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# An exploratory research on aesthetic reading of a multicultural novel in a book club setting amongst fifth grade students

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**AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON AESTHETIC READING OF A  
MULTICULTURAL NOVEL IN A BOOK CLUB SETTING AMONGST FIFTH  
GRADE STUDENTS**

by

Kasey Stevens

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Browne

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my husband, Matthew Stevens. Thank you for putting up with the stress and craziness of the past two years. I immensely appreciate you always being there to feed me tea or snacks when the nights turned late, distracting the dogs while I typed for hours, and coming over to give me the occasional long hug while I was working. Those small gestures mean more to me than you will ever know. Thank you for being a constant and positive support continually in my life.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to express my appreciation to my mother and father for their unwavering love and support throughout my entire college career and life. Your love and support has given me the drive to take this next step in my career.

## **Abstract**

Kasey Stevens

AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON AESTHETIC READING OF A  
MULTICULTURAL NOVEL IN A BOOK CLUB SETTING AMONGST FIFTH  
GRADE STUDENTS

2017-2018

Dr. Susan Browne

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to see how the use of a multicultural novel in a book club setting supported aesthetic reading. The specific aim was to what would happen amongst fifth graders participating in an after school program club. Conversation recordings, pre and post surveys about aesthetic reading, reader's notebooks, and the teacher's journal have been analyzed. The focus group demonstrated a range of aesthetic responses to the novel. The implications for using multicultural literature in book clubs to evoke aesthetic reading are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

“Research indicates that reading prepares the mind, nurtures the spirit and educates the soul. It is one of the most influential factors which parents and teachers can offer children.”

-Guofang Wan (2015)

The days of worksheets and dittos, lectures and speeches, and well-behaved silent students working individually at their desks have dissipated. If you take a walk into a classroom today, you will hear necessary noise and see students dispersed throughout the classroom. A snapshot of a productive literacy classroom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century shows students laughing over a scene in a book or students debating over a character’s actions. It shows a teacher sitting in a circle of students relentlessly pressing questions to push the limits and cause students to dig deeper into text. It shows students sitting on the floor in a group taking turns reading while others listen and interrupting to ask questions for clarity and comprehension. It shows students showing emotion over a fallen character and searching for the author’s purpose of the death. As Kathryn Wentzel says in her contributed chapter to *The Handbook of Competence and Motivation* (2007), "When teachers support [the] need for collaboration by allowing students to share ideas and build knowledge together, a sense of belongingness to the classroom community is established and the extension and elaboration of existing knowledge is facilitated." Collaboration in the literacy classroom is necessary. But as teachers, how do we give up control? How do we allow for collaboration in the most effective way? What kinds of texts can we use to

support this type of learning? How do we have students think at higher levels through this technique? By utilizing book clubs using multicultural novels in the classroom, we can have students collaborate and read aesthetically.

As literacy teachers, one of many goals is to create lifelong readers. We create a safe space for students to grow and foster reading skills while developing a natural love for reading. As I think of my own room, I see my students reaching higher levels of learning most when they are communicating with their peers and using multicultural books. They are asking questions of clarity to a friend, helping them solve a problem, or listening when they explain how they came to their answers. They are connecting with a character about something from their own life or questioning their decisions on an action taken in the book. As a teacher, I must look at our students as individuals and understand how to have them create aesthetic responses.

### **Story of the Question**

I was hired at my first teaching job at Wester Community Charter School 2 days before Valentine's Day in 2013. I stride in with optimism to a small room with one tiny window, 30 desks full of books and barely any walking room. The grey walls stood embarrassingly dull and spare while the bright fluorescent lighting that illuminated every corner immediately gave me a minor headache. In two hours, I had 29 African American students eager to enter the classroom ready to be engaged, motivated, and entertained. The first day began and to say I was nervous would be an understatement.

One hour later, 29 African American students entered my classroom happy to be reunited with each other and not giving their naïve Caucasian teacher with blonde hair the

time of day. They had been split up into different classrooms since their previous teacher quit without warning and were ready to be in a room with their friends again. Chaotic does not begin to describe how this day progressed. Students got in each other's face ready to settle a dispute from the last time they were together within the first half an hour. I specifically remember doing a read aloud and yelling every last page over students who would not stop talking. During math, manipulatives went flying across the room from an unknown student followed by a chorus of laughter from the class. I was officially in over my head. I took a deep sigh after dropping them off for lunch. I stared at my peanut butter and banana bread unable to eat. My appetite disappeared. At the end of the day, I sat in my chair for the first time in eight hours. My feet throbbed from inside my shoes. My voice was hoarse from yelling about multiplication. A mound of paperwork crowded my desk. 50 tests to grade left by the previous teacher and grades are due at the end of the week. I made it to the end of the year paddling above water before I hit a realization.

