

Literature Circles and Elementary Students' Ability
to Express Multiple Perspectives

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Abstract

Multiple perspectives within a literature circle create powerful material for discussion. These multiple perspectives can only occur when the correct group dynamics occur. The questions that centered my action-research project is: How does utilizing literature circles in a fourth-grade classroom affect students' abilities to consider multiple perspectives? Sources of data include: video recorded literature circles, video recorded interviews and a field journal. Analysis of the data revealed the following findings: One important point is that literature circles can provide a space where status and power issues can be negated, which will positively affect students' ability to consider multiple perspectives. Another finding was that expressing multiple perspectives helped to deepen the conversation and helped students return to the text. Furthermore, expressing multiple perspectives in a literature circle led students to create deeper discourse with the potential that students could view one another, view themselves, and view the world from a new perspective. Recommendations for further research include examining the positive and negative effects of roles, the effect of gender, mini-lessons and themed reading.

Keywords: Multiple perspectives, literature circles, group dynamics,

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Table of Content	v
Chapter One: Review of the Literature	1
Multiple Perspectives	1
Multiple Perspectives in English Language Arts.....	2
Literature Circles	4
Space for Multiple Perspective	7
Power Dynamics	13
Problem Statement and Research Question	19
Chapter Two: Background and Methods	21
Participants and Setting	21
Practices Implemented.....	22
Data Sources.....	25
Data Analysis	26
Limitations of Conclusions.....	27
Critique of Study.....	28
Chapter Three: Data Analysis and Conclusions	30

Status	30
Roles	38
Discussion Director	38
Other Members of the Group	44
Group Dynamics.....	47
Respect.....	48
Empathy.....	51
Trust.....	53
Disrespect.....	56
Multiple Perspectives	58
Perspective Taking	59
Differing Opinions	62
Differing Prior Experience	65
Differing Truths	67
Implications for the Classroom	69
Suggestions for Further Research.....	70
Conclusion	71
References	73
Appendix	77

CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Multiple Perspectives

There is a shift in the world of education toward the importance of *multiple perspectives* in conversations or discussions. A discussion or conversation that contains *multiple perspectives* includes one or more of the following: differing opinions, personal truths, and prior experiences (Christenson, 2004; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995).

Miller (2002) describes Jean Piaget's model of learning either through assimilation or accommodation. When a student assimilates a piece of information through a discussion, that student does not change his cognitive schema. However, if that student's cognitive schema does change, that student is making an accommodation. Through discussions of this nature, participants may assimilate or accommodate to new information by changing their cognitive schema.

Within an authentic conversation where multiple perspectives exist, participants offer differing opinions. There are participants who share at least two differing opinions on a single subject. These opinions are shared, heard, and respected by all members of the conversation. Some participants may include personal truth which is different than an opinion because it is influenced by their prior experience. These personal truths are unique and may not be completely understood but can be respected.

As a result of such conversations, participants may assimilate or accommodate to new ideas. If the perspective offered fits into the participant's schema, then that participant can assimilate the new information. This does not alter their schema. However, if a participant cannot integrate new information into his existing schema, then he may alter his understanding by forming a new schema. This is an accommodation.

In conversations that involve multiple perspectives, participants' respect for differing opinions and personal truths is essential. Furthermore, participants' schema may be altered. The value of multiple perspectives in a classroom is evident. Clearly, experiencing multiple perspectives benefits students and their learning, particularly in certain subject areas. English language arts is a perfect testing ground.

Multiple Perspectives in English Language Arts

Multiple perspectives are critical in literature discussions. A diverse range of perspectives supports genuine inquiry (Christenson, 2004). Diverse perspectives represent two or more people's differing truths which, when shared, allow for students to think more deeply about a subject. The resulting understandings that are drawn from inquiry broaden students' thinking about that subject. Through this process of inquiry, students and teachers can ask clarifying questions (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001; Goatley et al. 1995). These clarifying questions, which elicit additional information, are used throughout students' inquiry to explore two or more perspectives.

There are ways to ask questions that increase exchanging multiple perspectives. It is important to first model the type of questions that will lead to explanatory discussion (Pearson, 2010). Explanatory discussion clarifies opinions. This type of talk elicits multiple perspectives because the questions are open-ended.

A teacher's beliefs contribute to setting up a space where multiple perspectives are shared. Hadjioannou (2007) describes a teacher who believes in more than one correct answer. With her belief, she encourages a space for multiple perspectives to occur. Multiple perspectives are important because they allow for different correct answers to be shared (Hajioannou, 2007).

A second argument for the importance of multiple perspectives relates to diverse or alternative opinions (Chinn et al., 2001). Promoting a variety of opinions enables a rich conversation to occur, which helps students deal with diversity in the real world. In addition, hearing multiple opinions allows students to value other students' contributions (Thein, Beach & Parks, 2007).

This means there are multiple opportunities for a teacher to assign competence for a correct answer. Assigning competence means that the teacher notices a student's contribution and publically recognizes that student. (Featherstone, Crespo, & Jilk, 2011). Assigning competence usually is directed at a lower level students and focuses on shifting all students' beliefs regarding whether or not students, in this case, can be successful at sharing multiple perspectives. Assigning enough competence to lower-status students can alter self-perceptions and prompt them to share their multiple perspectives. The

educational value of multiple perspectives ranges from attending to various status inequalities to deepening conversation. It is necessary for teachers to create the space for sharing of multiple perspectives to occur. One place they can emerge is in literature circles.

Literature Circles

Literature circles are spaces for student-led discussions that are centered on a book of their choosing. They are highly structured with norms and roles but also provide the required environment for a rich, student-led discussion. Furthermore, to ensure success of literature circles, it is necessary to have clear guidelines that dictate what type of questions are asked and when best to ask them.

Daniels (2002) describes literature circles as having the following structures and practices:

- Students have the ability to select their own texts to read.
- Literature circles are based off book selection, students are not tracked, and all groups do not read the same book.
- Literature circles occur every week to discuss the text previously read.
- Students take notes, which serves to inform their discussion.

- Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions and open-ended questions are welcome.
- The teacher facilitates literature circles in the class but does not lead individual literature circles.
- Evaluation is by teacher observation and student-evaluation.
- Literature circles are a space to enjoy and deepen students' understanding about books.
- When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading material. (p.18)

In order for these literature circles to properly function, the classroom needs to have a set of expectations that encourage students to ask questions.

Literature circles require expectations in order to function. One expectation states that students must respect their peers' opinions and perspectives by responding in a non-judgmental fashion (Blum et al., 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Hadjioannou, 2007). Furthermore, Adler et al. (2004) adds that discussions must be a space where students can test ideas and perspectives. In addition, balancing gender eliminates one potential issue.

Literature circles are a space for students to have discussions revolving around a text (Daniels, 2002). This discussion is a form of cooperative learning

where students and a teacher have similar amounts of power (Chinn et al., 2001; Daniels, 2002; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Maloch, 2002). Literature circle are a space in which groups construct meaning (Daniels, 2002; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Evans, 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Hadjioannou, 2007; Maloch, 2002).

The benefits of literature circles include deepening discussion (Daniels, 2002), improving a reader's confidence (Goatley et al., 1995) increasing students' reading scores (Avci & Yuksel, 2011), increased student autonomy (Daniels, 2002; Daniels & Steineke, 2004; Goatley et al., 1995), increasing collaboration (Daniels, 2002; Daniels & Steineke, 2004), and finally, increasing the frequency of comments expressing multiple perspectives (see, for example, Blum, Lipsett, & Yocom, 2002; Thein et al., 2007; Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2011).

Individual classrooms have a different set of expectations regarding whether students are allowed to ask questions, the types of questions that are predominantly asked, and which students' questions are answered. For example, in a *monologic* classroom, teachers are usually authoritarian in demeanor and ask an overwhelming majority of the questions (Reznitskaya, 2012). In monologic classrooms, there are not rich literature discussions that are marked by multiple perspectives. This contrasts with classrooms in which teachers ask open-ended questions as well as encourage others to ask questions (Eeds & Wells, 1989). These classrooms are usually dialogic in nature (see, for example, Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan 2004; Reznitskaya et al., 2009). Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, and Caughlan (2004) demonstrated that students participated in roles, both active and supportive. When students took charge in

their discussions in small groups, the number of teacher-asked questions dramatically decreased while the number of student-asked questions, particularly open-ended questions, increased (Chinn et al., 2001; Goatley et al., 1995). In these groups, the types of questions that a teacher asked changed from discussion-directing questions to clarifying and authentic questions (see Adler et al., 2004; Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih, 2012). Adler et al. (2004) studied a series of dialogic classrooms. In these classrooms, teachers more readily ceded their power in the small-group setting, and as a result students asked more questions. These questions resulted in a lively discussion where students could share multiple perspectives. The norms and expectations belong to a classroom dictate the way in which questions are asked. These norms and expectations include having free exchanges of information (which included ideas, questions, and perspectives) through their discussion, as well as emphasizing listening. Finally, the teacher became a facilitator, not an authority figure.

Space for Multiple Perspectives

Literature circles are an excellent environment for multiple perspectives because they offer a space for the quieter voices to be heard (Chinn et al., 2001; Daniels, 2002; Goatley et al., 1995). A teacher needs to model the type of discussion he wants (Pearson, 2010). As part of these norms, it is vital to have students respect their peers' opinions and perspectives by responding in a non-judgmental fashion (Blum et al., 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Hadjioannou, 2007).

Goatley, Brock, and Raphael (1995) focused on how student-led discussion provided diverse students the opportunity for participation. The school where the study took place had 85% of its students participating in a government-funded breakfast and lunch programs. Students in this study were of European American, Vietnamese American, and Hispanic decent. Students in this study were in fifth grade and had one teacher in the classroom.

