-learners/mentors with grade six students. We decided to investigate the efficacy of intergenerational literature circles as: (1) a means of improving literacy across the curriculum using a resource-based learning approach, (2) an integrated approach to social studies concept development and to understanding diverse perspectives, and (3) a method to assist teacher candidates in becoming more deeply aware of themselves as literate individuals responsible for helping improve children's literacy.

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<sup>1</sup>This definition drawn from: [www.archaeologyexpert.co.uk/AGlossaryOfArchaeologicalTerms.html](http://www.archaeologyexpert.co.uk/AGlossaryOfArchaeologicalTerms.html)

It was during this year that we decided to apply for a research grant to further investigate intergenerational literature circles and began the research project in the fall of 2005.

## RELATED LITERATURE/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research about literature circles and collaborative talk, proliferating since the early 1990s (e.g., Commeyras, Bisplinghoff, and Olson, 2003; Daniels, 2002; Alvermann, et al, 1996; Almasi, McKeown & Beck, 1996; Langer, 1995; and Wells, 1994), has particularly explored the advantages of engagement in literature circles for grade-school learners. Literature circles provide the context in which the epistemic mode of engagement with text can be elicited (Wells, 1994) as well as the place and space where students can use and practice the personal and heuristic functions of language (Halliday, 1973). Schmidt and Pailliotet (2001) investigated the influence of children's literature on children's attitudes, values and beliefs and how literature is a means of children coming to understand the stories of others.

Talk is the foundation of literacy and conversation is the key to comprehension. It is through interaction with others that students develop the ability to construct and communicate meaning. Work by Daniels (2004) with literature circles supports this.

In her study of the experiences of grade five students working in literature circles, Epp (1999) found that literature circles provided support for students in their reading. She learned that as students initiated their own discussions about the literature, they constructed meaning by retelling events, talking about characters, sequencing events, and paraphrasing. It was through the interaction with others that students were able to develop the ability to construct and communicate meaning. This development of literate thinking helped students make relevant and explicit arguments, consider alternatives, and reflect on their experiences and reading processes. Students themselves pointed out the importance of being able to talk about their own ideas in a context that allowed for differences of opinion - the notion of 'different perspectives' became a commonly used term. Other studies (e.g., Keehn & Roser 2002; Montgomery, 2000; and Noll, 1994) examined literature circles as an approach to helping children develop cross-curriculum understandings and as an approach to developing their understanding of intercultural issues and perspectives. Epp (2000) conducted a related study, investigating the use of picture books with students across various age levels in literature circles that explored issues and topics in various curricular areas and wrote a teachers' manual (2002) for the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan that advocated use of literature to study social studies concepts and foster respect and understanding for political, philosophical, moral, physical, gender, ethnic, linguistic, and other differences that exist between people. Schmidt and Pailliotet (2001) investigated the influence of children's literature on children's attitudes, values and beliefs and how literature is a means of children coming to understand the stories of others.

We wished to extend this work, exploring how literature circles assist grade school students in developing their understanding of concepts, perspectives and intercultural issues across the curriculum as well as investigating the efficacy of intergenerational literature circles as an approach to helping teacher candidates enhance their understanding of multiculturalism and alternate perspectives. An environment which includes peer interaction, links to literature, writing and the arts helps students actively inquire about the experience of others. Perspective-taking is key to historical understanding. Looking at multiple stories helps students with more authentic historical analysis. "When students see people like themselves in the history

they study, they are more likely to envision themselves as active agents empowered to move history forward ... such a vision builds the thoughtful and socially responsible citizenry vital to a democratic society” (Skolnick et al, 2004, p. 3).

The review of literature reveals that there have been only a handful of studies exploring the benefits of literature circles for teacher candidates. For example, Asselin (2000) examined how engagement in peer-based literature circles effected the assumptions about literature and reading held by a group of teacher candidates, while Schick and Hurren (2003) investigated the role of narrative in teaching social studies by engaging teacher candidates in book clubs where members discussed auto-biographies, memoirs and historical fiction. One study investigated literature circles as a site where school-age children worked together with teacher candidates as co-learners. In this study, Finke and Edwards (1997) discovered how effective grade four and five students were in contributing to discussions, understanding literature, and demonstrating the learning processes of reading to teacher candidates. There have been studies in teacher education (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) which indicate that learning experiences for becoming teachers need to be designed in order that they enhance their understanding of teaching as a “complex and multifaceted intellectual, creative, decision-making activity” (Schulz, 2005, p. 149).

We speculated that intergenerational literature circles could provide this type of experience and believe that our study contributes to scholarship by exploring the efficacy of literature circles in assisting teacher candidates develop their understandings of students, learning processes, diverse perspectives and the complexity of teaching roles.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our research investigated intergenerational literature circles as communities of learning where both teacher candidates and school-age children had the opportunity to engage in and observe the processes of reading, develop their awareness of multiple levels of responding to text, enhance their understanding of alternate perspectives, and use an integrated approach to social studies concept development. We examined the efficacy of intergenerational literature circles as (a) an integrated approach to social studies concept development, (b) a method to assist teacher candidates in becoming more deeply aware of themselves as readers/learners and as future teachers of young readers/learners, and (c) a mechanism for empowering school-age students as they assume an equal role with adult co-learners. The particular research questions that guided our inquiry were:

1. What is the relationship between personal reading and teaching and learning?
2. Are literature circles effective in exploring diverse perspectives, including ethnic, racial, gender, class, ableness, etc.?
3. Are literature circles effective in developing more complex and diverse understanding of concepts?
4. Are literature circles effective in assisting teacher candidates in their transformation into professional teachers?
5. Are intergenerational literature circles effective in empowering students?

Using these guiding questions we excavated intergenerational literature circles as potential sites of multilayered learning.

# Excavation Tools

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Like archeologists, we are interested in the lives of particular groups of people and have a set of tools that we use to unearth the artifacts embedded in the terrain we wish to explore. In this section of the report we describe our project participants and the methods and activities used for gathering, analyzing and interpreting the data we uncovered.

## WITH WHOM?

Two cohorts of teacher candidates (enrolled in Lemisko's Social Studies Methods classes in fall & winter terms) visited classrooms in Prairie Spirit School Division, where they participated as co-learners and 'guides-on-the-side' with grade school students in literature circles that explored social studies concepts using contemporary and historical fiction.

During the classroom visits, teacher candidates observed and then participated in literature circles, taking on the complex roles of co-learner/mentor/facilitator.

## YEAR 1 OF THE PROJECT

- Worked with grade six students in Marg Epp's classroom
- Visited five times during the fall term; all participants read/discussed the same contemporary fiction novel (*Peacekeepers* by Dianne Linden)
- Visited seven times in the winter term: each literature circle group read/discussed a different historical fiction novel related to the theme 'diversity'

*Across the Steel River* by Ted Stenhouse

*Morning Girl* by Michael Dorris

*Behind the Bedroom Wall* by Laura Williams

*Daniel's Story* by Carol Mataas

*The Captive* by Joyce Hansen

*Underground to Canada* by Barbara Smucker

*Home Child* by Barbara Haworth-Attard

*The Lights Go On Again* by Kit Pearson

*Days of Terror* by Barbara Smucker

## YEAR 2 OF THE PROJECT

- Marg Epp took up position as Learning Support Facilitator
- Fall term: cohort of teacher candidates divided between two classrooms.
  - One group worked with grade five students, read/discussed a historical fiction novel (*Underground to Canada* by Barbara Smucker).
  - Other worked with grade seven students, read/discussed a contemporary fiction novel (*Parvana's Journey* by Deborah Ellis).
- Winter term: cohort of teacher candidates divided among three teachers' classrooms.
  - Two groups worked with two different groups of grade five students at the same school; read/discussed a contemporary fiction novel (*Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman).

- Third group of teacher candidates worked with grade five students at a different school; read/discussed a historical fiction novel (*Copper Sunrise* by Brian Buchan).

### YEAR 3 OF THE PROJECT

- Continued work with the same three teachers who volunteered during the winter term of Year 2.
- Fall term: cohort of teacher candidates divided among three teachers' classrooms.
  - Two groups worked with two different groups of grade five students at the same school; read/discussed a contemporary fiction novel (*Peacekeepers* by Dianne Linden).
  - Third group of teacher candidates worked with grade four students at a different school; read/discussed a historical fiction novel (*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry).
- Winter term: cohort of teacher candidates divided among three teachers' classrooms; all participants read/discussed the same historical fiction novel (*Copper Sunrise* by Brian Buchan).
  - Two different groups of grade five students at the same school.
  - Third group of teacher candidates worked with grade four students at a different school.

### HOW? DATA GATHERING

Data from teacher candidates were gathered from reflective portfolios they created as an assignment, then voluntarily re-submitted as data for this study.

Data from grade school students were gathered from interviews, their written reflections about intergenerational literature circles and assignments related to the literature circle work.

### HOW? ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data were interpreted using a discourse analysis approach in which the themes that emerged from analysis of the written texts were used to address the research questions listed above.