I realized that even though they are young and slightly disobedient, they are still people not robots. Maybe they don't need to be in their seats all the time. Maybe they can talk to each other while working on a task. Who knows maybe it would be better for them? This horrific first day was one of self-reflection in the teaching field. Everything I knew from when I was in school had changed. The days of worksheets and independent work are gone. Students need to be stimulated through visual learning and with meaningful conversations between each other. This first day reminds me of how different classrooms are in this present day and how each classroom varies depending on their area.

Among the chaos of those first few months, I was fascinated by the new realization I had made and how I would make it my own. How was I going to reach these students who I had nothing in common with? What literature could I introduce to them to have them love reading? I had 25 African American students, 1 Nigerian student, 2 Asian students, and 1 Hispanic student. They struggled to connect aesthetically to a text and discuss effectively during reading time.

Now on my sixth year of teaching at a different school in a lower economic suburban setting, I am still intrigued by the process that students take to make aesthetic connections to a text. One day while doing a read aloud of “Carla’s Sandwich,” I asked my students, “Does this make you think of anything in your life?” The room turned quiet. A student called out “We don’t even look like them or act like them. What would that even make us this about in our life?” This comment hit me like a ton of bricks. They were right. They have no similarities as Carla, physically or intrinsically. These were 10 year old African American, Hispanic, and Asian students and Carla is a 5 year old Caucasian girl. They really do not have anything in common with her. I needed to provide my students characters that they could connect to in order to make these aesthetic responses I so wanted them to make. They need to see themselves in the characters to empathize, criticize, and interact with them. By combining my two realizations, I hope that through research, I can learn how to use book clubs to encourage communication and higher levels of learning. Additionally, I hope to have my students and future students create more aesthetic connections with the use of multicultural novels. I also hope to encourage confidence in students to critic, analyze, and evaluate responses of their peers and of the characters in the story.

## **Research Purpose**

This study sets out to discover how fifth grade students participating in a book club reading a multicultural novel respond aesthetically to the text. Teachers are encouraged to have their students use higher level thinking to develop 21st century skills. This higher level thinking is praised and immensely valued in the classroom but the question remains of how do we as teachers do that? Teachers learn about using different questioning strategies using Bloom's Taxonomy like I tried while reading "Carla's Sandwich." But is that enough? How do we know they can do things like make aesthetic connections, analyze, critique, and thoughtfully discuss various topics? One goal of this research was to explore the ways in which students demonstrated aesthetic response. In aesthetic reading response, a reader "adopts an attitude of readiness to attend to what is being lived through during the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 74). They need to make a connection to the literature and then critique, analyze, and evaluate the characters in the story. Aesthetic response can also be categorized as mentioning feelings, imagining themselves as a character, expanding on the story, making connections to their life, and picturing being in the story (Cox and Many, 1992, p. 73).

Another goal of this research was to utilize a positive strategy to create this aesthetic response through the use of book club discussions. Book clubs emerge from using a social constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1973) that allows students to develop socially and adopt information more proficiently through social exchanges. An article by PBS (2005) titled "The Benefits of Book Clubs" state that, "Book discussions help children practice turn-taking, encourage them to use language to analyze, make predictions and solve problems, and provide them with opportunities to try out new

vocabulary words.” Additionally, students develop 21st century skills such as critiquing and analyzing along with these collaboration skills. Students are asked to not only create questions to discuss with their peers but respond respectfully and question the thoughts of others. Students first process what others have said and then make their own decision on how to respond if they agree or disagree with examples and statements to support this reasoning. Along with developing deeper understandings in the novel itself, students will consider other’s perspectives and practice analyzing the actual novel in a social setting. By creating a sense of community in reading instead of isolation in book club discussions, students flourish to construct meaning with their peers, create personal responses, and work cooperatively together (Raphael & McMahon, 1992).

The third goal of my research is to consider the cultural needs of my students through culturally responsive pedagogy by incorporating a multicultural novel in their book club. As I move further into my research I asked, are book clubs enough to have students make aesthetic responses to their literature? Research clearly states that book clubs build student skills and develop higher level thinking skills. In our ever growing diverse world, teachers have to consider the cultures of our students when expecting aesthetic responses. According to the Huffington Post reporter, Klein (2015), the 2014-2015 school year was the first year in which the majority of students in classrooms were not Caucasian. They state “In 2025, America’s schools will likely be substantially more diverse than they are currently, serving more kids who come from Hispanic, Asian or mixed-race backgrounds” (Klein, 2015). These shifting demographics question how students will create aesthetic responses in book club discussions. This supports the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy in our classrooms. Gay (2002) defines culturally

responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for [students]” (p. 31). It is the job of the teacher to incorporate various cultures including ones of the students in the classroom to develop no barriers (Hall, 2009). By having exposure to various cultures, it builds students to be people who are more accepting, value cultures, and understand happening in our world. In relation to this study, by using a multicultural novel in a book club discussion, we are using culturally responsive pedagogy. It fosters cultural understanding, knowledge, and awareness that future employers want their employees to have. Teachers are additionally providing an avenue in which students can create aesthetic response to reading by channeling similarities of the characters, setting, and culture shown in the novel. Multicultural literature helps children identify their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the conversation on issues regarding diversity (Colby & Lion, 2004).

A veteran teacher once told me that he is a teacher because he wants to help children not only be great students but be great people he wants to share his future world with. Developing these skills through culturally responsive pedagogy and book club discussions builds positive citizens of the country for our future and could diminish friction between people. By using higher order learning like aesthetic response, teachers will develop the cognitive processes for our students. This will indeed prepare them for fast paced jobs that require you to use and apply information instead of knowing just facts. My overall research goal is to connect the theories of culturally responsive pedagogy, book club discussions, and aesthetic response to see if using them together



creates a safe space for students to learn at their highest potential. I hope to have my students and future students create more aesthetic reading responses with the use of multicultural novels. I also hope to encourage confidence in students to critic, analyze, and evaluate responses of their peers and of the characters in the story.

### **Research Problem**

Students create aesthetic responses to novels that connect to them on a personal level. Engaging in aesthetic responses builds skills like critiquing, analyzing, and evaluating which are the highest form of understanding according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Using a multicultural novel in a book club setting might increase the chance of aesthetic reading response. These skills should be focused on in their middle school years because of their developing of themselves as individuals. My question combines each of these ideas to question what would happen if we use them simultaneously. Therefore, my teacher inquiry question is "How do fifth grade students participating in a book club reading a multicultural novel respond aesthetically to the text?"

### **Organization of the Paper**

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature surrounding the use of book club discussions, culturally responsive teaching, and multicultural literature. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study along with the context. It also includes my plan for research, knowledge about the novel, and vital facts about the participants. Chapter four analyzing the data and discusses the findings. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions for the study as well as the suggestions for future research on book clubs using multicultural novels.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

“As I prepare for the new school year to begin, I can’t wait to have my classroom full of buzzing student voices. Some might think I’m crazy to hope for a noisy classroom, but a class with collaborative student discussions is the kind of environment that will prepare our students for success in today’s teamwork-driven workplaces.”

-Karen Vogelsang, *Tennessee Teacher of the Year 2016*

As the days of lecture teaching are proved ineffective, teachers have been coming up with new and innovative ways to include their students in worthwhile literacy instruction (Khan, 2012) (Freeman, Eddy, MacDonough, Smith, Wenderoth, Jordt, and Okoroafor, 2013). Teachers yearn for discussion that drives deeper learning and collaboration amongst students in their classrooms to assist in promoting student growth in literacy. Noisy classrooms can show students are working alongside one another to reach a common goal, challenging others opinions over topics respectfully and with reason, or finding commonality in a topic and reaching forward to learn more. These are the attributes 21<sup>st</sup> century employers want in today’s workplaces around the globe. It is our job as teachers to prepare our students for their eminent futures.

Book clubs are an approach that has been effective to build a form of social community amongst students in the classroom for many years (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). This can be brought into our classrooms while incorporating multicultural literature to bring students up to the higher level thinking and critical response skill level that is expected of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student. The incorporation of multicultural literature into a book club discussion will encourage students to think critically about diversity and

issues in our society. “Diversity is a reality of our nation and of the world, and with that reality comes the responsibility and opportunity for growth in order to create a more accepting and just world” (Martinez, 2012, p. 53).

This study sets out to discover how fifth grade students participating in a book club reading a multicultural novel respond aesthetically to the text. The first section of the literature review discusses the theory and research behind book club discussions. The second section discusses a comprehensive view of culturally responsive pedagogy in relation to the culturally conscious novels used in the book club. The final section focuses on multicultural literature and how it fosters aesthetic reading.

### **Book Club Discussions**

From the 1970s to 2000s, student to student communication was always something that was limited and restricted in the classroom (Polleck, 2010), however, theories of having students conferring in the classroom are nothing new to literature. Vygotsky (1973) initially discusses the social constructivist theory where social interaction was a crucial part of learning. Book clubs offer a social constructivist learning opportunity by providing students a chance to adopt knowledge more efficiently when through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1973). Vygotsky (1973) created the idea for social learning and finds it to be an essential key to long lasting comprehension and attentiveness during literacy instruction. During book club, students converse socially in an open arena of conversation otherwise halted by teachers.