Goatley et al. (1995) writes about a teacher who facilitated what she called *book clubs* in which students naturally took on active and supportive roles in their discussions. Students did not have assigned roles in their book clubs. In addition, these students had participated in book clubs the previous year, which further improved their discussion. The leadership of any student was respected by their peers and their comments discussed. There were instances in which students' comments built off one another, as well as showed evident of the students' increased comprehension. The strategies students used to increase comprehension included looking back at the book, using peers' knowledge of the book, examining the cover and back of the book, and drawing upon readers' prior knowledge. Using these strategies in discussion increased comprehension. Students participated harmoniously because they had previously participated in book clubs. Students asked each other questions, which sparked discussions where many perspectives were shared. The high level of respect towards each member and the various techniques used allowed these book clubs to successfully handle their group dynamics.

Some of the conclusions support a social constructivist method, particularly in positive social interaction within a literature discussion. In addition, Goatley et al. (1995) determined that roles, though they provided structure, caused issues in their literature circle. Another finding the researchers found was that the members of literature circles were very supportive to all comments that were made. In addition, students took on a variety of roles while speaking including those of: leadership, support or silence. Through these discussions, students collaborated to discuss difficulties that arose, citing the text as well as using personal truths to inform the conversation. Finally, students referred back to previous discussions and used all parts of the book to inform their literature circle discussion.

The credibility of this study is high. The data was triangulated by the researcher's field notes, audio and video tapes as well as student work. The study was peer-reviewed. There is adequate description, which focused on describing the students' gender, race, and academic. These descriptions provide some additional information; however, description of the school and its neighborhoods would further increase the dependability.

This study is important because it shows that book clubs not only can succeed with mixed gender but may also be free of power struggles. The organized nature of the book clubs led to participants feeling safe, which in turn resulted in the expressions of multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the teacher organized a space for the entire class to gather and share their ideas from

different book clubs. Such whole-class sharing could lead to disagreements that further advance students' understanding of multiple perspectives.

The sharing of multiple perspectives occur more frequently in student-led discussions within a collaborative learning environment that supports unique styles of reading (Battistich, Solomon, & Delucchi, 1993; Chinn et al. 2001; Chinn, O'Donnell & Jinks, 2000; Daniels, 2002). These disagreements lead to interpretive discussion, which is manifested when a student makes an evaluative statement (Thein et al., 2011). Interpretive discussion has the potential for sharing multiple perspectives to occur because of the individual ways in which readers read. Rosenblatt (1982) describes reading as a transaction between the reader and the words on the page. Readers understand words through a lens of their own experience and interprets texts uniquely. Because each reader understands a text differently, members of a literature circle will share different perspectives on a topic.

Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) discuss the impact of literature circles that focus on political or multicultural texts. Researchers studied 90 tenth-grade students engaged in literature circles. Creekside Junior/Senior High School, with a predominantly European American student body comprising middle- and working-class students, was located in the northeastern United States outside a large city. Researchers describe a six-week literature circle that focused on the book *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Data was gathered through interviews, ethnographic observations, and recorded literature circle discussions. Researchers observed an increase in the amount of interpretive statements

made by students, which helped to make sense of, make predictions about, or speculate about the text. These students asked authentic questions, which are defined as those not having a predetermined answer. More importantly these particular literature circles developed the participants' ability to "perspective take," which means "they acknowledge, respect, [and] understand... alternative perspectives" (Thein, et al., 2011, p. 21). Perspective taking occurred if the teacher listed that as a norm or expectation.

Thein et al. (2011) had solid credibility. The data was triangulated and their research was peer-reviewed. Although they did not do member-checks, their triangulated data created solid credibility. Rich-thick description increased dependability.

There were many useful ideas that came out of this article. Perspective taking or being able to understand and respect diverse points of view needs to occur before multiple perspectives take place. The respect and ability to understand another's perspective will lead to an environment where students feel safe and thus will be able to share multiple perspectives.

Within a literature circle, multiple perspectives arise as students answer questions (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). The most useful types of questions have "more than one possible answer, lead to different opinions...[and] make you see something in a different way" (p. 130). Asking initial questions is not enough. Literature circles require effective open-ended and follow-up questions. Questions that can be answered by a yes or no are not effective. However, questions that begin with the word *why* usually will elicit additional responses

because there is more than one correct answer. These types of questions, which lead to expression of multiple perspectives, must be encouraged and taught by the teacher as norms and expectations.

Roles, once taught, are an essential tool to scaffold students into a richer discussion. A teacher can use roles, particularly the role of a discussion director whose job it is to ask questions, to promote the use of multiple perspectives in literature circles (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Daniels and Steineke (2004) present many mini-lessons where a teacher can teach the class about the norms and expectations in a literature circle. These norms range from adopting roles to setting ground rules which include participating, being prepared to ask questions and justifying answers. These norms and expectations promote multiple perspectives.

In order to reinforce these norms, teachers must expect students are to abide by them. One way to ensure this occurs is to develop a classroom setting that promotes discourse. Hadjioannou (2007) researched a classroom where the teacher and the entire school focused on respectful yet all-inclusive dialogue. Students not only participated but were enthusiastic about it. A classroom of students such as in Hadjioannou (2007) reinforces the value of norms.

Multiple perspectives can be reinforced by norms that are practiced and followed in the classroom community. These multiple perspectives are often elicited by open-ended questions where there is not one set answer. Furthermore, multiple perspectives can be fostered in literature circles because interpretive discussion occurs (Thein et al., 2011). However, these practices

which elicit multiple perspectives will not occur if there are power struggles within the literature circles.

Power Dynamics

When norms and expectations are not upheld, the classroom environment can create a situation in which only some students equitably participate in literature circles. This can lead to power struggles. Power struggles are a major issue that can derail literature circles and discourage discussions in which multiple perspectives are otherwise offered. Within literature circles, there is the potential for power struggles to occur between the genders (Evans, 1996, 2002; Evans, Alvermann, & Anders, 1998). However, depending on the classroom dynamics, literature circles can be free of power struggles including those between gender (Goatley et al., 1995; Hadjioannou, 2007).

There are many instances in literature circles where boys seized power from girls through the use of their voice (Evans, 1996, 2002; Evans et al., 1998). Evans (2002) studied power struggles between students in literature discussion. Her study took place in a school is located in a working-class neighborhood. She observed 22 fifth-grade students, an even split between boys and girls. The students were predominantly of European American. Evans discovered that students understood successful literature discussions require respectful interactions between all students during implementation. Another aspect she noticed was that mixed-gender groups generally experienced problems with issues of respect. Mixed-gender discussion groups created a boys-against-girls mentality, which resulted in less valuable discussions. Within these mixed-gender

groups, one or more students would seize control and let some students speak while silencing others. Students preferred same-gender groups.

Evans' (2002) credibility was solid as she triangulated multiple data sources. She showed her videotapes to her participants as part of member-checks and had her research peer-reviewed. Dependability was solid in Evans' study as she offered a fairly rich description of her setting, participants, and action.

Evans (2002) offered students' insights into what creates a successful discussion. She revealed that students adding their opinions created a successful discussion. Furthermore, Evans highlights what transpires when animosity occurs between students of different genders, resulting in the abandonment of a literature discussion. However, it is important to realize that boys can dominate a conversation with or without superior numbers. Dominant boys limited the opportunities for multiple perspectives within a literature circle. Interestingly, this study did not discuss whether having a majority of girls in a literature circle would lead them to seize power.

Evans (2002) provides three important conclusions. First, it is important for students to understand the conditions required to hold a successful discussion. Second, students are very cognizant of the issue of gender, which may hinder literature circle discussions. The final conclusion was that a "bossy" facilitator had a strong, negative influence on literature circle discussions, tending to intentionally or unintentionally silence people through cutting them off or asking them a question when they were not prepared.

Clarke (2006) asserted that girls wielded and maintained power in literature circles through voicing, which is a means of controlling a conversation through speech and through having superior numbers. Voicing allowed two girls to dictate the general direction of the topics within a literature circle by discussing texts among themselves, and by talking over what other members of their literature discussion group had to offer. Based on the Evans (2002) and Clarke (2006) studies, either gender is able to seize power (Clarke, 2006; Evans, 2002). Any student has the capacity to dominate a conversation and thus derail the possibility for multiple perspectives.

A study by Evans, Alvermann, and Andres (1998) explored the influence of gender on students' decision to participate in literature discussions. This article examined how social dynamics impact discussion. This article focuses on three fifth-grade girls in Tucson, Arizona. They attend a diverse school. Evans et al. (1998) found that upper elementary girls were far more submissive and silent in a literature discussion than boys. Girls were teased and called bossy by boys in order for boys to remain in control. In response, girls used silence to regain power.

The authors were able to increase their credibility by triangulating data. In addition, this article was peer reviewed. Its dependability is weak because of a lack of rich, thick description. All data in the study can be traced back to its sources, which increases the study's transferability. Evans et al. (1998) reveals how power struggles can derail an otherwise functional literature discussion to the point where some students are silenced. Silence is its own form of wielding

power, because those silent students refuse to participate. In any classroom, having mixed-gender literature circles raises the possibility of power struggles occurring.

However, this article neglects a critical aspect of a classroom which can change the struggle for power within a literature discussion. This aspect is the dynamics of a classroom. Some classroom dynamics do not hold a space for the opinions of all students, regardless of gender, to be shared and honored. However, if a teacher sets appropriate expectations, power struggles between genders do not occur (Goatley et al., 1995; Hadjioannou, 2007; Maloch, 2002).

Maloch (2002) describes teacher talk and roles in a literature discussion as empowering students to discuss literature in a respectful fashion. A classroom that is based on mutual respect and high participation can create a community that is inclusive and has the potential to produce strong literature circles (Hadjioannou, 2007). The expectations and rules regarding literature circles are critical to an in-depth discussion with all students participating (Hadjioannou, 2007).

Goatley et al. (1995) revealed that a successful literature discussion can take place in the form of a book club. The structure of these book clubs eliminated any power struggles between genders. Within the structure, the two more experienced members directed the group. One aspect of this study was the distinct lack of assigned roles. This took place because students who participated in these book clubs had been doing so for several years and knew the

expectations. Since there were no set roles within a book club, both genders took on leadership roles and supportive roles.