# Artifacts Uncovered and Interpreted

(What we learned)

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Like archaeologists, we examined the material remains (statements made by teacher candidates and grade school students) to uncover answers to our research questions. We will share what we have discovered primarily by using the voices of teacher candidates and grade school students. To organize this portion of the report, we have divided this section into sub-sections using our research questions as bolded headings. Our commentary appears in ordinary font, while the voices of participants are represented by italicized text. Bullets indicate different voices.

## RESEARCH QUESTION: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL READING AND TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Teacher candidates indicated that in their personal reading they had separated reading for enjoyment and reading for information. They supposed that learning involved reading non-fiction for information. Participation in the literature circles helped them understand that both fiction and non-fiction can be read for both enjoyment and information. While not stating this explicitly, teacher candidates indicated that there was a blending of aesthetic and efferent responses in reading all kinds of text.

- *It [the literature circle project] has showed me not to close the door to fiction books. It challenges me to find the non-fiction relationship it speaks to. The interconnection of fiction and non-fiction can be a powerful combination, as we witnessed with Peacekeepers.*
- *I was able to learn more about how I use my reading skills, as I was able to not only read a novel, but read for meaning and context within its historical background. I was not used to doing this with novels, as I usually only read novels for enjoyment, and text books and articles for information.*
- *The whole story setting paints a picture of what it was like for pioneer homesteaders in Eastern Canada, and I became familiar with many facts as matter of course while reading the story.*

Grade school students also learned through literature circles that fiction and non-fiction could be read for enjoyment and information. Comments indicated that reading the fiction actually created interest in reading to find more information to enhance learning.

- *What I like best about it what we learned about a first Nations Peoples and how they lived back then. I liked going on the internet and looking up and learning about the Beothuk.*
- *The part I most enjoyed from the whole process would probably be the researching because I found out a lot of interesting information about concentration camps and I like to feel like I've got a handle on things and I just really enjoyed learning about it.*

Teacher candidates came to understand that talking about what they read enhanced both enjoyment and learning.

- *With reflection and group discussion the students were better able to unpack meaning from passages. This reinforced the importance of discussing the novel for me – sometimes I even missed something the students cued into.*
- *Being a part of the intergenerational literature circles has given me greater insight into how students and I can learn through conversation. There are many ways in which learners can develop their ideas through group conversation.... In my literature group, if a member did not agree with something another member had shared they would each use the novel to justify their opinion.*

Comments from grade school students emphasized how important talking about reading is for their learning.

- *I like to be in a group. You get more ideas, you help each other and it's a more fun way to work.*
- *I understand the book more in a group.*
- *One person's brain isn't as good as five or more.*
- *Talking helps us understand – if one person doesn't know, you've got backup.*
- *The best part of our meeting was how our group worked together. We really had a lot of talking and discussing and we also had great topics to talk about. My group is very good at discussing stuff.*
- *Questions were asked and we built on others' ideas.*

The literature circle project influenced the personal reading habits of teacher candidates because it showed them they needed to read all kinds of texts critically and carefully in order to engage in constructing deeper meaning with others.

- *When these questions came up within my group it showed me that I had not read the novel critically enough or with enough thought. I need to come with a better grasp on possibilities [sic] of conversation. I need to take the time to see it from the point of view of the child. I need to read the book again and dig deeper.... The students have been reading the novel, this is true, but they have been doing so at a different level. They have been evaluating and analyzing it as they go along and so are learning the book not just reading it.*
- *I think I will read more critically in the future, as a lot of interesting ideas came up in our group, which I hadn't always thought of.*
- *Without literature circles I don't know if I would have analyzed the novel as much as I did. I also don't think I would see the novel in the same light if it wasn't for having young minds in our group. I think if I was to read this book on my own without a literature circle, I don't think that I would get as much out of it as I did when we working in a literature circle, and I think the students would be the same way. For one I wouldn't have had the chance to see the story from other people's points of view, especially those from young people. I would not have a chance to discuss what has happened and make predictions on what I think is going to happen.*

The literature circles project also influenced grade school students to think differently about their reading habits. Like the teacher candidates, they discovered

that reading carefully and making connections through conversation helped them construct deeper meaning.

- *The purpose for having literature circles is to think about your reading. When I used to read just any book I didn't think about what I was reading. Now I think a lot more about my reading.*
- *We were all reading books and learning more. If we found something that we thought was interesting we would tell the group. We all worked together.*
- *I think this will improve my reading and my thinking.... I like it when we talk about what happened in the previous chapter.*
- *I feel good about doing literature circles with the university students. I am thinking about my reading more than I've done before. When I'm at home sometimes I think about my reading. I want to do this again sometime in the year.*
- *Our discussion group discussed what Nell should do about Bonnie [characters from the novel]. Should she tell someone or will that make it worse? Then we started talking about how things like that happen in our classroom.... Our talk about things that happen in our school kind of connect or relate to the things that happen in Nell's school.*
- *Literature Circles have made me look at the book in a whole different way. At first I thought Nell was kind of bossy and whiney but [TC] asked me to put myself in her shoes. Then I saw that her life was very frustrating and complicated.*

## RESEARCH QUESTION: ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES EFFECTIVE IN EXPLORING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, INCLUDING ETHNICITY, RACE, GENDER, CLASS, ABILITY, ETC.?

While examining and interpreting artifacts (statements) related to this question, we discovered that teacher candidates found literature circles to be effective in exploring diverse perspectives represented in the texts that were read and discussed. In addition, we also discovered that teacher candidates found literature circles effective because the approach helped them learn that young people have diverse, complex, and valuable perspectives and that explicit exploration of multiple perspectives enhances understanding and compassion. The data revealed that:

- 1) Teacher candidates found that literature circles were effective in enhancing their understanding that young people have valuable diverse perspectives. Learning about these multiple perspectives enriched everyone's understanding and enabled teacher candidates in better understanding the students with whom they worked.
  - *There was such a range of opinions and feelings on this subject, which was very neat to see.... I also found interesting, the range of knowledge behind the discussion. They had good reasons to back up their answers and actually thought about the concept, which impressed me.... Seeing how different opinions of children of the same age can have was a good experience for me. It was good to see that I have to be aware of children having opposing views and not trying to persuade anyone to believe my view on a certain topic.*

- *It is differences in opinions such as this that allow group members to open their eyes to other possibilities besides their responses.*
  - *I am realizing, not just from the poetry experience, but from our discussions in general that the grade six students are very intelligent. They often make inquires during our discussions that I had not thought of. They help me to see things from a different perspective.*
  - *The intergenerational literature circle project helped me learn more about social studies content because I was working within a larger group which offered perspectives quite different from my own. The concerns and observations of students who were a decade younger than me brought to my attention things which I might have overlooked completely such as the feelings of a child in an unfamiliar setting. [student] and [student] found it much easier to empathize with the characters Arthur and Sadie because they are similar ages. I looked at the full scope of the book to understand the theme taking into consideration the time period, and my analysis of the hardship faced by Arthur the home child was cold and calculating. Part of me thought that his immigration to Canada and subsequent “adoption” by the Wilsons was the best solution for everyone, because they would provide the necessities of life in exchange for indentured work.*
  - *Without literature circles I don’t know if I would have analyzed the novel as much as I did. I also don’t think I would see the novel in the same light if it wasn’t for having young minds in our group.*
- 2) Teacher candidates demonstrated that literature circles were effective because the discussions revealed experiences and background knowledge which gives rise to diverse perspectives. Through conversations in literature circles, teacher candidates had a window into students’ thinking, which assisted in developing their understanding of how learning is enhanced when ideas are explored from differing points of view.
- *When discussing the thoughts and questions, the children got to make meaning of their thoughts by making them more concrete as they discuss. They also get to see things in the text that they may not have found on their own, as everyone interprets information a little bit differently. The idea that everyone interprets information differently held true during this activity. The children were able to answer questions that I had not found answers to myself. I have found that they can be deep readers with little guidance.*
  - *The best part about literature circles was that it allowed me and the other group members to gain insights about each other’s ideas, beliefs and perspectives. I do not feel that studying this novel independently would have resulted in the same understanding of the issues.*
  - *Conversation in the literature circles was engaging and required active participation. Each student used the literature circle to ask questions, share connections and make predictions. Consequently, everyone’s understanding of the novel was expanded because each of us could learn from the diverse perspectives of each other.*
  - *I realized how simplistic students interpret what I as an adult cannot wrap my head around. One boy in our group said, “So what if they are different. If everyone was the same and we wanted to go on a roller coaster we would be waiting in line forever, because everyone would have the same idea at the same time.” I realized how students often perceive text or information very differently from how I would interpret it, so it is important to teach students about different perspectives. They learn by allowing them to explore the content and relating it to personal experiences, as well they learn by having group discussions.*