Book clubs emerge from using a social constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1973) that allows students to grow socially and adopt knowledge more

efficiently through social interactions. Broughton (2002) studied four students for six months and watched them grow socially outside of the classroom where book club created more understanding individuals. One student began creating more friends in gym class and as the club progressed, questioned other's opinions in a respectful manner. She states (2002) "Social interactions, made possible through discussions of the text, also resulted in alternatives for interpreting the actions of others and offered ways of looking at moral dilemmas that were different from the girls' prior understandings." Polleck's (2010) qualitative study of adolescent females in book club discussions relates something similar to Broughton. In her study, her students found social growth through relationships in their peers and gained perspective of others. In their exit interviews, students discussed how they grew close from these social interactions in book club. One student stated (2010) "Now we [hang out]. Now I see them in the hall, and I'm like 'Hey, you read the book?' But I used to [say] hi to them and we used to be in classes together but it was never like now. Like Pat and me and Yoana got closer." By using book clubs, students gain a sense of community and understanding of each other building a stronger social person. Through the use of book clubs and communicating socially in the classroom, students develop socially as more thoughtful, considerate, and understanding people willing to work together (Broughton, 2002).

Gee's theory of discourse (1999) and social linguistics relates and supports the integration of discussions between students in literacy education. Those who study Sociolinguistics believe that reading is both a social and linguistic process (Gee, 1999). As a social process, reading is used to establish, structure, and maintain social relationships between and among people (Gee,1999). As a linguistic process, reading is

used to discuss intentions and meanings, not only between an author and a reader, but also between people involved in a reading event (Gee, 1999). His beliefs on literacy were rooted under the umbrella of a social learning perspective and grounded in the *Social Linguistics Theory* in which emphasizes “the central role of social interaction in the development of knowledge and learning” (Gee, 1999). Additionally, Gee (1999) defines discourse “with a lower case d” to be everything that involves us as a person. It is an identity kit: a costume or a set of instructions that makes us recognizable and it gives what we do meaning in a specific social context. In book club, students unpack their identity tool kit and bring their opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and background when they discuss their books. Students discuss in their own language and opinions built from their toolkit.

Successful book clubs discussions such as Au and Kawakami’s (1986) study of Hawaiian students at the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) school allowed students to discuss and interact in their own discourse. During this study, students spoke in an English dialect or Hawaiian Creole English. Students were examined using “talk story.” “Talk story” is defined as “a rambling personal experience narrative mixed with folk materials” (Au & Kawakami, 1986). Students discuss literacy in whole group or small group depending upon the grade. Using talk story showed that students tapped into more background knowledge, created a comfortable environment for learning, along with many other benefits (Au & Kawakami, 1986). Au and Kawakami state “Because students are already proficient with this style of interaction, they are able to focus on learning to read rather than on figuring about how to participate appropriately in the discussion” (Au and Kawakami, 1986). In summary, by students communicating in

their various and individual discourses during book club, they create a more meaningful interaction and encapsulate reading. This in turn helps students prepare for participation in a democratic society and its processes (Applebee, 2002).

Fall, Webb, and Chundowsky (2003) conducted an empirical study comparing the impact of discussion on a language arts assessment. In this study, two different groups of students took a ninety minute language arts assessment which included two passages. One group had the opportunity to discuss each passage for ten minutes while the other group did not. In their results, “the students who discussed the story often added new descriptions of the story or revised their understandings, leading them to show greater numbers of descriptions in the second part of the test” (Fall, Web, and Chundowsky, 2003). By adding those 10 minutes of discussion, their understanding of the story grew to greater heights which provided greater support and details for their answers. In transcripts of discussion, students reached aesthetic learning by communicating about the main character, Louise and the death of her husband. Student stated that they felt so upset for her and then related it to a time someone in their family died. Fall, Web, and Chundowsky (2003) also state, “The results of this study show that even a small amount of collaboration can have significant influences on students' understanding of the material and their performance on a collaborative test.” Aesthetic reading and discussion increased overall understanding and concept of the story by just adding 10 minutes of collaboration. One can only imagine what the benefits of a 40 minute book club would be to their students.