Maloch (2002) wondered about the “relationship between a teacher’s role and student participation in literature discussion group” (97). Her study took place in a third-grade classroom. The class had students from across the socio-economic range. In addition, it was fairly evenly split in terms of gender, with 14 male and 15 female students; the class comprised 15 European American, 11 African American and three Asian American students. Because the teacher taught more refined speaking skills, students grew to facilitate their own literature discussions. They became more autonomous in their literature discussions and did so without power struggles.

Maloch’s credibility is fairly solid. This was a peer-reviewed study. She triangulated data by having multiple data sources. She had member checks with students observing the videotapes. The dependability is very solid due to extremely rich-thick description of the setting, participants, and action. Finally, there is no issue with confirmability as the author does not appear to be biased in the study. This study shows how a teacher can transition a class from being dependent on the teacher to becoming more autonomous in leading a literature discussion. Students were able to discuss topics of their choosing as well as provide differing opinions without power struggles.

Hadjioannou (2007) focused on the features of a classroom environment and how they impacted discussion. This study takes place in a fifth-grade

classroom in Florida. There were 24 students in this class. The school is predominantly middle class.

The classroom did not have power struggles with literature discussions. In fact, this classroom had effective discussions. This occurred because of the environment and norms of the classroom. The teacher hung art up on her walls and formed close relationships with the students. The teacher stressed that everyone participated in literature discussions. She respected students' intelligence and treated their comments with care. This reduced power struggles between them. Students could raise any topics they wanted to and they would be respected and heard.

The credibility of this study was high. It was triangulated with multiple sources of data. It was further strengthened by being peer-reviewed. Dependability was fairly high with rich-thick description of participants, setting, and action. There was no indication that there was any bias on the researcher's part.

Hadjioannou (2007) presents a situation, albeit one where the whole school participated, in a classroom where students and the teacher did not have power struggles and the teacher encouraged her students to speak their mind, further reducing the causes for power struggle. This classroom, based on mutual respect, situated in a school that preached mutual respect, was able to have deep discussions where multiple perspectives occurred.

Studies by Hadjioannou (2007), and Maloch (2002) had no gender struggles in their classroom. In addition, each one of the studies had well-defined

classroom expectations that helped to support literature discussions. A literature circle may have power struggles if there are imbalances of gender or if norms are lacking or unenforced. However, if a teacher sets the norms and expectations that students will respect others' opinions and may share their own opinions, this may reduce power struggles.

Problem Statement and Research Question

The national climate on education revolves around high-stakes testing such as the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP), the tests administered in grades three through eight in the state of Washington. This year, Washington will replace the MSP with tests created by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which requires students to meet higher expectations derived from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Schools and teachers are tasked with increasingly rigorous standards. This is especially true in the field of literacy. The current national climate surrounding literacy emphasizes fluency, speed, and accountability, rather than comprehension, engagement, or critical reading.

The current climate thus increases the emphasis on teacher- and textbook-centered reading instruction. As a result, student engagement can suffer, leading to decreased comprehension and fluency, and a loss of desire to read. Furthermore, the teacher is the primary facilitator of learning, and students do not have the opportunity to independently seek meaning. However, literature circles offer another model in which engagement increases through student

selection of texts, and probing questions are asked, and students facilitate their own learning.

The structure of literature circles creates a safe space for students to share their opinions. As students grow more comfortable in their respective roles, they are able to begin to question each other and share multiple perspectives. If a structure for literature circles is not established, then power dynamics can threaten the viability of literature circles. However, when properly structured, multiple perspectives can be elicited (Daniels, 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Hadjioannou, 2007). My research study is shaped by a vision of literature circles as a supportive space in which multiple perspectives can be learned and explored, and in which power dynamics can be managed by students adhering to specific norms and expectations. Arising from this vision, my specific research question is: How does utilizing literature circles in a fourth-grade classroom affect students' abilities to consider multiple perspectives?

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Participants and Setting

Westbrook Elementary School (a pseudonym) is set in a suburban neighborhood in a medium-sized city in western Washington. Westbrook, a fourth- and fifth-grade school, serves a large population of military families, many of which are in transitional states of deployment or transfer. The student population is 54% European American, 14% Hispanic, 8% Asian American, and 6% African American. Twenty-two percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 11% qualify for support through special education. Half of the students have at least one parent in the military. The community is impacted by deployment and reintegration of parents. These students need stability in the classroom which attends to the primary needs of military students.

The two fourth-grade classes I had each contained 12 girls and 12 boys, all of whom participated in this study. One quarter of the class was struggling readers, and two were gifted readers. There were two Asian Americans, two African Americans, three Hispanic students and 17 European American students. I divided the class into five literature circles of three to seven students each. These groups remained constant throughout the duration of the data collection period. Where possible, I balanced the gender makeup of each group, in order to reduce the likelihood of power struggles within a literature circle. These students had varied levels of academic achievement in English.

Practices Implemented

I began to enact literature circles by reading poetry. I asked students to silently take notes on various aspects of poetry like rhyme scheme, and rhythm, and then I asked students to share these notes with the class. This step served as a transition to literature circles because it provided participants an opportunity to practice taking silent notes and then sharing and discussing their comments, ideas, and conclusions. Throughout the period of this study, I taught students certain norms and expectations which developed a respectful classroom in which all students could be heard. Following this discussion of poetry, students learned about literature circles.

Students learned how literature circles would function during the period of this study. Students began by meeting in literature circle groups and reading their texts aloud. When they arrived at the end of their chapter, the discussion director asked each student what their favorite part was and what other questions, observations or comments they had about the story. That process evolved to include the summarizer providing a summary, the predictor (as well as the rest of the circle) making predictions about what would happen next, and illustrator drawing important scenes. The discussion director prompted each member of the circle to provide evidence from the book. Students had a few opportunities to read their texts silently and take notes before meeting in their literature circles. Students were placed in stable literature circle groups. Each literature circle had five or six roles. Each student held one role for a week and

then rotated roles. Each member of the literature circle had the opportunity to share questions, observations, and statements.

Students were scaffolded into the format of literature circles during the first lessons on poetry, where they practiced note-taking and then sharing their comments in the class at large. The whole class then constructed a set of norms revolving around respectful, yet all-inclusive discussion. After I separated students into the groups I had selected, the class agreed upon a set of norms and expectations that dictated how the literature circles would operate. Their first conversations were assisted by questions that were written on the board or on the document reader.

Students were introduced to the role of discussion director, whose job it was to facilitate the conversation and encourage everyone to come up with questions to share. I next introduced the four other roles (summarizer and predictor, literature enhancer, illustrator, and connector) so that everyone had a role. For the group that had more than five students, I separated the summarizer and predictor roles, which enabled every student to have a role. In addition, I decided that groups larger than five would have two connectors and two predictors. Students practiced these roles in order to master them. Students were assisted by handouts that described each role, and reinforced by having the roles written on the whiteboard.

Students were introduced to hand signals previously in the year. These hand signals demonstrated an overt and nonverbal method of communicating whether a student agreed or disagreed with a comment. Students would extend

their pinkie and thumb out, with the pinkie pointed toward the speaker, and then rock their hand back and forth to signify agreement. If a student disagreed, then they would gently tap their index fingers together. These hand signals became an important part of helping the discussions to flow smoothly, because they eliminated the need for students to shout out “I agree” or “I disagree” and allowed for the discussion director to call on another member who then offered a different perspective.

Once literature circles were running smoothly, students learned methods to deepen discussions. Some methods included asking initial and follow-up questions, using hand signals, using phrases like “think differently than” or “see it another way,” and asking a member of the literature circle to cite from the text. Finally, the discussion director learned to ask if other people saw a point made in the literature circle a different way. These and other techniques elicited multiple perspectives during literature circles.

To enact literature circles, I employed various strategies. I focused on teaching students how to deepen discussion by asking initial and follow-up questions. One initial question might be: *Why did the character make a certain choice?* A follow-up question could be: *Why do you think that is the case?* In addition, I focused on instructing students to use hand signals to respond to each other’s thinking, signifying their agreement or thinking about the comment using agreed-upon signals. Furthermore, I used several key phrases such as “I thought similarly and differently” or “I thought differently” to signify an opportunity for multiple perspectives to be voiced. These actions were reinforced by norms

that encouraged all students to share their opinions and required the classroom community to be respectful. In addition, I pointed out instances of multiple perspectives and assigned competence, which is praising a particular strategy or effort that students use. These actions helped me to investigate the question: How does utilizing literature circles in a fourth-grade classroom affect students' abilities to consider multiple perspectives?

Data Sources

While students participated in literature circles, I collected a number of sources of data. I made extensive field notes regarding situations where students engaged in discussions that contained multiple perspectives. I noted statements the participants made involved multiple perspectives, or that stated opinions, truths, and personal experiences. To take notes on the entire class, I moved around the room while taking notes on each literature circle.

I videotaped literature circles in order to have objective data showing whether multiple perspectives were expressed within a literature circle. I examined the tapes to determine the frequency of students reflecting multiple perspectives changed during the period of the study. Examining video footage and taking field notes enabled me to generate questions for several of the participants, which were then answered by informal interviews.

I conducted informal interviews with students regarding their participation in literature circles and how often a discussion involved multiple perspectives. In the interviews, I viewed the videotapes with students and asked questions that came from my field notes, such as "What were you thinking when you made that

comment?” or “How were you thinking about [someone’s] comment?” All three of these types of data—field notes, video footage, and interviews—allowed me to triangulate my data.

During the period of this field study, I taught lessons about the value and practices of bringing multiple perspectives into the literature circle discussions. These lessons were videotaped, and I compared the content learned in these lessons to students’ practices in their literature circles. Pre- and posttests provided additional data about students’ understanding.