- *At first I thought that the group was just poor at comprehension in reading because they were making poor predictions that I thought were off topic. This thought soon changed after realizing that the students were placing meaning and importance on different aspects of the novel based on their understanding in relation to their own lives and experiences. Each child experiences different things in life, each situation affecting them in different ways. As a teacher, I need to recognize that each student will be able to relate to the same story in different ways. Each individual will place more value on a certain aspect of the story more than another.*
  - *I have come to understand many of these things by having the opportunity to work with grade five students during our literature circle projects. I think that taking student's diversity into consideration is important. It is important to think about the different views that students may have on subject matter and why they have these ideas. I believe that it is important to create an environment in which each student feels comfortable sharing what makes him or her unique. We do not want to focus on differences so that children feel alienated or like they do not fit in, we want to teach students how important it is to honor differences.*
  - *I also learned that by allowing them to connect it to other aspects I could tell if they understood the story they were reading. One boy in our group related to the little boy in *Encounter*, as he is leaving the shore and looking back at his family, the boy in our group related this to himself being on the bus and looking out the window at his mom and brother and waving goodbye. By telling his story, I as a teacher was able to learn about him, as well as see if he was making meaning about the story. All students will gain a different understanding, and have a different perspective while reading the same story. It is important to talk about perspectives, and teach students to use each perspective to have a better understanding of the story.*
  - *Today's discussion stretched my thinking when we discussed the questions the students had. I found that their questions really made me think ... I learned that students really pick up on things they never experienced before. Even the little things interest them ... I found this interesting as they looked at aspects of the novel that I had never considered. Their questions gave me a fairly good understanding of their interpretations of the book.*
- 3) Teacher candidates discovered literature circles were effective because the approach enhances opportunities to hear a variety of perspectives, which deepens understanding and empathy. Teacher candidates indicated that because literature circle participants read and critically discuss various viewpoints, they develop deeper understanding.
- *Today the group picked up with the quality discussion that was experienced last day. [names of students] discussed with the group the motivations of the Germans to kill so many people. I had never really thought about such as obvious question. Upon reading the book the students had asked the obvious question, why? Personally my unconscious response had always been, because. I had never thought of what type of motivation one would need to follow through with cultural genocide. Discussing this motivation with the students was very valuable for me. It forced me to try and answer a very difficult question that didn't necessarily have a correct answer. The different reaction to the book that the students had was valuable for the entire group. This discussion went a long way in validating the purpose of a literature circle. Bringing many differing minds together to talk about the same piece of literature only brings everyone in the group to a deeper understanding of the novel as a whole.*
  - *This was one of our better group discussions because we really delved into the concept of slavery and the diversity of treatment that slaves experienced. I was*

*impressed by the depth of the conversation and [student's] ability to bring in other literature for comparison.*

- *The literature circle project did help me learn more about social studies content. I could have read Home Child on my own and pulled my own thoughts out of the book but gathering weekly to discuss the readings gave me a deeper understanding of social studies. Hearing other perspectives and details gave me greater perception on the places and issues within the novel because they were not always the same as mine. For example, I don't know much about the War that the novel mentions; [student] filled me in on the details. Had I read the book alone and not discussed it I probably would have just passed by the War and not made the effort to learn more about it. Having a debate on Feb. 4th about gender roles expanded my knowledge about male and female positions because I was able to listen to others input on the topic and not just my own.... I learned the most about social studies on the last day at [name of school] (Mini Conference). Traveling the stations created by the students I learned about Taino people and their tragic story, I learned more about Hitler (I didn't know he committed suicide) and I learned much more about places through the geographical contexts the students presented.*
  - *At one point of the conversations in the literature circles the topic of where the Beothuk nation came from was raised. It was explained that some people think the First Nations came over a land bridge between Asia and North America called Beringia, while some people think that the First Nations have always lived in North America. This raised the discussion into where humans came from. [student] brought forth information that he have viewed on television that humans originated from apes. This point led to a discussion on Darwin's Theory of Evolution. As one can see the Social Studies related question of where certain human societies originated from closely related to the science related Theory of Evolution. By integrating Social Studies into various school subjects students experience their world through various perspectives. With each new experience students better understand the world and can be aware and accepting of many different viewpoints.*
- 4) Teacher candidates also indicated that literature circles are effective because the approach develops empathy and understanding by providing opportunities for participants to see things from someone else's perspective.
- *We later talked of how the Aboriginals might have thought of the Europeans as there is only the one perspective presented in the book. When we were trying to see the other side, the kids were thought it was interesting to reverse the roles. They thought that the Aboriginals might have thought of the Europeans as savages and thieves as the Europeans did not seem to understand and value nature and that the land was already inhabited. I found that trying to see the story from a different perspective proved valuable and promoted critical thinking and compassion.*
  - *When students begin to respect and appreciate all cultures they start to understand differences and develop empathy and understanding. A student who defended the Natives in Copper Sunrise demonstrated this empathy by saying that he did not think "what the Scottish are doing is right," and went on to explain that their actions made him feel very badly for the Natives because they had done nothing wrong to deserve such poor treatment and hatred. Through their learning of different cultures, the students began to view everyone as equal and worthy of respect. During this same literature circle, a different student pointed out that everyone's heart beats the same meaning that everyone should be viewed as equal because we are really not that different.*
- 5) Teacher candidates also indicated that literature circles were effective because the discussion helped in the formation and articulation of personal perspectives.

They saw that exploring and clarifying one's own thoughts in a group discussion and hearing other perspectives contributes to both collective and individual ideas.

- *The group of literature circles helps provide students with a variety of perspectives on a piece of literature. It was most interesting, today and over the past four sessions with our students, to see how each student responded differently to the text they read. It seemed that in every chapter the students each picked out something that they found interesting or that aroused questions in them. They responded in different ways with unique insights to the events that unfolded in the story. For example, one student felt that the book was all about death, while another student felt it was about sadness and miscommunication. While we all came away with some general understandings and shared common feelings about events which transpired in the novel, we also developed our own individual interpretations of events, and we each found certain aspects of the story more interesting, and more emotionally affecting than others.*
  - *Talking about a book helps me comprehend themes, ideas, etc., better. It's also nice to hear other's point of view because in some cases it could lead to new opinions, ideas and clarity.*
- 6) Teacher candidates indicated that literature circles helped them learn effective ways of teaching about perspectives. They believe that developing an awareness that diverse perspectives do exist in classrooms is important and that talking about and exploring these perspectives, and choosing resources that reflect diverse perspectives, stretches everyone's thinking.
- *This was ... the most interesting part of discussion ... that all issues have two sides or perspectives to them, based on what someone believes. This challenged my thinking in teaching, to be sure to present both sides of an issue to students and to allow them to come to their own conclusion. So often, I think that we, as teachers, force our opinions on students because we have worked through the processes and made decisions for ourselves. Instead, we have to allow students to work through these processes for themselves and come to the conclusion that is best for them.*
  - *By doing the literature circles I also realized the difference between males and females within our group, and how they interacted with one another. The girls found it easier to relate it to other texts, while the boys related the story more to personal experiences. This was interesting and I thought maybe girls in our group at this age read a variety of books, where as boys tend to be more experiential. I also learned that by allowing them to connect it to other aspects I could tell if they understood the story they were reading. One boy in our group related to the little boy in *Encounter*, as he is leaving the shore and looking back at his family, the boy in our group related this to himself being on the bus and looking out the window at his mom and brother and waving goodbye. By telling his story, I as a teacher was able to learn about him, as well as see if he was making meaning about the story. All students will gain a different understanding, and have a different perspective while reading the same story. It is important to talk about perspectives, and teach students to use each perspective to have a better understanding of the story.*
  - *I would definitely use the exercise of getting each student to write on a similar event from their own perspectives to demonstrate how point of view can be interpreted from different angles depending upon the different experience, lifestyle, and context it is placed in. Similarly, this topic reminded me of ensuring that we, as teachers, bring resources into the classroom that are presented from a variety of points of view so we do not only present one sided, biased information to our students. I believe that the role of the teacher is to provide all resources and materials possible, while*

*allowing the students to infer and decide for themselves. Similarly, integration played a huge role in the course material and further reinforced many Social Studies concepts.... As a social studies teacher, I am going to be looking for ways to integrate Social Studies concepts into other classes. Not only do students develop critical thinking skills, but they are more aware of different points of view that have been traditionally left out of the curriculum.*

- *By participating in literature circles at school B, I learned about another positive aspect of incorporating diversity in the classroom. Through literature circle discussions, it became evident that students will learn about new and interesting things from cultures other than their own. More so, in the process of learning about different cultures students will automatically engage in interesting discussions as they are eager to learn about different cultural beliefs and customs other than their own.*

While examining and interpreting statements made by grade school students related to multiple perspectives, we discovered that grade school students also found literature circles to be effective in helping them see value in hearing the perspectives of others. In fact, these younger learners appeared to recognize that holding a perspective different from someone else is a natural way of thinking.