In another empirical study, Wu, Chen, and Chern (2014) discussed how their low ability readers benefitted from discussion in their literacy instruction. In this study, four

adolescent female students with different reading proficiency levels moved from small group teacher led instruction to an open discussion student-led setting about the stories they read over an 8 week period. These girls transformed their literacy instruction from reading one on one with a teacher in basal readers to group discussions about characters and their actions as a group. The girls described it as a “more grown up and responsible way of reading” (Wu, Chen, & Chern, 2014). The findings indicated that the participants shifted from shallow plot descriptions to making personal connections with the story. Each female made connections with their text ‘*A Bridge to Terabithia*’ and also connected to each other. In their exit interview, each girl discusses their appeal to the setting and how they grew into “reflective readers” (Wu, Chen, and Chern, 2014). If self-monitoring and self-reflection is our highest form of learning for students, discussion based learning environment such as book clubs should be incorporated into our classrooms.

During book club discussions, authentic conversations between and amongst students is imperative to their cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and sound, conceptual understandings (Polleck, 2010). Gambrell (1996) and Applebee (2002) examine discussion based classroom interactions to foster critical thinking, improve communication skills, and have a positive impact on interpersonal relationships between class members. In book club, participants have the opportunity to express their opinions, emotions, and concerns and contribute to conversation based on these statements from others. The students have to be ready to take criticism and deliver their opinions with support and reasoning. In authentic dialogue, there is no preordained conclusion (Hadjioanno, 2007). However, the objective of the conversation is to reach new and

cultured understandings. Since the situation is so open-ended, participants have to offer up their emotions, feelings, and opinions which can be demanding of some students.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

When culturally responsive instruction is applied into the classroom academic achievement and approval of cultural diverse students are more likely to increase. Students grow confidence when they see their personal cultures incorporated into their classrooms. In her original piece, Ladson-Billings (1995) dared to ask the question instead of what is wrong with African American learners, what is right with these students and where in the teacher pedagogy do we find success? Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the phrase “culturally relevant pedagogy” and defined it as one “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 16–17). Here, she identified three major criteria of cultural responsive pedagogy: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (1995). “Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely make them feel good. The trick of culturally responsive teaching is to get students to choose academic success” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

Academic success refers to the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experience. Cultural competence is where students are expected to incorporate their cultural backgrounds within the school setting. Their framework of beliefs and cultural understanding play a crucial role in their success. During so, teachers are expected to “provide culturally relevant material operating



students' culture as a channel for learning" (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Finally, socio-political consciousness "allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequalities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This relates back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of our students. Teachers prepare the students for their future professions by creating critical thinking skills and problem solving skills.

Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for [students]" (p. 31). She states to be effective teachers of minority students have to have courage to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Engaging in meaningful conversations about culture, discussing cultural differences and traditions, and responding to literature from opinions based on cultures can be threatening but necessary for students. If students are expected to have discussion criticizing opinions in uncomfortable situations, a community has to be built between them. Gay (2002) states "building community among diverse learners is another essential element of culturally responsive teaching."

A study conducted by Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson in 2011 discuss effects of a culturally responsive teacher's pedagogy on urban low-income African American and Latino high school students' interpretations of racial diversity, racism, and individual and collective agency in U. S. history. This qualitative study compared and analyzed classrooms who introduced people of color (Native American, African American, and Hispanic) as historical actors and not just as victims (Epstein, Moyorga, and Nelson, 2011). The included lessons on political and social movements, including but not limited

to abolitionism and the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, teachers were presenting people of color historically as having multiple perspectives on paths to freedom and equality. Along with presentation, teachers had students engage in discussions about race and debate different topics. At the end of the school year, the authors found that students gained access of political movements, portrayed people of color as resilient and having agency, and included a diverse set of racial groups in the explanations of the historical experiences. The result of Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson's study proves that students can gain a vast knowledge when exposed to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Hall (2009) conducted a study to expose preservice teachers to book clubs to see how they would go intrinsically in their teaching. Preservice teachers were asked to read one of five books presented and discuss them in a book club for five weeks. Each book presented the results of a research study that examined how elementary students' social, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds influenced how they experienced and responded to reading and writing within an elementary school classroom. Preservice teachers found that book clubs they were using promoting culturally responsive pedagogy within themselves. They stated that when they had to speak to each other, they wanted to take into consideration of the feelings of others by not wanting to offend cultures (2009). By reading the book, they also came across the importance of culturally responsive teaching. "Literacy instruction needs to be culturally responsive. It's a necessary part of good teaching." (Hall, 2009). In the end, the preservice teachers practiced a method of incorporating culturally responsive teaching while learning about the importance of culturally responsive teaching. One teacher (2009) stated, "So I think part of culturally responsive teaching is making sure that I don't create barriers for my students that get in

the way of their being able to read or write and helping them learn to understand and accept differences in each other. Using book clubs create no barriers.”