Data Analysis

I also transcribed data from interviews and video that directly applied to my research topic. As I analyzed and began to code my data, I had in mind questions such as:

- Does engaging in conversation with *multiple perspectives* matter?
- Does engaging in a conversation with opinions matter?
- Does engaging in a conversation where truths that are backed by personal experience matter?
- Do conversations with *multiple perspectives* lead to assimilation and/or accommodation?
- Do perspectives shared by one student hold more weight than other students?
- Does academic or social status matter?
- How do group dynamics play a role in enabling multiple perspectives?

As I analyzed the data, I applied coding practices (Mertens, 2009), from which I developed analytical categories, which are as follows: roles, status, group dynamics, and multiple perspectives. I analyzed my field notes using the categories I developed from the other data. These questions, observations and statements provided the basis for my findings and conclusions.

These methods of analysis were appropriate for my study because they provided me the best sources of data to accurately assess whether discussions with multiple perspectives occurred. Video footage of literature circles provided unbiased evidence of literature circle discussions. My field notes provided questions, observations and statements which I used to generate interviews, which in turn deepened my understanding of how literature circles functioned from the vantage point of my participants.

Limitations of Conclusions

Field notes provided a useful record of how literature circles changed throughout the period of study. Furthermore, field notes allowed me a space to jot down my thoughts. However, it proved difficult to write down my thoughts in a classroom where students were having multiple discussions. Furthermore, it was challenging to record accurate comments from students, due to the number of discussions taking place.

The interviews revealed much useful information. These interviews provided me additional insight from students after I asked them about statements they made in their literature circles. However, students' memories were not completely reliable, so their comments were not always solid as data. In addition,

there were problems with transcribing students' answers because at times they mumbled and the recording was inaudible. Furthermore, I in some interviews did not ask all the questions, due to running out of time in the period. Tangential topics also at times caused me to run out of time to complete an interview.

Finally, I experienced much success with video recording literature circles. I got many hours of valuable data and was able to code in order to reach conclusions. However, the confusion of discussions in a literature circle made certain parts inaudible.

Some of the limitations my studies faced were a limited amount of time to compile all of my field notes after literature circles, a lack of clear responses from my interviews as well as some inaudible portions of video. Due to these limitations, readers should understand that my findings and conclusions will not be applicable to every situation. Furthermore, these limitations come from the dynamics of my classroom and therefore should be understood as part of the natural flow of my classroom.

Critique of This Study

In order to strengthen the credibility of this study, I triangulated by having multiple sources of data. Students viewed video footage after they engaged in a literature circle, which provided them an opportunity to respond. However because my participants were nine and ten years old, they were unable to respond to my analysis of the data, which weakens credibility.

My triangulated data also strengthens this study's dependability. Furthermore, I have rich-thick description of the setting, participants and the

procedure. The school set up is very unique. The school's high percentage of military students, as well as the fact that it serves only fourth and fifth grades, qualifies the transferability of this study.

This study is transformative because it focuses on individual voice and includes all students. Within a classroom, different students have different statuses. In discussions, some students have high academic status and others have low status. Literature circles provide a structure in which students who have low academic status can be heard. This provides an outlet for ideas as well as opportunities for students to speak who would normally not be heard. The data can be tracked to its source, meaning I have the field notes and video footage of literature circles and also of interviews, which strengthens confirmability. Because I had a close relationship with my students, I examined my field notes, and transcripts carefully to reduce my bias while drawing conclusions.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS

This study focuses on the research question: How does utilizing literature circles in a fourth-grade classroom affect students' abilities to consider multiple perspectives? In answering this question, I have discovered four major themes: social and academic status, roles of the discussion director and other participants, aspects of group dynamics (respect, empathy, trust and disrespect), and multiple perspectives where perspective taking, differing opinions, differing experiences and differing truths are examined. I will discuss all four of these themes in turn and conclude this paper with conclusions, implications for practice, and a comment on limitations of this study.

Status

Status relates to hierarchies that occur in the classroom. While there are various types of status that occur in a classroom, I am primarily focusing on two types of status: academic status and social status. Academic status refers to how competent a student is in an academic subject area and as well as to the student's understanding of peers' perception of that student's understanding. Academic status has the potential to change based on how the teacher praises—assigns competence—to students.

A second type of status that occurs is social status. Social status is how students view themselves with regard to the social ranking or positioning present in a classroom environment. I theorize that in a literature circle that uses norms and expectations that promote respect, the discussion director who facilitates and includes all voices can affect social status. This status can go up or down

during a literature circle depending on the circumstances, subject, social situation, interactions, answers provided in class, and responses that a teacher gives to a student. One example of this occurred during an interview:

Me: Why did you share that it was mean for the first graders to be bullied?

Why did you share that?

Jill¹: Because if someone knocks them off it would be mean.

Me: Did your group respect what you had to say?

Jill: Yeah. (pause) Kind of...

Me: Why only kind of?

Jill: Ummmmm (pause). I don't know... (laughs)

Me: Did you feel comfortable saying that with your group?

Jill: Not really.

During this brief interview, Jill reveals the inherent social and academic status issues that occur. After I asked the question, "Did your group respect what you had to say?" and Jill responded with "Kind of," it is clear that her group does not value her words as much as other members. If they had respected her words, then her group would have completely listened to her words. This is evidence of low status within her group. The implications of Jill's lowered status are made obvious at the end of the interview when Jill reveals that she was not really comfortable sharing with her group. Jill recognizes her lowered status in the group, which correlates with her saying that she was not really comfortable sharing in her group.

¹ Please note that all participants' names have been changed to protect their identity.

Some students, like Jill, perceived their own status, while others were cognizant of their status through the eyes of someone else. A brief transcript from one literature circle demonstrates this type of awareness of status.

Tom: Because I like seeing, ya, umm because when I see the picture in the book, I saw how they pushed her off and I thought it was funny.

Also because I remember laughing at people when they were pushed off a tire swing.

Frank (discussion director): Did you find it be funny?

Brandon: I did not exactly think it would be funny (Tom shifts uncomfortably).

Tom: Entertaining not funny.

Brandon: I kind of feel like it's really mean...

Tom: Well, Joey said they had to push the first graders and he made Suds be mean and stuff because Suds has a soft side and said, "I'm not going to get off".

Tom's last two comments reveal how other people's ideas can affect the a group member's thoughts. This concept is very heavily connected to status because of the weight that other members' opinions hold. The discussion director used his considerable status to influence Tom's decision. Furthermore, Brandon also disagreed with Tom's claim. These two members caused Tom to begin to feel uncomfortable. One might interpret this situation as evidence of the loss of social status that Tom might undergo if he were to hold to his stated ideas. Another interpretation might be a loss of academic status based on an

incorrect reading of the text. Tom is clearly influenced by two members who have the academic and social status to openly disagree with his opinion and to influence Tom to amend his opinion.

The issue of status is further explored in the transcript below, as Kaylie's comments reveal many interesting aspects of status. This transcript comes from an interview I conducted with Kaylie on October 22, 2014, about her role as a discussion director of a literature circle. As the discussion director in her group, Kaylie took her role seriously and observed the group processes carefully.

Me: Do you think everyone listens to everyone the same? Do everyone's words carry the same amount of weight?

Kaylie: I think so.

Me: Okay, so there is good listening happening. Do you feel like both students who make a comment or observations or question would be heard?

Kaylie: They might listen more to one person than the other.

Me: Why?

Kaylie: One person can explain their point better.

Me: Does your group offer multiple perspectives?

Kaylie: Yes

Me: Have you offered a perspective that is connected to something in your life.

Kaylie: Yes because I feel safe saying them.

Me: Okay. Do you think everyone is heard the same way? Do you think Brandon and Jill are heard the same way? Does the whole group value them the same or differently?

Kaylie: Differently.

Me: Why?

Kaylie: One person is always into the book and one might not be.

Me: Your group values the person's perspective that is into the book. What do you mean into the book?

Kaylie: Those people who understand it.

Me: Do you think there is something your group can do to help? Is there something more?

Kaylie: I think it is something else, too.

Me: What else do you think it is?

Kaylie: I think that it's based off that Brandon is more focused than Jill.

In this transcribed interview, Kaylie described how status functions in her group. As the discussion director, and Kaylie believed that everyone was listened to. In addition, Kaylie felt safe making points associated with her life. Kaylie's confidence is likely drawn from her high academic status and social status, because she can articulate her points and felt as though everyone would hear them. A second interesting aspect of Kaylie's interview occurred when she stated that some students might be listened to more than others because they can explain their points better. Here is one particular aspect of participating in a literature circle, being able to articulate your point, which was highly valued for

Kaylie. This speaking ability can increase status in the literature circle or, in the case of Jill, cause it to be lowered.

Kaylie further clarified her understanding of this academic skill when she stated that “one person is always into the book and one might not be” and that “some members are more focused than others.” Kaylie’s statements reveal a that characteristic she believed determines the status of members in the literature circle. Members who are always into the book, understand it, and are more focused receive more status from Kaylie, while the students who do not show these characteristics, and who might have a different method, have lower status.

There were also groups in which status was not an issue or was not yet noticed. The following transcript from an interview with Chris illuminates these points on October 27, 2014.

Me: How are your discussions going in your group? What’s going well?

Chris: Ummm, the good thing about them is that everyone is getting into the discussion, it’s going very well and everyone is taking turns and making connections.

Me: Okay, so everyone is taking turns talking and you are all making connections. Do you feel like it is different than the first time you had a discussion?

Chris: Yeah.

Me: How so?

Chris: Before we did not really take turns so we had a really hard time hearing everyone. But now, umm, we changed it so we can take turns talking so we can hear everyone's perspective.

Me: Wow! That's great. Do you feel like your whole group listens to your group the same way or do you feel like they listen to one more than the other?

Chris: Maybe listen to me more than others and also Hillary because she is quieter. Erin less.

Me: Why listen to Erin less?

Chris: Because he is louder and so we have to take turns.

Me: Okay! Thanks.