- *We are all taking turns talking. We share ideas. Sometimes someone will start to talk about something and when they're done someone else adds on ... we learn about the story in the teacher candidates' point of view. They sometime have different opinions on things in the book than we do.*
- *Perspective means how someone sees something, that would be their perspective. Your perspective is what you see. Nobody in the whole entire world will ever see how you see something.*
- *I think the purpose for literature circles is that we (the students) learn how to discuss out feelings and opinions and we learn more by reading the books. We also hear others opinions to know that there's not one right answer and that each person is entitled to their own opinion.*

In addition, it is apparent that literature circles were effective in assisting grade school students improve their ability to articulate their perspectives. For instance, one group of young learners were asked, pre- and post- literature circle experience, to respond to a set of questions related to the theme *Unity Within Diversity*. Their pre-literature circle experience responses ranged from blank looks to very minimal ideas. After about six weeks of reading, discussing and researching, they seemed to have a much deeper understanding of 'point of view', as indicated by their responses to the question: "In what ways does learning about the past help us understand why people have different points of view?" For example, young learners wrote:

- *You discuss why people's points of view are what they are.*
- *... because events such as slavery can strengthen or change peoples' opinion. For instance, slave owners obviously thought slavery was good, but abolitionists and most likely slaves themselves thought it was bad because they experienced it. The slave owners didn't feel the pain of a ship, or the hunger or the heat, or the feeling of being exhausted.*
- *We talked about how interesting it was that there are so many books about a Jewish child's experience and not from Nazi children. We also discussed about how horrible it was that people did this to other innocent people.*
- *It helps us learn how the world has changed because if people didn't have their own point of view, the world would be the same as it was in the past.*

# RESEARCH QUESTION: ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES EFFECTIVE IN DEVELOPING MORE COMPLEX AND DIVERSE UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPTS?

Teacher candidates indicated that literature circles and accompanying learning activities were effective in assisting young learners in developing deeper and more complex conceptual understandings. Their comments about development of conceptual understanding parallel their statements about the ways in which literature circles helped them discover more about learning, in general. The data revealed that:

- 1) Teacher candidates discovered literature circles were effective in enhancing conceptual understanding because use of this approach assists in connecting or relating concepts to personal life and experiences.
  - *I also noticed that the students were more enthusiastic about concepts that could be tied into their lives or that interested them. For example, [student] often talked about his experiences at his Grandparent's farm, including experiences with his Grandfather. When discussing background information on Ontario, as well as, reading about farming in the novel, [student] could make connections in his life to the farming life in the research and in the novel. He specifically loved tractors; therefore, he brought pictures of tractors and designed his display around tractors. His overall enthusiasm on the mini-conference, book and research was heightened because he drew on connection between himself and the book.*
  - *The literature circle project definitely helped me to learn more about how young people develop their understanding of social studies concepts. I learned that student understandings are connected to their personal world. The students were putting themselves in these situations or relating situations to similar ones they have encountered. For example, [student] put himself in Arthur's situation when he was ganged up on in school. He said he wouldn't know what to do, it would be so scary, but he would probably fight back as much as he could.*
  - *I feel this project was successful in helping me understand ways that young learners develop comprehension of new concepts in Social Studies. I learned that young learners need to be able to relate aspects of new subject matter to events in their own life or emotions they have experienced in order to truly understand or take an interest in what they are learning ... when reading about Christmas traditions in our group's novel, [student] mentioned how the scene made him flashback to holidays with his family. I feel connection-making while reading is extremely important because one can remember the story longer when they recall the ideas and feelings the events of the novel evoked in them. Making comparisons between real life and historical fiction allows young learners to see the subject matter as relevant.*
- 2) Teacher candidates discovered literature circles were effective in enhancing conceptual understanding because use of this approach means that concepts are explored through conversation.
  - *The students who were having troubles comprehending the text were given a second chance to comprehend during the literature circles. I could tell that one student was able to learn quite a bit from the conversations. He would often say very little in the beginning but near the end he was able to contribute to the conversation. Hearing his classmates discuss the text allowed him to make his own connections with what he had read and he would then share with us.*

- *Literature circles allows the students to think in more complex ways about the book, because they need to be able to discuss it, rather than just reading it. The class that I am student teaching in (Grade 3/4) is doing a novel study on Mr. Popper's Penguin's. The only thing they do is read the chapters and answer questions about the chapters. I think that they would benefit a lot more from reading and then discussing in groups what happened, rather than always answering questions. I really don't think that they comprehend what is going on in the book, because I've noticed it is hard for them to answer the questions. This shows me that doing a novel study is not very useful. The students need to be able to talk to each other about what is going on in the book, do different activities relating to the book, rather than just reading it and trying to answer simple questions. I think that orally discussing the book is what leads you to comprehension.*
  - *The use of literature in social studies is another way to allow students to relate and discuss concepts within a situation. Literature takes the students into a situation as viewers but is much more personal than television. The students need to use their imaginations to create the experience for themselves. In this way they become more in tune with the concepts which affect the situation. Literature circles add to the benefits of reading literature by providing a time for conversation. This, as mentioned earlier, provides much more learning than can be individually accomplished.*
- 3) Teacher candidates discovered literature circles are effective because use of this approach means that learners engage in multilayered, intertextual, and multiple exposures to ideas which deepens and enhances conceptual understanding.
- *We connected Number the Stars to the Diary of Anne Frank & stories from Hana's Suitcase. We talked about how bad it was that Hitler bullied the Jews & how scary it would have been for them to experience this story next year (because they are 9 years old – Annemarie was ten in the story. We talked about how wars didn't just happening history & that there are kids who have to live through/see war in their countries every day now.*
  - *In Social Studies students learn why events occurred, what lead up to the events and how the events affected the people of the time and area. I believe that studying the economic, geographical, political, and social contexts of the concept are important. Social Studies is more than dates. It is learning about a concept from every angle and really understanding not just memorizing when something happened. In the past I never would have thought of this project as a Social Studies unit. I learned about integrating a Social Studies research unit with an English Language Arts novel study. Doing the research and planning the learning stations along side the students helped me to learn for myself how much more there is to Social Studies than I originally thought.*
  - *[Student] was constantly connecting events from The Lights Go On Again and information on World War II with other literary works he had read, events or memories from his own life, as well as stories he had been told by others. For example, he compared the conflict of war in The Lights Go On Again to Hana's Suitcase. Although one novel deal with the war in England and the other describes the immense conflict between the Nazi's and Jewish people, he was able to draw similarities in the sadness of the misfortune of children separated from their families.*
  - *I think the literature circle project helped me further my understanding of how young learners develop their understanding of social studies concepts. I realized it is important for the learner to be exposed to the concept in a variety of ways. I realized developing social studies concepts involves a process.*

4) Teacher candidates discovered literature circles are effective because use of this approach means that learners are given sufficient time to construct deep conceptual understanding.

- *It is also important for the students to spend time “with” complex concepts, like identity, and point of view. Students are not going to create comprehension overnight; they must interact with the topic, and observe others while they interact to build true understanding. The more time my group members spent discussing identity, within the context of our lives, and the lives of the Taino people, the more they seemed to grasp the concept, and the many intricacies that encompass it.*
- *I definitely realize that students cannot be expected to simply read about concepts, they must ask questions, be questioned, question the world and different notions that might have seemed clear before, but are now being put into perspective. It was really obvious, through my observations of [two students] that they needed to be completely immersed in the concepts to understand them. By participating in all kinds of activities that revolved around the novel, the students were able to slowly put themselves into their character’s shoes. When we did the interview activity, we really saw that they had developed an understanding of the novel and of the different concepts that was not there at the beginning.*
- *I realized developing social studies concepts involves a process. For example, we worked with the grade six students over a period of one term to develop their understanding of diversity. During this time we used various teaching methods and activities to help the students further their knowledge. The students had the freedom to explore other social studies concepts within the novels. For example, our students chose to highlight the theme of friendship while others chose oppression. I think allowing the students to select concepts they find interesting will encourage the students to want to do research because the work is meaningful. I enjoyed the experience of seeing the students’ progress in their study of social studies concepts. I think watching the students throughout the term allowed me to see how they have changed their thinking and grown as learners. For example, when we first began the literature circles I was not sure what the students knew or thought about social studies. As we read the novel I was able to see they could draw on events and experiences within the novel to explain concepts, such as conflict, culture, etc.*

Grade school students also indicated that literature circles and accompanying learning activities were effective in assisting them develop deeper and more complex conceptual understandings. These younger learners found the conversations and the reading related to the literature circles to be interesting and informative and it is clear that their conceptual understanding was deeply connected to feelings they had about specific events about which they read.

- *I think the most important event was when I learned about people were treated back then. I also think it was important because I learned so much about history. Such as: how it was like, that people were not all treated fairly.*
- *I learned that the Europeans didn’t treat the First Nations, Beothuk, very nice. I learned so much about the First Nation People. I can’t believe how they were treated.*
- *I learned from my classmates ideas. It really made me think about history. What I think could go better next time is do ask more questions and I would still like to learn more about history.*
- *I learned about the Holocaust, before I didn’t know there was such a thing. I also learned a lot more about history.*

In addition, the responses of grade school students to questions about concepts that were explored during the project show that literature circles helped them develop more complex conceptual understandings. The following questions and responses demonstrate this point (in the questions posed, concepts that were explored during the project are underlined):

Q: What is Diversity?

- *Diversity is altogether everyone's differences. It is the things that are different even in the smallest ways. Diversity is everywhere. Everywhere you look there is diversity whether it's right before your eyes or somewhere you can't see clearly. Everything is diverse.*

Q: In What Ways Does Interaction Between Groups of People Affect Each Group?