### **Aesthetic Response to Multicultural Literature**

All students have the right to be seen and heard through the stories and the literature that is shared in our schools and classrooms. Steiner (2008) states, “Stories can generate an attitude that does not see race as a barrier but as a natural identity contributing to the beauty of our world” (p. 88). Multicultural literature helps children identify their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the conversation on issues regarding diversity (Colby & Lion, 2004). It provides students with the knowledge, awareness and compassion to become members of the richly diverse democratic society that makes up our country as well as the global world. In using multicultural literature, it provides an avenue to make deeper connections and aesthetic response.

Each reading event, as described by Rosenblatt (1985), involves a ‘particular individual and a particular text,’ and happens at a ‘particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting’ (p. 100). Rosenblatt’s seminal piece *The Reader, The Text, The Poet* (1978) discusses the differences in transaction readers have when reading. To fully encapsulate the reader is to make an aesthetic connection. In aesthetic reading, a reader “adopts an attitude of readiness to attend to what is being lived through during the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 74). For an aesthetic response to happen there needs to be three things: what personal connections the reader brings to the text, the text itself, and the circumstances in which the text was

presented. (Rosenblatt, 1985). For example, if immediately after reading a text, a student writes down the main idea and details to support their answer and immediately closes their notebook, they are not making an aesthetic connection. When a reader becomes extremely upset after learning the character betrayed his best friend and makes comments to a friend, they are making an aesthetic response. Cox and Many (1992) suggest that aesthetic reading may look like

picturing and imaging while reading or viewing; describing a strongly felt sense of the verisimilitude of the evocation, the reality of being there; imagining themselves in a character's place or in story events; questioning or hypothesizing about a story; extending a story or creating new stories; making associations with other stories and their own life experiences; and mentioning feelings evoke. (p.24)

Louie (2005) conducted an observational case study on students that found that students had various types of sympathy (aesthetic reading) while reading and responding to multicultural literacy about communist China. The study had 25 participants, 23 Caucasian students and 2 Hispanic students which reflected the demographics of the high school. In this study, students met twice a week for 90 minutes for six weeks to discuss the book, *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom* (Feng, 1995). Louie (2005) found that when students were exposed to multicultural literature in an environment free of judgement, they made multiple empathetic responses and created aesthetic connections. They articulated other responses, sympathized with characters, questioned historical attitudes of individuals, and connected experiences in the text with their own experiences (2005). Students shared that they never “felt so strongly about a character. I think it is because it

reminds me of my dad.” (p. 576). This integration of multicultural literature allowed students to reach a new level of learning that they had never before.

In younger grades, students are actually taught to prize basic comprehension over other types of reading and thinking because, instead of promoting creative and aesthetic responses to literature, schools have employed "comprehension" models from developmental reading (Anderson and Rubino, 1991). Teachers should not only invite aesthetic reading into their classroom but encourage students to be submerged in their text to make personal and intertextual connections. It becomes the job of the teacher to provide opportunity for aesthetic reading to occur in a discussion setting. “The instructional situation created by the teacher can limit, or even eliminate, the aesthetic transaction” (Anderson and Rubino, 1991). Simply providing a text that is multicultural or dimensional gives the opportunity for students to flourish aesthetically. Aesthetic reading is something that teachers aim to achieve in their classroom for the highest level of Bloom’s Taxonomy (synthesis). Though the demands may be high, many state that making aesthetic connections in the classroom is highly prized.

## **Conclusion**

After my review of the literature, it is clear that book club discussions while reading multicultural novels should be integrated into everyday classrooms in order to create aesthetic responses from our students. Teachers need to provide this opportunity for discussion in a book club setting to build high comprehension and intrapersonal skills in turn developing a 21<sup>st</sup> century learner. Culturally responsive pedagogy and incorporating multicultural literature plays a significant role in having students think

critically about diversity and issues in society. Students can learn to build a community and become more understanding of each other's backgrounds and cultures.

This study is set out to explore, discuss, and develop understanding that using a book club discussing a multicultural novel will help students respond aesthetically to a text. As a result, students build higher level learning while reading and discussing with peers and create students who can compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world they will be living in in their future.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative study. The definition of qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It aims to gain a deep understanding of a specific event, rather than a surface account of a large sample population. Qualitative research allows the meaning of the inquiry to emerge from the participants. Finally, it aims to get a better understanding through first-hand experience, honest reporting, and quotations of actual conversations along with understanding how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behavior. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)

The qualitative research is best for collecting data because it will allow the teacher to get a deeper understanding of communication between students and how it allows or does not allow them to read while making aesthetic connections due to higher level thinking. This relates directly to my research because of the communication aspect of book club discussions. Practitioner research debates, invents, and acts on salient questions in the next generation. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The qualitative research paradigm allows for the researcher to go into the field and build conclusions, abstracts, and hypotheses from details in their data. A researcher can interact with whom they are researching and can facilitate their hypotheses. For this, I can help each student individually who is on the brink of making an aesthetic connection. I can interact with my students minimally without providing answers. The research can act as a guide. Being

physically involved during research is both gratifying and rewarding to the researcher. Because this type of research is not run off of figures and numbers, it can be difficult to plan and analyze data. During my study, I will be able to use actual conversations, notes, and surveys from my data. Since I am involved, I will be able to prompt students with higher level thinking questions to gage their aesthetic learning. I can talk with them to guide them to discuss their connections with the characters in the story in order to get my results.