There are many different aspects of interest in this transcript. First, Chris asserted that some groups are able to listen to each other. He went on to comment upon how his group listened to some students more carefully because one member spoke quietly. This showed respect for group members' contributions in the discussion and a validation of both their academic and social status. Chris also pointed out that they took turns, which allowed them to hear everyone. This implied that all members had something worth stating. Third, Chris was aware that all members needed a turn. When he responded to my question, "Why listen to Erin less?" by stating, "Because he is louder," this revealed that Chris was conscious of ensuring all voices were heard, which helped to balance Chris's perception of Erin's high status with the other members' lower status.

Both social and academic status are inherently tied to the question of how students' abilities with multiple perspectives are affected by literature circles. Literature circles are a space where discussion occurs. Without proper scaffolding, these students who had the highest academic status in the group would be the only ones to share their perspectives. In addition, without expectations and norms, literature circles would simply reproduce and reinforce social and academic status within the entire class. Furthermore, the role of discussion director, which will be explained more in the next section on group roles, was the primary role and thus received a high status. If that role had not rotated among students, students who had the highest social and academic status would have taken over that role to further boost their own status. With proper scaffolding, norms, and expectations, students with lower academic and social status have the potential to rise and thus share their opinions and perspectives. Balancing the factor of status positively affects group dynamics, as I will discuss in a later section on group dynamics.

While coding for academic and social status in my transcripts for literature circles, interviews and field notes, I could not always distinguish between the two types of status. Because the two statuses were not distinguishable in transcripts, interviews, and field notes, I have combined social and academic status under the term of *status*. I coded instances when a student was able to summarize an argument, define a word, synthesize ideas or share their perspective. I noticed social status in the literature circles when students offered different perspectives and when the group members listened to their peers. In my field notes I noted

students' efforts to balance social status. An example of this are the norms and expectations that both classes created for literature circles. For the complete list of norms and expectations for both classes, see Appendix A. Furthermore, I noticed that in interviews, students revealed they did not feel heard, or would be cut off, or noticed that they heard certain students more than others.

Roles

Normally there are many roles within a literature circle. There is a discussion director who facilitates the conversation, a connector who makes text to self, text to text and text to world connections, an illustrator who draws pictures, a literature enhancer who looks up words, and a summarizer and predictor who summarizes the chapter and makes a prediction about what will occur in the next chapter. In these literature circles, the role that stuck was the discussion director.

Discussion Director

Literature circles cannot function without the facilitating leadership that a discussion director provides. It is imperative that a literature circle be led by a strong discussion director with the ability to ask open-ended questions, towards the aim of facilitating a whole group discussion. If any of these requirements are ignored, then the literature circle does not function effectively. The discussion director's role significantly affects the group's success through inclusion or silencing of various members of the literature circle. An example of the discussion director using the role to include other members can be found in this

transcript from a literature circle discussion of *Socks* by Beverly Clearly (2008) in which Andrea had not recognized a word:

Andrea: What's *mewed*?

Eric (discussion director): What do you think? What do other people think?

Kaylie: I think it is mewed like a cat or something.

Brandon: Yeah, that's what I think too.

Erin (reading from the book): "Look at the beautiful black tail and cat sleeping."

Andrea: Oh so it is a cat! Thanks.

Erin: Yeah, well I thought so because I have a cat and that cat mewed.

Eric (DD): Does anyone else have a cat?

[Several people nod.]

In this transcript, the discussion director made an effort to assist a member of the literature circle who was struggling to determine the meaning of the word *mewed*. The discussion director did this by inviting the entire group to participate in answering the question about what *mewed* meant. The discussion director asked, "What do other people think?" which is an open-ended question with no judgment involved. This furthered the likelihood of the group answering the question. In this case, the group did respond to answer the question.

Kaylie: I think it is *mewed* like a cat or something

Brandon: Yeah that's what I think too.

Erin (Reading from the book): "Look at the beautiful black tail and cat sleeping"

Andrea: Oh so it is a cat! Thanks.

From the open-ended question the discussion director posed, these literature circle members supported their peer and built onto one another's thoughts. Their conversation began with Kaylie sharing her opinion, which was given substantial attention from Erin, who cited the evidence found in a passage from the text. Here and in other cases, the discussion director provided direction for the discussion by beginning and facilitating a conversation or by beginning to read from the text if the discussion slowed. The role of discussion director carries with it a lot of power and status, being the primary role that was enacted throughout the entire study. Depending on the student, the discussion director could really impact success of the literature circle.

Effective discussion directors used social skills, social status, and academic status to maintain the group and to keep it focused on the discussion. An example of this occurs in the transcript while Santiago was discussing the book *Fourth Grade Rats* by Jerry Spinelli (2012) and commented on bullying below.

Santiago: And I was being made fun of for my doll.

Kirk (DD): What would you do if you faced this miserable situation?

Gabriella: I would try to hide them under my bed and I would ignore them
and have done so.

Kirk: What would you ignore?

Gabriella: I would ignore the bully.

Kirk (DD): Okay, what about you Santiago?

Santiago: I would put it in my closet and never touch it again.

Kirk (DD): But you would listen to the bullies?

Gabriella: But he would keep them.

Santiago: I don't know, maybe.

Kirk (DD): So several of you want to keep them and will ignore the bullies who are making fun of them keeping the dolls, and one of you would give in to the bullies. Why would you keep 'em?

There are several points to be considered within this transcript. First, the discussion director called on individual people in the group. When the discussion director called on Santiago, he succeeded at bringing another member of the literature circle into the discussion. This showed not only the skills of the discussion director but also his high status, since he could maintain and facilitate a thoughtful discussion. The director's question "Who would you ignore?" is a re-voicing of a group member's words, repeated word for word, showing a skill that contributed to the discussion director's academic status. Furthermore, the discussion director summarized Santiago's comment, which boosted his academic status. After the summary, the discussion director proceeded to further facilitate the discussion by asking, "Why would you keep 'em?" There were also important interpersonal dynamics that were in play in these transcripts but they will be discussed in a later section on group dynamics.

There were also examples of ineffective discussion directors. One type of behavior that made discussion directors ineffective was dominating the group. In the conversation below, Baylie did not succeed in facilitating an exchange of

ideas. Within this literature circle discussion of the book *Superfudge* by Judy Blume (2007), Baylie became impatient while the connector was thinking of connections, either text to self, text to text or text to world. I took part in this literature circle, after circulating around the room, and I wanted to understand more about the book.

Baylie (DD): I think he was just like two family members just to introduce more characters in the story?

Me: Why?

Baylie (DD): Well if there were only like two characters, I think there was not enough characters in the stories yet and so they introduced the sister and baby brother.

[After a few moments of indistinct talk, Baylie continued.]

Baylie (DD): Yeah. What do you think Gail?

Gail: (silence which lasts a few seconds. Gail appears to be thinking and writing down a quote).

Baylie (DD): Connector!

Gail (startled): Well, it was like my own. Because he plays with other kids.... but that's all I found.

Baylie (DD): Okay next chapter.

In this transcript, Gail was not prepared to answer Baylie's question yet. While Gail was thinking and writing, the discussion director sharply interrupted Gail's thinking, by referring to Gail's assigned role during that literature circle. Gail was clearly startled, and her answer was awkward and incomplete. Gail might have

said more, but the interaction made her feel uncomfortable and probably caused her to make a hasty connection. Her final “but that’s all I found” resulted from the discussion director’s command.

The transcript above reveals the discussion director using status to control the group. Baylie, as the discussion director, had high social status, and he used it to get the connector to respond even though Gail was not ready. However, I wonder if this interaction marked a lowering of the social status for the discussion director, because he was controlling the group instead of collaborating.

An interesting example of a discussion director silencing people is revealed in the following transcript where Tony is responding to the text / *survived the Destruction of Pompeii* by Lauren Tarshis (2014). My voice is present in this transcript because I was sitting in this group at the time.

Tony: I like how the knights were fighting and then he wins his fight and earns his nickname.

Me: Why is that your favorite?

Tony: Because... (gets cut off).

Baylie (DD): I have not shared yet.

Tony has been effectively silenced when the discussion director says it is his turn to share. Moreover, this silenced me and increased the discussion director’s status while lowering Tony’s social status. The two examples of ineffective discussion directors occurred when they dominated the conversation or silenced their members.

The discussion director directly relates to my question regarding literature circles and multiple perspectives because without their facilitation skills, the subsequent discussion in the literature circle would not succeed. Without the discussion, there would be no sharing of multiple perspectives.

The discussion director's voice and presence were perceptible in the literature circles both in the video and the transcript. The discussion directors were inclusive when they said something that ensured that all members would have an opportunity to speak, and when they directly pointed to a member or opened the floor up for all members to speak. Directors also increased inclusion by providing open-ended questions.

Other Members of the Group

As previously discussed, literature circles were facilitated by discussion directors. While normally there are other roles that are present (such as connector, illustrator, enhancer, predictor and summarizer), in this study the only role that students always enacted was that of discussion director. Therefore, I will consider the rest of the participants in a literature circle simply in the role of other members of the group. There are many different aspects that other members can play, but in this study I will again focus on inclusion and exclusion of members.

One example of other group members being inclusive appears in the transcript below. The students were discussing *Cabinet of the Earth* by Anne Nesbet (2012):

Nadia: There is something that connected from this chapter to me. I freaked out at the man suddenly changing into something else!

(Everyone's eyes shift to Nadia)

Kelly: That did not freak me out.

Frank(DD): Why didn't that freak you out?

Nadia: It freaked me out because he went into the locker room and turned really pale.

Kelly: It did not freak me out because I watch scary movies and during October my dad wears a scary mask.

Sam: I remember when my dad scared other people on Halloween too! I really liked that part of the book for the same reason.

Nadia: Oh well, that never happened to me before so I was really scared.

Sam: That might have scared me too if my dad had not scared me during Halloween.

Kelly: Yeah, that could have scared me too.

Frank DD: Let's move to the next person (Nadia looks happy and engaged).

In this portion of the transcript, Sam and Kelly's comments include Nadia in the conversation. Their participation in the discussion reduces the burden on Frank who is the discussion director and demonstrates how other members can be inclusive. There are important aspects of group dynamics here, but that will be discussed in the next section.

On the other hand, other members can be silencing.