- *Everyone learns new things if they're interacting.*
- *Interaction between different groups of people affect them by making them closer. Interactions between them may make them more like friends.*
- *Interactions between groups of people can affect each group, whether it's a positive change or negative change, it happens. When the Taino people interacted with Christopher Columbus, it was a negative change for the Taino people and a positive change for CC. But everything depends on how the groups treat each other.*
- *For instance, Rosa Parks was a black woman who lived when all the racism was going on. She didn't like it. And so she took a stand and stood up for herself. She did get punished because the whites had a totally different point of view from the blacks.*
- *During the Holocaust some Germans felt bad and sad about what was happening to the Jews so some Germans realized that they were human and didn't deserve that so they helped them. By having the Germans help the Jews, the Jews found out that not all Germans followed Hitler and some did care. By interacting, both the Jews and Germans changed their minds about each other. The interactions between the Jews and Germans made them think differently about each other and gain respect for one another.*

Q: Can interactions lead to change?

- *These interactions can lead to change if the government realizes that punishing First Nations children is cruel and bad [reference to residential schools].*
- *Yes, because people are learning things. Therefore it's change.*
- *Interactions can lead to major change like friendship between races that could never be friends without (interaction).*
- *Interactions lead to change by people changing their points of view. When a person sees something from another person's angle, their opinion may change. They may make it stop so there's another change.*

Q: What are people's rights and responsibilities in a diverse world?

- *People have the right to be free no matter what their colour is. People have the responsibility to respect people and share with other people.*
- *People's rights are to be free, be safe, have food and water, to voice our opinions and beliefs if we choose to, to make mistakes, to be listened to, and to be different! People's responsibilities are to not hurt people or their feelings, to not discriminate people because of how they look, and ... let people be different!*

# RESEARCH QUESTION: ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES EFFECTIVE IN ASSISTING TEACHER CANDIDATES IN THEIR TRANSFORMATION INTO PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS?

While examining and interpreting artifacts (statements) related to this question, we discovered three categories of information about the effectiveness of literature circles in assisting teacher candidates in their transformation into professional teachers: what teacher candidates said they learned; what grade school students said they thought teacher candidates learned; what we, as researchers, discovered about how teacher candidates define teaching.

## WHAT TEACHER CANDIDATES SAID THEY LEARNED

In their transformation into professional teachers, literature circles were effective in helping teacher candidates discover more about learning, in general. The data revealed that:

- 1) Teacher candidates discovered that each individual has particular learning needs based on personal experiences and that this must be taken into account by teachers.
  - *At first I thought that the group was just poor at comprehension in reading because they were making poor predictions that I thought were off topic. This thought soon changed after realizing that the students were placing meaning and importance on different aspects of the novel based on their understanding in relation to their own lives and experiences. Each child experiences different things in life, each situation affecting them in different ways. As a teacher, I need to recognize that each student will be able to relate to the same story in different ways. Each individual will place more value on a certain aspect of the, story more than another.*
  - *Before I thought it was all about different levels of learning. Now I think it's all about life experiences and how the stages in our lives help us to experience books. I still believe that we need to view learning through a child experiences. It is only through this that we begin to grasp what children need from us as teachers.*
  - *Through these literature circles I was able to develop an understanding of how students think. I was able to see how they connect their own experiences to things that they are learning. This is very important for me as a teacher, because if I am able to understand how my students think, I will have a better chance of being able to address their learning needs and to improve my teaching techniques.*
- 2) Teacher candidates came to understand that learning involves connecting to personal experiences, 'real life', and prior knowledge in order to build understanding.
  - *While participating in the literature circles I also realized how a lot of the conversations that we were having would stray away from the book and end up with the children sharing personal experiences. I believe this is how they were internalizing what they were reading and relating it to their own personal experiences. I had never really seen the connection before but now I see what Ketch means when she said that conversations allow us to make sense of who we*

are. As an individual I participate in conversations daily. I think that the power of them and the influences they have in my life has really only become apparent to me now. But after making the connection between my personal experience with having conversations and with what Ketch talks about in her article, I am better able to understand why so often, children especially, relate topics of discussion back to their own life experiences.

- I learned that deep comprehension derives largely from personal appreciation and experience, so it is very important to create a learning atmosphere in which students feel safe to share their perceptions and interpretations.
- The intergenerational literature circle helped me learn more about how young learners develop understanding of social studies by creating an awareness of how their cognitive ability and experience base affect their learning. Their ability to make connections and understand concepts is strongly related to their prior knowledge and experience. [student] was able to relate to Nell's family situation by relating it to his father working up north and being away for long periods of time. He was also able to make a historical connection from a current event article Mrs. Epp brought into class and the novel. This reinforces how young learners benefit from interrelating subjects and how expanding the boundaries by not teaching subjects in isolation is beneficial for the student.

3) Teacher candidates discovered that learning requires social interaction, and that listening is as important as speaking.

- The opinions and knowledge that you can gain by listening to others will also give more value and substance to the ideas that you share (when it is your turn, of course). This experience in the school further entrenched in my mind the amount of knowledge one can gain merely by listening to your peers. I think that too many times in school we are encouraged to listen to and learn from our teachers, when we can learn so much more if we also learn to listen to and learn from our peers.
- Through my work in [name of town] I have learned that learning truly is a social process. The students really impressed me with their ability to contribute their own insightful points in discussions based around Copper Sunrise. The students seemed to enjoy asking their own questions, and the students seemed to enjoy taking turns answering those questions. Each question always led to another insightful comment or question and it was awesome to see deep learning taking place.
- We were human beings interacting with other humans to learn 'from each other'. I would have to say that the interaction is a huge component of the definition [of social studies]. Without it, the impact would not be the same.

4) Teacher candidates discovered that authentic learning involves making choices, taking risks and 'thinking for yourself'.

- The goal of education is to get the students thinking for themselves and questioning why or how something is the way it is or came to be. Just giving them the answers is doing them an injustice and hindering their ability to think for themselves.
- I must ensure that my students are given the freedom to gain a deeper understanding of who they are through the conversations we will have in such areas as language arts, math and social studies.

In their transformation into professional teachers, literature circles were effective in helping teacher candidates discover more about learners. The data revealed that:

- 1) Literature circles were effective in helping teacher candidates discover that they are teaching individuals, not a homogeneous group. They learned that they must take diversity into account by considering learning styles, skills, interests, developmental differences, ways of representing understanding and so on.
  - *I feel that I have learned a lot as a teacher over the past few weeks working in literature circles. I have seen what a great range of learning abilities, styles, and interests can exist within one small group of children, let alone an entire classroom. It has made me realize that I will have to be very vigilant in attending to the great and varied needs of my students when I have my own classroom.*
  - *Reflecting on my literature circle experience has helped me to carefully consider the type of students I have worked with thus far as a teacher-candidate ... I need, at all times, to be aware of who my students are as individuals, so that I can best teach to their needs and abilities and so I can be inclusive of the unique perspectives and varied identities that they bring to the learning process.*
- 2) Teacher candidates discovered that diversity among learners is not to be feared, but celebrated – diversity enhances learning experiences.
  - *I have also seen, however, how students of varying interests, learning styles and abilities can help one another to build background knowledge, create learning connections, and think critically about material they are studying. This is why literature circles are so wonderful ... being useful in almost every subject area and it excites me to think of all the educative possibilities it opens the door to.*
  - *Today I learned that we need to be more like young people. The students are so different from each other. They all share different view points, and different backgrounds, yet for the most part they are accepting of each other, and if they do not agree with each other they just move on and ignore it. They are not competitive for the most part and are very eager to help others.*
- 3) Teacher candidates discovered that their assumptions about young learners are often wrong. They learned that children can be more capable, mature, creative, open, respectful, accepting, and more capable of working with each other than expected.
  - *Little did I know that I could not prepare for the type of questions that were going to be posed.... What came up instead were questions of a much deeper level/meaning.*
  - *We then got talking about Marciella and her baby. This stemmed off into a talk about the girl who dropped off her baby in the cold on someone's doorstep. The students demonstrated empathy by feeling sad for the girl being in that position. They did feel that she made the wrong choice and there were more appropriate ways to deal with the situation. Children this age sure can surprise you with the maturity of their logic. I did not expect them to be able to assess this situation so well.*
  - *I was surprised by their answers. I know I do not have very much experience with Grade 4/5 students but I did not expect the level of answers and questions they asked. A lot of their ideas were ones that I also had [student]. Bailey stood out in my mind the most. The idea he shared about the snow goose and the image it created for him as quiet and calming. I guess I just expected straight forward answers and not much analysis. As a future teacher I should prepare to be surprised by my students' abilities and I should not go into a discussion or lesson with preconceived ideas of what to expect.*

- *Being in intergenerational literature circles has taught me that young people see the world differently, and they bring new light to a dark situation. I think that young people think differently than I do, and I can learn a lot from them. I feel the one main thing that intergenerational literature circles has taught me, is that young people are smarter than I thought and they need to be challenged or they will not be interested in paying attention.*
- 4) Teacher candidates discovered that teachers must allow young learners freedom to choose and take risks.
- *If it has been set in stone that [student] write a two page report (or something like that) on his topic there is no way he would have been willing to do anything. But since we allowed him to be creative and bring something that he enjoys (drawing comics) into his assignment, he is excited about it and ready to work hard.*
  - *As a teacher I must let students decide their own path to learning. I found myself often trying to guide the students in the direction I wanted them to go at the beginning. I found near the end that when I allowed them to go their own way, even if it was into mistakes, they learned more.*