When working with students in fifth grade, they are just becoming their own person and developing their own opinions. Using qualitative research applies best to this study because students are going to discuss their newly felt feelings with emotion to develop their connection to the story. Surveys, discussion notes, and ability to talk to the students will be best to gage the goal.

### **Procedure of the Study**

Before the book club began, I sent out a generic interest slip to students in the aftercare program to get an idea of who would be interested along with a reading interest survey. I analyzed these surveys to pick a multicultural book that would appeal to their likes. I decided to have the students read the multicultural book “Bud, Not Buddy” by Christopher Paul Curtis.

After selecting this story, students worked in group initially at first to read for 5 minutes and discuss what attracts them to this book. This acted as an ice breaker. Then, they created how many chapters they wanted to complete by next week. Students set their own goals for reading since it is in their spare time. I told them to create one meaningful



questions they want to discuss from their readings. This initial question will give me an accurate representation of where they are at in their higher level learning.

In the second session is where students would begin to discuss as an open forum. We talked about how to keep conversations going and what questions are “thick” and make you think. Students came up with some example “thick” questions. They then edited their question that they had to come up with to make it “thicker.” From there, they broke into a group to discuss. I acted as the facilitator only jumping in to make students elaborate and filling empty discussion holes. At the end, we reflected on how we can improve book club and what we think was great about it.

In the third through sixth session, students began leading discussions throughout chapters 5 through 8. Their questions needed some tweaking before they discussed and requested that they have 10 minutes in the beginning to add in more “thick” questions which became a weekly thing. During week fifth and sixth, I helped my students create different connections by providing them each with two different questions to consider when reading the next chapters. This created a different type of aesthetic response by criticizing and becoming very familiar with the characters. During their discussions, they saw different thoughts than previous anticipated. During this, I began to analyze who was creating aesthetic connections by their recorded conversations and which students still needed me to ask more questions when it was their turn to speak. I began to see the leaders of the group and who was more invested in the story.

In the final session, students were eager to wrap up their thoughts about our book. In their final discussion, they began with the general question, “What were your overall

feelings towards the book?” Students discussed with the group and came to an ultimate rating. For their final work, students were asked to rate the book out of 5 stars and give reasons why. At the end, they completed a survey about the book club experience and what changed from beginning till the ending. Some students were sad to see it being over and asked for recommendations on new books like this one. Students were also excited they finished such a large book and enjoyed being in a small group setting.

### **About the Novel**

“Bud, Not Buddy” (Curtis,1999) is a book about an orphaned 10-year old African American boy named Bud Caldwell in search to find his father during the Great Depression. His only prized possession is a flier his mom left him from a jazz band featuring a bass player named James E. Calloway believed to be his father. Bud is in his third foster family when the book opens. Unfazed by Bud, one of the older brothers beats Bud up causing him to leave his home and run away. Bud is in search of a better life with happier times with who he believes is his father. Bud meets another orphaned friend, Bugs, and they team up and head to a train bound for California hoping to get jobs out West. However, Bud misses the train and heads back to the library where a helpful librarian gives him instructions on how to get to Grand Rapids. On his long hike to Grand Rapids, he runs into Lefty Lewis who coaxes Bud to accept a ride, food, and a real bed to sleep in. At Grand Rapids, Bud finds the band Dusky Devastators of the Depression, the band which his father is a member of. Though his father rejects him, the other band members take a liking to Bud and invite him to dinner. Eventually he finds out that Calloway is his grandfather and he finds the home he always wanted with the jazz band.

“Bud, Not Buddy” (Curtis,1999) would be a multicultural novel because as readers, we experience the Depression through the eyes of a young African American boy who listens to the stories of segregation and inequality from the adults he meets along his journey to find his father. It introduces students to one of four categories of multicultural literature: poverty (Davis, Brown, Rice, and Soeder, 2005). This book points out the challenges of worrying about food, where to sleep, and personal safety. It introduces some of the barriers in obtaining a quality education for students who come from poverty backgrounds. To provide a balance of the hard reality of the depression, he provides comical characters like Mr. Lefty and have Bud create “Bud Caldwell’s Rules and Things to Have a Funner Life and Make a Better Liar Out of Yourself.”