Kevin: It was funny because....

James (cutting him off): ...because he tried to sell the baby for 25 cents.

Kevin: I thought it was funny because one part because I couldn't read a page because it had a word that I could not read but because I wanted to be the baby. He was playing hide and go seek and his mom thought he was kidnapped. They finally found her in the closet. So then uhh the his mom got really mad at him and then asked him questions do you understanding and he was like no and was talking back.

James cut Kevin off before he could begin to articulate his perspective. However, Kevin, likely due to his status, continued his explanation. Nonetheless, this action of silencing was still detrimental to the group's dynamics and represented an important status issue.

Other members participated in the discussion and shared multiple perspectives, which made the literature circles function more effectively. The level of participation was determined by several factors: by the status of the participant, both academic and social; by the norms and expectations; by the discussion director's ability to be inclusive and to facilitate; and by the participant's own level of comfort in the literature circle. This last item reveals an important aspect of group dynamics, which will be discussed in the next section.

The roles played by group members other than the director are critical to my study since these students make up a literature circle. In interviews, other members would commented about how their group listened to one another and

took turns. They also revealed that some participants were heard more than others.

The videotapes of literature circles frequently showed participants asking other participants to explain their thinking or offering them a space to speak. There were also some examples of students who silenced other students by interrupting them. Both of these behaviors seemed to be related to status and to the group's enactment of the established norms and expectations.

Group Dynamics

At the foundation of literature circles is group dynamics. Group dynamics involve the general interactions between members of a literature circle, interactions between specific members, and the feelings that are pervasive throughout the literature circle. These feelings are a result of group dynamics, which is also influenced by academic and social status. An examination of group dynamics must also examine the environments in which the literature circle takes place. I identified four common types of interactions that were commonly found throughout these literature circles: respectful interactions, trusting interactions, empathetic interactions, and disrespectful interactions.

Group dynamics are critical to my question because without group dynamics that build trust, respect, and empathy, and that limit disrespect, there is no way for literature circles to contain multiple perspectives.

I coded for group dynamics in videos and written transcripts when participants interacted with each other with a distinctly positive or negative effect. I noticed that participants' words and actions dictated whether or not other

participants would feel respect, trust, empathy, or disrespect. I also noticed that students' words that impacted the group dynamics would also impact the depth of the conversation. Hand signals and other overt actions also impacted group dynamics. In interviews, participants commented on the success or shortcomings of their literature circles based on the group dynamics. In field notes, I recorded information about groups who were listening to one another as more positive group dynamics, and I noted exclusion and not listening as negative group dynamics. I theorize that elements of group dynamics interact as the groups' form, to enable students to offer multiple perspectives in the discussions.

Respect

The most fundamental element of group dynamics is respectful interactions. Respectful interactions include noticing when participants are listening to the speaker's words, when they are looking at the speaker, are agreeing or disagreeing with hand signals, or are verbally responding in a non-judgmental tone. In a videotape of Tom's literature circle, all of the group members looked directly at Tom while he commented on his favorite part of the book. They did not interrupt him, nor did they contradict his perspective. The act of looking and listening as he articulated his point demonstrated respect for Tom.

Respect also occurred when students did not make fun of other students. In a later interview with Tom, I had the opportunity to ask him about his experiences of respect in his group.

Me: I am curious about when you talked about your own experience being bullied. Why did you share that?

Tom: Because the book was talking about it.

Me: Did you feel comfortable sharing it with your group?

Tom: Yeah, because no one was making fun of me and other people had shared their experience of being bullied too.

Tom discussed how he felt comfortable sharing his experiences with the group because no one was making fun of him. The group dynamics of Tom's group enacted respect, which led Tom to share something personal.

Other groups demonstrated respect by recognizing students' voices.

During our interview, Chris spoke about how his group recognized students.

Me: How are your discussions going in your group? What's going well?

Chris: Ummm, the good thing about them is that everyone is getting into the discussion. It's going very well and everyone is taking turns talking and everyone is making connections.

Me: Okay, so everyone is taking turns talking and you are all making connections. Do you feel like it is different than the first time you had a discussion?

Chris: Yeah.

Me: How so?

Chris: Before we did not really take turns so we had a really hard time hearing everyone. But now umm we changed it so we can take turns talking so we can hear everyone's perspective.

Me: Wow! So you take turns to hear everyone's perspective? That is great. Do you feel like your whole group listens to your group the same way or do you feel like they listen to one more than the other?

Chris: Maybe listen to me more than others and also Hillary because she is quieter. Erin less.

Me: Why listen to Erin less?

Chris: Because he is louder and so we have to take turns...

Chris discussed how Hillary is quieter, which requires his group to listen to her more closely than Erin, who is louder. Chris described how his group respected all members of the literature by welcoming in Hillary's voice, when she otherwise might not be heard due to her quiet nature. He also recognized that Erin will get his voice heard when he had something to say. In addition, Chris discussed how his group took turns, which meant that everyone had an opportunity to speak. This clearly represents ed respectful dynamic within the group.

The videotapes show that respectful interactions usually involved students looking at one another. Sometimes students demonstrated respect for each other by showing a hand signal that I taught. This hand signal was a student's closed hand with thumb and pinkie outstretched to the side, pinkie pointed toward the speaker, the hand rotated back and forth toward the speaker to indicate that they agreed with the speaker. This hand signal also demonstrated that the speaker was listening. Furthermore, the hand signal also allowed students to respond without interrupting the speaker, which is another sign of a respectful interaction.

In the interview transcripts, students talked about how respect set the framework for a safe environment in which to discuss ideas in the literature circle.

Empathy

After establishing a solid foundation of respectful interactions within a literature circle, the group dynamics can be further strengthened with empathetic interactions between various members of a literature circle. Empathetic interactions, although still infrequent in the literature circles in my study, occurred when a member of a literature circle showed understanding of what the speaker was saying from the speaker's experience. (Empathy will be a key aspect in my later discussion of perspective taking.) Empathy within a group builds a safe environment from the foundation that respect lays down. In the passage below, note how Sam and Kelly responded to Nadia's contributions. The students were discussing *Cabinet of the Earth*.

Nadia: There is something that connected from this chapter to me. I

freaked out at the man suddenly changing into something else!

(Everyone's eyes shift to the Nadia)

Kelly: That did not freak me out.

Frank(DD): Why didn't that freak you out?

Nadia: It freaked me out because he went into the locker room and turned really pale.

Kelly: It did not freak me out because I watch scary movies and during October my dad wears a scary mask.

Sam: I remember when my dad scared other people on Halloween too! I really liked that part of the book for the same reason.

Nadia: Oh well, that never happened to me before so I was really scared.

Sam: That might have scared me too if my dad had not scared me during Halloween.

Kelly: Yeah, that could have scared me too.

Frank DD: Let's move to the next person (Nadia looks happy and engaged).

In this transcript, Nadia shared her personal response, and the entire group looked at her when she spoke. This attentiveness, coupled with the lack of interruption, presented a respectful ambience. Without the respect, the rest of the conversation could not have happened, because the speaker would not have felt comfortable sharing more of her insight. As a result of this initial respect, Nadia revealed that she was scared when the character went pale in the locker room and that she had never had her dad provide her with an experience of scaring people on Halloween. Sam and Kelly, both of whom had the experience of their fathers scaring people, had an empathetic interaction with Nadia. They not only respected Nadia's feelings by not making fun of her, but they actually understood what her experience was, as shown when Sam said, "That might have scared me too if my dad had not scared me during Halloween," and also when Kelly said, "Yeah, that could have scared me too." Kelly and Sam could have taken advantage of Nadia's vulnerable sharing and her lack of experience as an opportunity to lower her status. But they did not; they understood where

she was coming from. They valued her experience and status in the group. This has valuable elements of building a trusting dynamic, which will be discussed in the next section.

Empathetic group dynamics ties very closely to my question since empathy is a way to validate different perspectives. I will return to this point in the later sections on perspective taking and the multiple perspectives.

Trust

When respect and empathy were present in a literature circle, group dynamics that involved trust could occur. Respect and empathy are critical aspects that are required in the literature circle for trust to be formed, which in turn helped to construct a safe environment in which to students could share. Trust in literature circles appeared when students were willing to be vulnerable by sharing their ideas especially when those ideas might not be popular with the entire group. Trust-building also relied on the other members of a literature circle to be responsive and sensitive toward the member who shared an opinion by respecting the speaker's words.

In my interview with Tom, he provided a valuable insight into what makes a trusting group. In response to a question about feeling comfortable, Tom replied, "Yeah because no one was making fun of me and other people had shared their experience of being bullied too." Tom also revealed that respect occurred within the group when he stated that "no one was making fun of me." In addition, other members had already shared their experiences, so he felt

comfortable; for some members, trust was built after watching successful sharing by their peers.

There are powerful instances where students show both trust and empathy, which then built more trust. The following transcript (quoted above as well) from a literature circle discussion reveals dialogue that contains both respect and empathy:

Nadia: There is something that connected from this chapter to me. I freaked out at the man suddenly changing into something else!

(Everyone's eyes shift to Nadia)

Kelly: That did not freak me out.

Frank: Why didn't that freak you out?

Nadia: It freaked me out because he went into the locker room and turned really pale.

Kelly: It did not freak me out because I watch scary movies and during October my dad wears a scary mask.

Sam: I remember when my dad scared other people on Halloween too! I really liked that part of the book for the same reason.

Nadia: Oh well, that never happened to me before so I was really scared.

Sam: That might have scared me too if my dad had not scared me during Halloween.

Kelly: Yeah, that could have scared me too.

Frank: Let's move to the next person (Nadia looks happy and engaged).