In their transformation into professional teachers, literature circles were effective in helping teacher candidates discover more about teaching strategies and resources. The data revealed that:

- 1) Teacher candidates discovered that conversation, reflection, knowledge seeking and questioning, constructing knowledge, and collaboration are approaches which promote student engagement.
- *Being in [name of town] and using the literature circle method was very eye opening. I see now that having students work in groups to attain knowledge collectively is a great teaching tool. The students were much more excited with these lessons than the one I observed student teaching. The students were much more creative, energetic, and eager to learn using the literature circle as a tool. With lecture they seemed to zone out and lose interest in the lesson very quickly. This is something I want to avoid in my own lessons. I want to try and engage my students in the material and let them think critically about the material I am giving them.*
  - *While I was on my student teaching experience, I experienced a much different teaching/learning style than what was presented at the literature circles. In the literature circles, the students were encouraged to become active and critical members of group discussions, where in the classroom students sat quietly in their desks, researching predetermined question and coloring provincial maps. From what I saw, the students in the classroom were not being challenged to critically examine their environments, or develop skills to examine the past, present, or future. There appeared to be very little opportunity for students in the classroom to sit and discuss their information, probe for deeper meaning, or share their findings with one another. After seeing the benefit of literature circles, which involved amazing conversations and deep questions, I think it would have been of a benefit to allow the students to share their information with one another, rather than perform writing and copying exercises. I feel that a dynamic classroom where students use their imaginations and critical thinking skills to find the answer is a more beneficial exercise than numbly finding and copying answers down into a notebook. When students engage in the lesson being taught, they are more likely to apply and remember the information being taught.*

- *I also believe that in the literature circles we did in [name of town] there was more student involvement in the lesson. The students were the ones who were to direct the conversation as much as possible and in a traditional view of teaching the teacher directs the conversation and the learning. In the literature circles a found that these offered an opportunity for all students to talk because they are in small groups where in a large classroom sometimes it is hard to have all the students share their opinions because of the size.*
- *Although I do think that in some cases lecturing students is necessary to some degree. But providing students the opportunity to practice skills and gather the information themselves and form their own opinions about issues is something that I missed out on as a student throughout elementary and high school. My role is not to tell the students what I know, it is to give the student tools and guidance so that they can find and seek out the information for themselves. Finally, I can see how this integrated project teaches us that.*
- *In the Literature circles at the end of every session the students were given 5 minutes to discuss what they had learned that day and any other questions they had. I feel this is very important because often times we forget how we felt while reading, or doing an activity, so allowing them time immediately after they were able to record authentic feelings about the activity. I saw how reflections can create a deeper connection and understanding, in the case of one student in my literature group he started off writing factual information in his notebook, about definitions, locations, and where the story was taking place. On the very last day he wrote in his book "I felt very sad, and wanted to cry when Tethani was shot, it made me think of my own family, and what would happen if I lost one of my best friends. I don't get why this happened just because his skin was a different color. I got to experience the power of recording thoughts while reading, and how he understood the tragedy in the story, and made the connection to his own life. The story left him with deeper questions, that I would have never had the opportunity to learn about if they would have been expected to just answer basic questions after each chapter they read.*
- *Certain roles allowed students do the assignment without ever reading the chapter because for example if a student was the Word Wizard they could skim the chapters to find large words and then look them up in the dictionary. The allotted roles also prevented students from expanding on ideas that were outside their job; for example if the Artsy Artist found a quote they found interesting they couldn't really share it because it was not their task. I realize as a teacher that students need to learn through critical reflection and questioning, not rote learning. Reflection is a great part of learning, and I did not feel this type of literature circles fostered this type of learning.*
- *In my recent participation in literature circle groups students were not given specific roles, but rather asked them to comment on four different aspects: asking questions, making connections, reflecting on their thoughts and feelings and sharing facts they learned. I feel that this style of literature circles enabled the students to connect deeply with the novel. The ongoing dialogue that takes place in literature circles allows the students to reflect by sharing ideas and opinions and learning about social studies concepts by relating the events in the novel to real life.*
- *During my student teaching I also learned approaches to teaching social studies... The approach used in the grade five classroom was similar to literature circles in that it involved students sharing ideas and discussing the novel, but it also differed in many ways. The most significant difference is that the students are answering questions as opposed to asking them; I did not really like this because I felt that it involved very little critical thinking as many answers could be found straight out of the book... Another difference between these groups and literature circles was that it did not allow for very much personal reflection; these activities fueled a more rote*

*type of learning. I think that this activity may have been better if the students were to create their own questions to discuss. Overall I think I would prefer to use the literature circles style of teaching social studies because it asked students to be critical and creative thinkers. It allowed for discussions and reflections to take place. As opposed to answering questions asked by the teacher, literature circle groups call for students to ask their own questions.*

2) Teacher candidates discovered the importance of using an integrated approach – that is, the fusion of subject areas.

- I have often thought to myself, “Is this even Social Studies? It seems like English.” I would then go back to the curriculum guide and always realize that Social Studies includes a lot more than coloring maps and learning geography. These are important aspects of Social Studies of course, but we are also teaching children to reflect on the world around them critically, about their heritage and past, about their country, etc.*
- At first, I was skeptical that the message and concepts of the Social Studies class would become muted by the focus upon literacy and Language Arts. Instead I was pleasantly surprised to see that the students were able to take Social Studies concepts and apply them to both the story and their lived experiences. The integration between Language Arts and Social Studies was amazing as the students were practicing and developing skills in both subject areas at the same time. The structure of literature circles was an excellent way to encourage students to think critically about the world and relationships around them, while developing their listening and communication skills. As a classroom teacher, I will definitely use the methods of literature circles to encourage me students to develop connections and probe for deeper meaning within their lives.*

3) Teacher candidates discovered the importance of a resource-based learning approach.

- Instead of learning about Social Studies out of a textbook or atlas, the students were able to read a novel which created a relationship with the subject. The students were able to connect and build relationships with the characters which resulted in empathy.*
- ... literature can provide the opportunity for learning about others and being empathetic and understanding of their situations both past and present.*
- In general, the intergenerational literature circles taught me about social studies can be integrated into other subject areas, especially language arts. It was also a valuable learning experience to discover how resource based learning is a great way to cover social studies content. Having human resources, like teacher candidates (or community members, etc.) is so valuable to a classroom teacher, as it allows their students to study the content more in depth, with the extra hands to guide and contribute to the discussions.*
- The resource-based learning model, in which a wide range of resources were utilized, resulted in the work of every single student being original and creative.*
- This resource-based approach appeals to me because I love literature and I understand how children can build a deep understanding of important concepts through high quality fiction and non-fiction literature. They had the opportunity to develop and consolidate their understanding of big ideas and concepts through the use of multiple tools and learning resources. I feel that the use of different strategies and resources is also important because children learn in different ways.*

## **WHAT GRADE SCHOOL STUDENTS SAID THEY THOUGHT TEACHER CANDIDATES LEARNED**

Grade school students thought that literature circles were effective in helping teacher candidates learn about teaching. When asked what they thought teacher candidates had learned, they responded:

- *You need to know what kids are like and what kids like – we talked about what kids are like.*
- *We showed them how to listen.*
- *We taught them to be open to all kinds of kids.*
- *That they don't have to give grade 5 answers – they can give answers at a higher level so we learn from them.*
- *About teaching – how kids think, act, and are different.*
- *How exciting it is to teach.*
- *They learned that kids don't react the way they might expect them to.*
- *They learned about our point of view.*
- *If they don't like working with four kids, what are they going to do with a whole classroom?*
- *They learned that kids are different: some talk more and they have different ways of expressing themselves and different points of view.*
- *They were shocked at some of our answers to questions.*
- *Kids are complicated. They don't always understand. They don't always take turns.*
- *They learned that you'll have to pay attention to kids' work – some are good in one subject but not another.*
- *They'd have to realize that they'll have a lot of homework (as a teacher).*
- *They learned how kids behave differently.*
- *They learned how to handle kids.*
- *They learned how kids think by hearing them in discussions.*
- *Kids are harder than they look – some people think that older grades are easier to handle – it depends on the kids.*
- *They learned about our feeling and our personalities.*
- *They learned that we have different opinions and how we think.*

## **WHAT WE, AS RESEARCHERS, DISCOVERED ABOUT HOW TEACHER CANDIDATES DEFINE TEACHING**

Overall we believe the artifacts demonstrate that literature circles were effective in providing opportunities for teacher candidates to garner deeper insights into the process of becoming a professional teacher. For us, however, being a professional teacher is more about being a co-learner and facilitator than a transmitter of information. So, although we think that literature circles provided good field experience opportunities from which all teacher candidates garnered

some valuable insights, there were teacher candidates who remained uncomfortable with the idea of not being the sage on the stage. From the data:

We learned that for some, there remained a clear separation between “teacher” (talker, giver of information, director, authority) and “co-learner/facilitator.” For these folks, “to teach” does not include “to learn.”