There are several important pieces of this transcript to discuss. First, Nadia revealed feeling scared because of the shape shifter (a character in the *The Cabinet of Earths*). Nadia took a risk here and was rewarded when her group's attention shifted squarely onto her. This action was immediately demonstrated respect in this dialogue, and it allowed for the conversation to continue. This dialogue was further strengthened by an action of empathy. Nadia stated, again being vulnerable, that she had never had the experience of her dad scaring her, and Sam and Kelly responded that "it's okay" and showed that they understood Nadia's experience to be scary. This demonstrated empathy, since Frank and Kelly understood. When Frank stated that they were going to move to the next speaker, the videotape shows that Nadia was feeling very happy. She was smiling and she leaned in eagerly as the next member was about to speak. These types of interactions build trust within a literature circle and promote different opinions, vulnerability and, ultimately, multiple perspectives.

Without trust between literature circle members, no one would feel comfortable sharing unique perspectives. The example of Nadia describing her fearful experience and the events that transpired after demonstrated how trust is essential for powerful moments to occur in a literature circle.

Trusting interactions take on many different appearances. In transcripts in literature circles as well as in other video evidence, trusting interactions occurred when students showed vulnerability and other students were supportive of these statements. My field notes also included many observations of students supporting one another. On the 21st of October, one literature circle had a

student who “was very excited about a date in the book that was close to her birthday. Another student said that was stupid but other members in her group agreed that ‘it would be cool to find a date close to their birthday in a book.’” On the 23rd of October, I commented on Nadia’s sharing of being scared. These examples created a respectful environment where students could openly share opinions and ideas that were potentially different from the rest of the circle. Over the duration of this study, more vulnerable opinions were shared. Respect, empathy and trust led to a deep, rich dialogue where multiple perspectives could reside. However, there were also statements that restricted dialogue or obstructed the possibilities for multiple perspectives: disrespectful interactions.

Disrespect

Literature circles included a range of interactions from positive to negative. One of most common and hurtful types of interactions was disrespectful ones. Disrespectful interactions appeared differently depending on the circumstance. One instance of a disrespectful interaction within a literature circle occurred when members did not listen to their peers, highlighted in the transcript from Jill’s interview below:

Me: Did your group respect what you had to say?

Jill: Yeah. (pause) Kind of.

Me: Why only kind of?

Jill: Ummmmm (pause). I don’t know... (laughs)

Me: Did you feel comfortable saying that with your group?

Jill: Not really.

This transcript reveals two important aspects. First, as previously mentioned, Jill had lower status than other members, which led to her being disrespected. The second is the effect on Jill of those moments where the group only partially listens. When she revealed that her group “kind of” respected what she had to say, she showed that she did not feel comfortable sharing with her group. It is these types of interactions and less successful discussions that obstructed the possibility of multiple perspectives. Events like this also made me wonder whether one interruption increased the likelihood of future interruptions within a group.

A second common type of disrespect occurred when a student’s comment was interrupted by their peers. This example below highlights an interesting interruption and recovery of discourse.

Kevin: It was funny because...

James (cutting him off): Because he tried to sell the baby for 25 cents.

Kevin: I thought it was funny because one part because I couldn’t read a page because it had a word that I could not read but because I wanted to be the baby. He was playing hide and go seek and his mom thought he was kidnapped. They finally found her in the closet. So then uhh then his mom got really mad at him and then asked him questions do you understand and he was like “no” and was talking back.

Kevin in this example was interrupted, a violation of the class’s norms and expectations. This instance of disrespect, however, was brushed aside by Kevin, who resumed his discussion. The fact that Kevin continued speaking showed his

high status, which enabled him to continue speaking, in contrast to Jill's comment about not feeling comfortable sharing in her group. However, in different circumstances, the speaker might not have been able to brush an interruption aside, and that would have stalled the literature circle.

These were disrespectful interactions because they disrupted the building of respect, empathy and trust, which are necessary for vulnerable sharing of multiple perspectives within the literature circles.

Disrespectful interaction within a literature circle ties to my research question because it impacts the dynamics within which students discuss a text. A disrespectful interaction limits or possibly eliminates the occurrence of multiple perspectives.

Disrespectful interactions were visible in the videotapes of literature circles when a student interrupted another student's contribution. In the interviews, some students discussed how their groups only partially respected what they had to say and it led them to feel less safe. Disrespect tends to disrupt, temporarily or permanently, healthy group dynamics that could lead toward the building of trust. It is the building of trust, particularly when empathy was involved, when status tensions were low, and when the discussion director facilitated effectively, that combined to create the framework for the voicing of multiple perspectives within the literature circle.

Multiple Perspectives

Multiple perspectives are the central aspect of this study. One definition of multiple perspectives is the voicing of two or more different viewpoints on the

same subject. However, in this study, I offer three categories of multiple perspectives:

- differing opinions, which examine two or more members' different ways of viewing an issue;
- differing experiences, where members of a literature circle use their individual experience to inform their perspectives; and
- differing truths, where members' fundamental truths come into conflict.

In these three categories, a useful technique which promoted multiple perspectives is perspective taking. Perspective taking occurred when two people share different perspectives and one member takes on another's perspective and attempts to understand it. Because perspective taking allows literature circle members to see others' perspectives, it is a tool for changing opinions. Multiple perspectives and perspective taking not only enrich and deepen a discussion held in a literature circle, but they change the way students see each other, see themselves, and see the world.

Multiple perspectives and perspective taking are central to my study. At this point, I will explore in depth the general topic of perspective taking and each of the categories named above: differing opinions, differing experiences, and differing truths.

Perspective Taking

Within a literature circle, any members may engage in perspective taking. As previously stated, perspective taking occurred when two people shared different perspectives and one member took on the other member's experience

and attempted to understand it. This technique could be used with other members of the group, but it was also used to understand a character's mindset. This valuable technique provided an opportunity for group members to change their perspective as well as see how others' experiences differed.

The transcript below shows one potential path to perspective taking. Kevin's ideas and stance changed as he tried on the ideas expressed by other members of his group.

Kevin: I think it was funny that Fudge had tried to sell the baby.

Ben: It was funny and I also have talked back to my mom. But I thought it was sad that he was trying to give the baby away?

Kaylie (DD): Why was it sad?

Ben: I don't know. I just thought it was sad to give away a baby.

James: I thought it was hilarious for a quarter trying leaving it outside, it was just hilarious. "Get it out of the house, send it into space I don't care take it out"

Kaylie (DD): I thought it was funny and a little bit sad

James: It was a little sad

Ben: If this was real life it would be a little sad but it was funny because it was in the book.

Kaylie (DD): What do you think Kevin?

Kevin: I think it was funny and a little bit sad because that Peter and Fudge did not like the baby because he used to be the smallest but

now he has to sleep in a bed and he tried selling Tootsie [the baby] and that was his only sister.

Kevin's final comment demonstrates how other people's perspectives and opinions helped to enrich his own. Kevin's initial thought was that it would be funny to sell a baby. Kevin's perspective is similar to that of the character in the story, who was irritated that his baby was gaining more attention than he was. This in itself is a version of perspective taking, because he had considered the character's point of view and then adopted that perspective. However, when James and Kaylie stated that it would be sad to sell a baby, Kevin considered the matter again. When Kevin responded by stating that in real life he would be sad, he took on James and Kaylie's point of view because he was able to understand and incorporate their perspectives into his own, and the discussion continued.

Perspective taking involves empathy because understanding another person's experience requires imagining being in their shoes. Putting yourself in another person's experience requires some level of empathy. In an interview, Tom referred to a situation similar to that recorded in the transcript above. In response to my interview question about whether Tom felt as though he changed his opinion based on the group's comments, Tom stated, "When I thought it was funny that the character in the story was being bullied, but when other people shared that they did not think so and shared their own experience, then I changed what I thought about that part in the book. I thought that I would not want to be bullied by anybody." Tom considered what other people had to say. Moreover, he realized that he did not want to be bullied, which convinced him to

change his perspective. This was only possible because Tom was willing to try out perspective taking.

Perspective taking only occurred when a literature circle was operating smoothly. If the dynamics of a group included practices of empathizing with one another, perspective taking tended to occur more often and more effectively.

Perspective taking is tied to my research question because it allows other participants to hear and consider multiple perspectives. Without this tool, students' multiple perspectives in a literature circle would not have any value since students would be less likely to change their perspective.

My field notes also include several instances in which students began with one idea and ended with a slightly different one. I also noticed how perspective taking occurred when students read texts that involved situations or characters that had a different perspective than their own. Perspective taking is one technique that enabled other students to see another perspective. The presence of differing opinions allowed for multiple perspectives to be heard in a literature circle.

Differing Opinions

Within a literature circle, many different types of opinions were raised that affected other members' thinking. Some opinions might resonate with other members, but there were also opinions which differed and caused a member's ideas to become uncertain and for an adjustment to be made. These variant opinions were the ones that I defined as *differing opinions*. Sharing differing opinions is a form of offering multiple perspectives because differing opinions

inherently mean that more than one opinion about a subject has been expressed. There were a variety of possibilities when a member of a literature circle uttered a differing opinion. One possibility was for the conversation to deepen through connections being made to self, to text, and to the world. An instance of multiple perspectives deepening a conversation occurred in this portion of an interview with Kaylie.

Me: I wondered if you noticed any changes in your literature circles since the beginning of the year.

Kaylie: Yeah. The discussions are getting longer because people are getting used to explaining their thinking. They make connections to their experiences outside of the book like I've done this and it's connected to a part of the book but also be able to mention another outside connection. This makes our discussion richer. When we are reading, people are paying attention to the story and can share more. People are also excited to be in these circles.

Kaylie revealed how these connections, originating from saying something different about the same part of the book, deepened the discussions which made the conversation richer. The key factor was expressing something different, sharing differing opinions, which in Kaylie's view, not only made the discussion richer but also caused people to be "excited... in these circles."

Differing opinions can cause also perspective taking to occur. In this transcription of a literature circle, differing opinions cause perspective taking to occur, which then drives the conversation forward. This literature circle

discussion focuses on *The Fourth Grade Rats*, and Tom discusses a portion of the text when a first grader is pushed off the tire swing.

Tom: Because I like seeing ya umm because when I see the picture in the book, I saw how they pushed her off and I thought it was funny. Also because I remember laughing at people when they were pushed off a tire swing.

Frank: Did you find it be funny?

Brandon: I did not exactly think it would be funny [Tom shifts uncomfortably]

Tom: Entertaining not funny

Brandon: I kind of feel like it's really mean.

Tom: Well Joey said they had to push the first graders and he made Suds be mean and stuff because Suds has a soft side and said, "I'm not going to get off."

There are many important aspects of differing opinions to be considered. Tom's assertion—that a girl being pushed off a tire swing was comical—was challenged by Brandon, who stated that it was not funny. These two differing opinions caused Tom to shift uncomfortably. I noticed that he looked away from Brandon and back down to the ground quite quickly. Tom began to modify his ideas with his comment "entertaining not funny." Tom continued to change perspective after Brandon declared that, "it's really mean," at which point Tom returned to the text. Differing opinions allowed for students to return more frequently to the text in order to help support their opinions, which in turn strengthened the discourse. In

addition, Tom's opinion changed from certainty ("I thought it was funny that the first grader got pushed off the tire swing") to using the text to justify his changing opinion.

In the transcripts of the literature circles, students expressed differing opinions in a few forms. In the most obvious type, two or more students had different opinions about a topic discussed. Another type is when two or more students interpreted an aspect of the text differently. A different type of differing opinion occurred when an individual student's opinion changed over the course of a conversation. I noticed how students' conversation included an increasing number of differing opinions from the start of the study to the end.

Differing opinions have the potential to cause perspective taking to occur which causes changing in the way students see the world and each other. Differing opinions and empathy can lead towards perspective taking. An example of this occurred with Nadia, Sam, and Kelly. Nadia revealed how she was scared and Sam and Kelly, though not having the same opinion, empathized and understood where she was coming from.

Differing Prior Experience

A second way in which students expressed multiple perspectives involves differing experiences. Differing prior experience influence a person's perspective. When these differing prior experiences were shared in literature circles, students created a powerful conversation. Similar to what happens when students expressed differing opinions, members sharing differing prior experiences often led to perspective taking. Articulating prior experience differs from expressing an

opinion, because comments about experiences are based wholly on those experiences, not simply on an opinion.

An example of this interaction around differing personal experiences comes from this literature circle transcript. In this conversation, Sam and Kelly responded to Nadia's explanation of an experience different from theirs.

Nadia: There is something that connected from this chapter to me. I

freaked out at the man suddenly changing into something else!

(Everyone's eyes shift to the speaker)

Kelly: That did not freak me out

Frank: Why didn't that freak you out?

Nadia: It freaked me out because he went into the locker room and turned really pale.

Kelly: It did not freak me out because I watch scary movies and during October my dad wears a scary mask.

Sam: I remember when my dad scared other people on Halloween too! I really liked that part of the book for the same reason.

Nadia: Oh well, that never happened to me before so I was really scared.

Sam: That might have scared me too if my dad had not scared me during Halloween.

Kelly: Yeah, that could have scared me too

Frank: Let's move to the next person. (Nadia looks happy and engaged)

This conversation was based in the text, which provided immediate strength, and then moved to Nadia, who shared a response, which turns out to

differ from Frank's and Kelly's responses. Sam's and Kelly's comments came from their lived experiences, which were different from Nadia's prior experience. These differing experiences were brought into the group and moved the conversation into new directions. Nadia, sharing an alternative experience, felt safe enough within the group. Her expression of a differing personal experience was rewarded when both Sam and Kelly responded by perspective taking and seemed to truly understand and empathize with Nadia's experience. This act of sharing prior experiences allowed members of literature circles to go into depth with their analysis, connect the text to their own experience, and feel safe while doing so. In addition, Nadia, Sam, and Kelly all had an opportunity to understand their peers' experience and thus see the world in a slightly different and more dynamic way.

Statements of differing prior experience are critical to my research project because they encouraged perspective taking that significantly fueled conversations in literature circles. My field notes also included several references to students' use of personal experiences in their literature circle conversations, and often these conversations became more personal and more weighty as students shared different experiences. There was also much more risk associated with sharing a differing personal experience than a differing opinion. The literature circle transcript above revealed the most common way to identify differing personal experiences: sometimes members discussed events or people in their own lives from two distinct perspectives.

Differing Personal Truth

Sharing a differing prior experience with the rest of the circle is more personal than sharing a differing opinion. However, this perspective is not the most personal type to share. The expression of multiple perspectives that is closest to the core of another member is a personal truth. When there is disagreement between truths, I labeled these instances as sharing differing personal truths.

This third type of multiple perspectives, differing personal truths, was also the least common type in this study. Differing personal truths occurred when a member of a literature circle stated something that was fundamentally true to the speaker, but not true for another. These were typically powerful ideas due to their core value for the sharer. One example of differing personal truths occurs in this section of transcript below:

Jill: My sister is in first grade while I am in fourth.

Erin (DD): Did you have any experiences like this?

Jill: Na. I know in Korea they did not have bullies and bullies do not exist.

Brandon: Really? I know I was bullied when I was in first grade by older kids. It was unpleasant...

Jill (DD): Oh....

Jill stated that there was no bullying in Korea, a different prior experience, but she generalized by saying that bullies do not exist overall. That expressed a truth for Jill, which had been created by her experiences abroad. However, the issue of bullying was a lived experience to Brandon, which had created a truth for him. When Jill and Brandon shared their experiences, Jill's perspective might have

changed when she which because of her silence after Brandon's statement. This sequence might have changed Jill's perspective but may have changed one of her fundamental truths. Jill may begin seeing instances of bullying as a result of this shift in truths.

Occurrences of students expressing differing personal truths were rare in the videos and transcribed conversations. However, I recognized the rare occurrence of differing truths in literature circle transcripts when participants discussed different fundamental truths with their peers. When these truths are shared, they access the core beliefs of a student. When these truths come into conflict, powerful discussion occurs which can drastically shake the lens of all participants in the literature circle.

Multiple perspectives were shared to great effect. Students uttered differing opinions, differing experiences and differing personal truths which perpetuated discussion as well as alters their own perspectives, other members and the way in which they view the world.

Implications for the Classroom

There are many implications for my teachings which can be discovered from my study. Literature circles are a safe space for multiple perspectives as well as for sharing personal experiences and truths. The result of literature circles can be stronger relationships developed within a class. Another implication is deeper conversations about the text. These conversations in literature circles lead to greater and deeper understandings about the text.

Furthermore, literature circles can create autonomous classrooms.

Because literature circles do not need the teacher to be involved in micro-managing the group, the teacher is free to observe and students can learn together.

These literature circles, which focused on multiple perspectives, reduce the need for classroom management. This occurs because students are interested in learning since they selected their own books and discuss topics which they are interested in. Furthermore, literature circles are heterogeneous in nature. This aspect of literature circles means that students sharing, regardless of academic or social status, have the potential to be heard. This further invests all students into literature circle discussions and reduces classroom management issues. In addition, students created the expectations and learning agreements under which literature circles will operate. Because of these student created agreements, students are more invested in following the expectations.

A final implication from my study is the teaching of reading. In literature circles, students are in small group setting, lowering their affective filter, select their own topics for discussion and have quite a bit of time to discuss and share their own opinions. In more traditional forms of teaching reading, students have a short window in which to speak and answer predetermined questions and have the teacher take charge. Incorporating the literature circle model into a practice of teaching reading will increase student engagement deepen students understanding of the fundamental principles of reading in a student-centered manner.

Suggestions for Further Research

One potential for study revolves around the idea of roles. There are other roles in literature circle despite nearly all literature circles only containing the discussion director. These roles would reduce the amount of status the discussion director has and increase the status that all members of a literature circle have. However, literature circle containing role can also be very restrictive. It would be interesting to examine the positive and negative affect roles have in literature circles.

Another potential area of study would be the affect of gender in literature circles. Because I manipulated the groups to even out the number of boys and girls in a group, I was not able to view the effect of gender on discourse. It would be interesting to study how unequal gender dynamics can still lead to a successful literature circle.

Furthermore, a topic of interest that Daniels (2002) touches on is a mini-lesson after literature circle. My study contained a recap occasionally, but never truly a mini-lesson that responded to literacy skills, or literature circle procedural skills. A study that examined the effectiveness of a mini-lesson before or after a literature circle would be quite enlightening.

During my study, there was a distinct lack of themed reading. The books that were selected were brought out of the school's closet where additional supplies are kept. While this method of randomly grabbing texts worked decently, I wonder what might happen if texts discussed in literature circles were themed. I think themes would provide a common thread which would improve an end of literature circle whole group discussion. So, an area of further research

would be to study the effect a class reading texts revolving around a theme.

Conclusion

There are a number of important ideas that come out of my data analysis. One important point is that literature circles can provide a space where status and power issues can be negated, which will positively affect students' ability to consider multiple perspectives. Another finding was that expressing multiple perspectives helped to deepen the conversation and helped students return to the text. Furthermore, expressing multiple perspectives in a literature circle led students to create deeper discourse with the potential that students could view one another, view themselves, and view the world from a new perspective.

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Appendix

Class 1's Norms and Expectations

1. Use quiet voices.
2. Group members can help each other out with unknown words if they ask for help.
3. Read at a slow enough pace so everyone can follow along.
4. One person talks at a time, while the rest of the group listens.
5. Everyone's voice will be heard and everyone will get a chance to participate.
6. One person reads a ½ to a full page and then the next person to the left reads next.
7. Everyone is respectful to the person who is reading and/or who is sharing their question, opinion or answer to a question.
8. Everyone is going to be a STAR student during Literature Circle time.

Class 2's Norms and Expectations

1. Track the speaker....one person speaks and the others listen.
2. Take turns reading and follow along when someone is reading.
3. Read and talk in a soft voice.
4. Respect everyone in the group
5. Let other people read without someone telling them what to do.
6. Be a STAR student.
7. If someone asks for help with a word, give them help only if they ask.
8. If someone is having a side conversation, respectfully remind them to stop.
9. People shouldn't need to argue about who is going to read next.