- *... this experience made me realize that grade six students are very immature and they need to have structure in order to be successful. My role as co-learner served as a subtle guide for time management and staying on task while contributing to the group learning experiences.*
- *I noticed with the literature circles that there was no need for any introduction or motivational set, unlike the formal lessons I taught. The literature circles were much more informal and focused more around co-learning as opposed to me being the teacher and the students doing the majority of the learning. There could have been motivational sets prepared for the literature circles, but then the role of co-learner would have evolved into teacher; which was not the point of the exercise. I think motivational sets have a purpose and a place in formal lessons, but when the students are engaged in an already fun and entertaining activity there is no real requirement for a motivational set because the kids are already excited and ready to participate.*
- *They surprised me with some of the words they used, along with their ideas and reasoning. We used a lot of open-ended questions and they seemed to respond well to that. They were even able to make up their own questions. It was quite hard to pull myself away from the instruction role and into a co-learner. I also think it is hard for the students to see me as a co-learner rather than an instructor.*
- *I think the hardest thing about this experience was learning how to be a co-learner and not a teacher. But I think it was a good experience because being teachers we never stop learning and we often have to be co-learners with our students. When we are teachers we also don't have a lot of time to get to know our students on a personal level and I think the students really felt important when we wanted to know more about them.*
- *Finally as a future Social Studies teacher I have learnt to be flexible because no matter how much one plans things they have a tendency to go in the opposite directions of those carefully laid out plans. For example, a discussion of where the Beothuk came from turned into a conversation about the Land Bridge Theory, which turned into a dialogue on where humans originated from. This discussion then turned into a discussion and mini lesson on Darwin's Theory of Evolution. The conversation then turned from a possibility of humans coming from monkeys into a debate about Big Foot and if he actually exists or not. This twisty turning conversation took place in matter of five to seven minutes (January 30, 2008). Needless to say all my preparation for that specific literature circle meeting did not prepare me for a talk that jumped from the Land Bridge Theory, to the Theory of Evolution, to end up about the existence of Big Foot and the credibility of the evidence that supported his existence. Flexibility is needed to allow students to learn in their own matter, using their own background knowledge. However it is still the teacher's responsibility that students do not get so side tracked that they miss the main objective of the lesson.*

We learned that for many teacher candidates the experience in literature circles helped them define/re-define teaching/teacher, coming to believe there was no separation between being teacher, listener, organizer, guider, facilitator, and learner. For these folks ‘to teach’ includes ‘to learn’.

- *The literature circle has also taught me not to react so fast, and to let students share their thoughts before assuming that they are off task. If I would have ended conversation when students were talking about Sasquatches, we may have missed a personal connection to the story.*
- *We also must recognize that we are all teachers and we are all learners and this type of experience helps us come to grasp with this concept. In their own little ways [student] and [student] taught me about life and myself, they also opened my eyes to different things I will need to work on as a future teacher and as a human being.*
- *The literature circle has also taught me not to react so fast, and to let students share their thoughts before assuming that they are off task. . . . I have come to understand my identity, and who I am more. I think that the more aware we are of who we are, and what factors contribute to our identity, the more we understand ourselves and the world around us.*
- *It was interesting for me to see that the teacher does not have to have all the answers. When given the opportunity, students can be great problem solvers, and come up with ideas that I would not have thought of as options.*
- *I have also learned that teachers need to take the role of a facilitator in classroom discussions. This may be hard for teachers to do and understand because the traditional view of the teacher is that the teacher teaches and the students learn. However, through my experiences I have found that the students engage in discussion more when the questions and comments are theirs (therefore, the students scaffold their own learning). In [name of town] I often had a planned set of questions that I was ready to ask the students, but within one or two days I found that the students participated and responded better to their own questions. . . . I find it is important that the teacher assumes the role of the facilitator (meaning that the teacher says only a few comments in the discussion and is there mainly to direct and organize the discussion). I can see how this can be hard for teachers to swallow sometimes because one might feel that they have so much to say on the topic as a teacher. To state it simply: it is our job to teach, but that does not have to mean that we (the teachers) have to do all the teaching.*

We also learned that many teacher candidates discovered that teaching is about relationships and the gradual release of responsibility.

- *I think the biggest thing to remember is that teaching is our job and therefore we are getting paid to pay attention to children and talk with them. It is our job to care, it shouldn't be a forced feeling, sure there is not always enough time in a day to have a one-on-one personal conversation with every student in the class, but we do teach for more than one day. As teachers if we dread having to talk with our students and listen to there 'underdeveloped' thoughts than I believe we are in the wrong profession. Teaching is a lot like Social Studies, we can take things from the past and look at how things are going and decide where we want to be. Hearing the 'underdeveloped' thoughts of children and watching them grow to more and more develop thoughts over time is what teaching is all about, it's the learning process . . . and caring relationships are being able to sit down with your students and have conversations with them, allowing them to make sense of the world around them and have the assurance that they are not alone, and that asking questions is a good thing*

# RESEARCH QUESTION: ARE INTERGENERATIONAL LITERATURE CIRCLES EFFECTIVE IN EMPOWERING STUDENTS?

Teacher candidates indicated that literature circles and accompanying learning activities were effective in empowering young learners. The data revealed that:

- 1) Teacher candidates discovered that intergenerational literature circles were effective in empowering young learners because use of this approach means that young learners work collaboratively and cooperatively in small groups, providing the initial confidence and comfort level which supports their developing feelings of empowerment.
  - *I personally saw this connection when within in my own literature circle [student] told the group that when his teacher was reading to the class the conclusion of the book Copper Sunrise he was crying with the teacher at the massacre of Tethani and his family. As well [student] made a connection with the death of Tethani's family to the death of two siblings within her family and how sad it made her feel. These personal revelations probably would not have been made in a large group setting such as a classroom environment. The closeness and safety of the literature circles allowed the students to make themselves vulnerable by revealing very intimate yet important information about themselves.*
  - *I also think that literature circles can provide a safe environment for children who are not as comfortable speaking in front of others to begin testing the waters and increasing their confidence in sharing their knowledge with their peers.*
  - *From this group discussion I gained an appreciation of how small intimate circles can create a comfortable environment where each person can open up and share their views and experiences.... As each student began to share their personal and emotional stories about their personal experiences with bullying my role shifted from discussion facilitator to a listener.*
  - *The biggest thing I learned is that children feel more comfortable speaking in smaller groups. They can absorb more information because they are required to participate at a higher level. They cannot just sit back and wait to be called on, they are front and center which prompts them to be more involved.*
  - *They began to adjust and began organizing themselves and change discussion topics on their own with no guidance from either student teacher. I think it is wonderful that these kids have the skills already to be able to manage a group of five successfully. I'm sure that if it was a whole class discussion that there would be more interruptions and that the discussion wouldn't flow as smoothly.*
  - *Book conversations encouraged the children to practice caring for each other. In book conversations, there are openings for each one to express their (perhaps) hidden feelings about a wide variety of issues, to become vulnerable for a moment, and to respond in a caring way to those of their classmates who do the same.*
- 2) Teacher candidates discovered that intergenerational literature circles were effective in empowering young learners because use of this approach assists in constructing an environment where the ideas of these learners are honoured in discussions with each other and adults. This builds confidence and trusting relationships, which enhances feelings of empowerment.

- *The oral communication with the students allowed the other teacher candidate and myself to demonstrate empathy, understanding, consideration and respect for all of the students. The young students quickly surmised that this was a learning environment which they wanted to promote and to participate in. They recognized that they were respected and in turn they extended this respect to everyone in the group. A respectful environment is key to promoting risk taking. It is also conducive to students feeling safe enough to access their higher cognitive levels of thinking - evaluation and interpretation.*
  - *These discussions also served as excellent opportunities for the students to use their listening skills. It has become apparent to me that students do not only use their listening skills in order to maintain silence while other students are talking. In fact, these students used their listening skills to make their classmates feel important and included. For example, even when [name of student]'s reflection was very different then [name of student]'s, she would sit quietly and listen to his opinions, in order to make him feel as if what he had to say was worthwhile.*
  - *Another highlight to the visit was [student]'s excitement to teach the whole group what we were supposed to do. She got so excited to teach us she even read to the group aloud her example of last years. We asked [student] to read us his and [student] blurted "Yah. Like I did cause I wasn't shy." She felt proud that she read to us.*
  - *I also found that talking with the kids gave them a feeling of importance as we all listened and responded to each other's comments. The literature circles allowed the children to have their voices heard and to teach others.*
- 3) Teacher candidates discovered that intergenerational literature circles were effective in empowering young learners because the element of 'co-learning' shifts power away from adults as the primary holders of knowledge. Through intergenerational literature circles, many teacher candidates discovered that young learners are empowered because adults and children participate together as co-learners, with all participants offering knowledge, help and support.
- *The literature circle method allows the students to teach and learn from each other. This way all levels of academic ability can come together to accomplish a goal. It sure brings the class together as a whole.*
  - *I also found that talking with the kids gave them a feeling of importance as we all listened and responded to each other's comments. The literature circles allowed the children to have their voices heard and to teach other.*
  - *The lecture and note way of teaching seems to divide a class. They do not get to work together and listen to different perspectives. It is their answer right or wrong. Students need to know that there are other points of view out there besides their own and this is not a bad thing. We do not always have to agree with everything someone says. The literature circle method of teaching allows for these opportunities of difference in opinion to present themselves. Students get to work through their problems as a group and collectively come up with the best answer. I really enjoy being a part of group cooperation. To see young people working together and letting their minds work in so many creative ways really fires me up. That is why I am a teacher.*
  - *Another positive outcome of these differing understandings, was the student to student teaching that occurred. It is not always the teacher that gives or explains the answers, and sometimes the most powerful learning experiences can come from peers.*

- *As time goes by she is less inhibited to share her thoughts and own ideas. I feel that her and I can discuss more freely, today more than ever before. Now that [student] has become more comfortable she brings ideas to light that I would not have thought of. A simple example is searching on the Internet. [student] offers alternative means of seeking out specific information, means that I alone would not have thought of. I learned that sometimes, despite thinking I have all the right answers, even a student in grade six can teach me sometimes. It is really valuable to be brought back to reality sometimes.*

Grade school students felt that the format of the literature circles and the activities which were extensions of these meetings enabled them to pursue topics that had personal interest. Sharing their findings was very valuable and empowered them in that they felt that what they had to say was important enough for others to be interested.

- *I enjoyed preparing and presenting the most. Presenting was probably the one I enjoyed the very most. The reason I enjoyed presenting so much was because after all the hard work that you put into gathering all the information it ends up paying off. I mean it doesn't just go into some folder of something to never be seen again, people actually take the time to read all the info and see what you've done.*
- *I enjoyed putting up my info because I felt happy for getting all the work done.*

There were many comments about the trusting environment which the intergenerational literature circles provided for students. Many comments dealt with the “safety” in these groups and how being together for awhile eases the insecurity of expressing one’s thoughts to other people and improves one’s communication skills.

- *I think that by doing this project I have improved at public speaking and talking about my information.*
- *In September when I first met my teacher candidates I was very nervous and worried. Will they think I'm dumb? Will they like me? But now after meeting my new teacher candidates I feel like I've got more of a handle on things. I feel now that I know what I'm doing. I'm feeling a lot more confident and less nervous.*
- *I think I understand literature circles better than before because now I know more about asking questions better to strangers, but they aren't strangers forever. I like circles you talk to people about a topic or book. You ask questions and get good discussions.*
- *It was more scary in September because I'm shy. This time I wasn't. It was easier because we had been through it once and it wasn't hard talking to big people now.*
- *I really like the discussion. Everybody said there honest opinion and chatted a lot. Questions were asked, building on others ideas. I think discussion went really good. I thought that [student] wouldn't be very talkative but he was. Everybody gave their honest opinions.*
- *I think the best part was how everybody worked together and nobody laughed at anybody.*
- *One person in our group doesn't talk that much and I'm going to try to help. It's [student]; she's not really talking that much. Even in the computer lab, not much talk. And I'm going to try to find more things to talk about and get follow up questions for the group. And get some of their minds thinking.*

Younger students also felt that these groups provided the space for everyone to be learning from others, no matter what age they were. The support was received as well as given. They showed great concern for their peers.

- *I learned from my classmates' ideas.*
- *My teacher candidate helped me with expressing my thoughts better. They also helped me with getting my voice in a conversation more often.*
- *I learned in Copper Sunrise that it does not matter if you're white or copper skinned it only matters about how big your heart is, and if you treat people who are different differently all you'll be doing is treating yourself the same way. I think I learned from my teacher candidate that you can never be afraid of your own opinion and life. You can't run away from it.*
- *I tried to get [student] thinking but it was always the same answer, "I do not know." I'm going to try to pull her into the discussion.*
- *Possibly [student] should speak up more. Not just getting louder but making more suggestions or asking more questions. But I think he's uncomfortable because he's the only boy in the group.*
- *We really opened up and we knew each other a little bit better so I think that everyone felt more comfortable.*
- *One person in our group doesn't talk that much and I'm going to try to help. I'm going to try to find more things to talk about and get follow-up questions for the group. And get some of their mind thinking a bit with hard stuff to figure out that will stump them [the teacher candidates].*
- *So we started to have fun with the story. So we kept on asking questions about it. We started paying attention to each other's questions. I think all of us had a good time.*
- *I felt I could express my thoughts and contribute to the discussion because no one laughed at my thoughts.... My ideas were listened to and respected and I could tell this because everyone looked at me when I spoke.*

# Post-Excavation

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Archaeologists learn by studying material evidence – those things that people have left behind. Our findings and conclusions are based on those materials left behind by teacher candidates and young learners. However, these stories extend beyond the material evidence left behind. Our interest was not only in the artifacts but in the terrain, the context (the literature circle) in which each of these artifacts or statements made by participants lay.

The findings we unearthed support what our literature review revealed to us and these research studies supported our findings. In addition, after we began the project, we came across more articles reporting on research which strengthens our interpretations of project findings. We believe that our research enables us to draw some conclusions and make some recommendations.

However, there is always more than what meets the eye (or ear) and so, while the project is complete, lingering questions and the learning continue.

## OUR CONCLUSIONS

1. Thinking about our own personal reading as adults enables us to see the opportunities and abilities of younger learners to think deeply. In other words, when we as educators think of ourselves as learners, we may be better able to meet the needs of the diverse students within the classroom.
2. Creating opportunities for pre-service teacher candidates to experience interactions and co-learning with young learners in classroom settings helps in their transformation into professional teachers. Being a co-learner opens everyone's eyes to the various perspectives and develops an awareness of the needs of students who come with a variety of background knowledge and experience.
3. Conversation is the key to comprehension (Ketch, 2005). Literature circles are one context in which students can explore a concept more deeply. Time to dwell on a concept(s) enables everyone (teacher and young learners) to explore multiple perspectives, reflect on their own thinking, clarify their thinking, and develop the language to articulate this thinking. In order to understand, readers and thinkers need to become fervent, take time to think, struggle for insight, and engage in discourse (Keene, 2008).
4. Through purposeful discussion, learners develop social awareness as diverse perspectives around ethnicity, race, gender, class, ableness can be explored in depth. Literature circles allow participants to combine efferent and aesthetic responses as learners investigate lives of real people in real situations and use the stories of people to enhance their understanding. Students work in a book rather than on a book (Graves, 2002). Not only are multiple perspectives of other people in history explored, but participants themselves learn to listen and respect perspectives of their peers. Lobron, A. & Selman, R. (2007) define social awareness as “the knowledge children have that allows them to understand and relate successfully to other people, both people like themselves and those who are from different backgrounds. Some of the key skills involved in the social awareness domain are negotiating with others, resolving conflicts,

expressing one's point of view, and listening to the perspectives of others" (p. 528). Children's awareness of social issues evolves through conversation. Classmates and the teacher support each other. Allowing children to share their thinking and hear different perspectives results in learning for all. By articulating their thoughts, children develop the vocabulary necessary to discuss issues such as racism and social justice and learn the language of having a different opinion.

5. Students are empowered when given the opportunity to voice their opinions, thoughts (even the undeveloped ones), and perspectives and are given choices in how they will communicate their learning. Connecting their thinking to what they already know is an important factor. Co-learning engages and empowers students. They learn and practice communication skills in authentic conversations about authentic issues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We need to support students in becoming self-directed in their learning. As educators, we support students in their learning by gradually releasing responsibility. "We teach children to think with and between texts by helping them say aloud, in conversations with us and with others, the thoughts they will eventually be able to develop without the interaction of conversation" (Calkins, 2001, p. 226). We do not tell students what to think, but we can share and model cognitive strategies that serve as ways of thinking and understanding. We gain a deeper understanding of text and the world around us when we activate background knowledge and make connections, question, infer, determine what is important, summarize and synthesize, and visualize. When we become engaged and fascinated in learning and struggling for insight, we enrich our understanding and we remember (Keene, 2008).
2. In order to become engaged and connected to learning, students need a classroom culture which values respect, trust and risk-taking.
3. In order to be more engaged and take ownership, students need to have opportunities which promote student autonomy.
4. Teachers need to model what a curious learner looks like.
5. Students need time to collaborate and communicate in small groups in order to build confidence.
6. Resources are an important part of students' awareness of multiple perspectives. A resource-based learning approach is most effective.
7. Integrating curricula areas is most effective in developing an understanding of concepts.

## LINGERING QUESTIONS

1. How can we best mentor and support teacher candidates in sustaining the enthusiasm and belief that all children are capable when they enter environments where change out in the field is not always embraced?
2. How can we support classroom teachers in their transformation into lifelong learners?
3. What are some ways of creating intergenerational literature circles where a university is not in close proximity to schools, e.g. collaborating with a different age group in a school or with seniors in the community, etc.?

## WRAPPING UP

The project has come to an end. We feel that a lot of learning about ourselves, each other, and social studies concepts occurred. Teacher candidates and young learners were engaged, enthusiastic and fervent as they struggled to understand. Perhaps it is best described by a grade six student when asked to reflect on the experience of intergenerational literature circles. His response was:

*It is very exciting because it's fun and I couldn't learn as much as if I was on my own. They're great people. You could not have made my Friday morning better.*

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