### **Data Collection**

Data for this research was collected in various ways. My first source of data was in the recordings of the book club when the teacher was not around. Students were recorded on iPads during free talk time with their book club and transcribed by the researcher. This data showed if students answering higher level thinking questions on the aesthetic level and how they were answering them. This means answering or asking questions about sympathy, criticism, or connection with the character. Additionally, if they showed or expressed emotions about a section when discussing their readings would be an aesthetic response. Also, from the recordings, the data showed how each student talked and for how long during book club.

Next, the second form of data was the reader’s notebook that each student used to track their higher level learning. Here, students created questions while reading at home

that they wanted to bring up in book club with their peers. They also added things from their discussion that they found interesting to help them expand on this knowledge later. By using both linguistic and written form, it was capture if students began to think at a higher level.

Observations were collected during each step of the research process. Additionally, the researcher had a journal in which she expressed her thoughts before, during, and after book club. This allowed the researcher to reflect on her own behavior throughout the course of research along with noting repeated behaviors of students.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collection throughout the course of this study was to find how using multicultural novels in book club discussions foster aesthetic reading. I used the reading interest survey to gage what kinds of stories the students preferred to read in their spare time. Using this information, I was able to measure if they enjoyed reading multicultural books and had any past experience reading these kinds of novels. Furthermore, the information gave me insight on how they viewed themselves as readers and how they communicate what they have learned after reading. This builds upon the connections they make with their novels. I questioned if they read to read or if they were reading and thinking about the books. By charting the data, it allowed me to see who was starting new with multicultural novels and discussions about books. My teacher research journal allowed me to reflect on common themes in my reflections about the students during discussion that may have seemed fleeting in the moment. It allowed me to capture moments that I focused on that week and reflect on the reasoning for focusing on it. Also,

I permitted me to stop and question different happenings in that session. The audio recordings were useful in capturing moments that I was not physically there for or moments that I might have missed while listening the first time. It gave me a glimpse into new understandings about how book club discussions were going when I walked away. All data analysis was inductive, common themes or topics were founded in each. Various patterns from observations were developed to make theories.

### **Context of the Study**

**Community.** Located in southern New Jersey, this community is made up of 39,399 people. The town itself is 58 square miles which is the largest municipality in its county. This township prides itself on its agriculture community and family-oriented establishments. Recently more single family homes have been built in the community drawing new residents every year. In the past 9 years more than 4,000 new residents have located to the town. There are still 4 different developments of condominiums and single family homes being built currently causing schools to expand their number of classrooms and number of students per classroom. The town is expected to add around 2,000 residents to the town within the next 5 years.

**School district.** The Mission of the School District, a large, diverse and growing community, is to educate all students to become independent, life-long learners, critical thinkers, caring and confident members of their community. The district, in partnership with the community, and in a climate of cooperation and mutual respect, will provide an academic environment which values excellence and diversity, encourages students to strive for personal excellence, and assists them in acquiring the knowledge, skills and

attitudes necessary to contribute positively to a rapidly changing world. The district is made up of 4 lower elementary schools (PreK to 3), 2 upper elementary schools (4 to 6), 1 middle school (6-8), and 1 high school (9-12). In 2009, another neighboring school district was no longer operating any schools and began sending all its students to this township. This grew a large expansion in the district and new schools developed. The Board of Education is made up of 9 community elected members that serves a three year term.

**School.** The study site serves grades fourth through sixth in the town of Saratoga\*. Their mission is to provide a safe, nurturing, and challenging environment where all students are inspired, supported, and empowered to: apply critical thinking and problem solving skills academically and personally, embrace lifelong learning, thrive with high expectations in a competitive, diverse, and evolving global society, and demonstrate courage, strength, and confidence leading to personal success and responsible citizenship. (Retrieved from the district website) Whereas the Board mission statement is centered on community, the study site mission statement is more child-centered to create a positive future citizen. There are 514 students whom are 66% African American, 19% Caucasian, and 9% Hispanic. Overall 58% of these students are from low income families which mean they qualify for free and reduced lunch. To qualify for free lunch, children's family income must be under \$15,171 which is 48% of students. To qualify for reduced lunch, children's family income must be below \$21,590 annual income which is 9% of students.

**Students.** Eight fifth grade students from the after-care program volunteered to participate in the book club based on their interest in the club. No students have IEPs and

are in regular education classrooms during the day. Information was collected from their teachers and records to display their academic information. Their demographics are below.

Table 1

*Student Demographics*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Lexile Level</b>	<b>Interested Books</b>
Kate	10	Hispanic	Female	940	Non-Fiction (Cooking)
Izzy	10	Caucasian	Female	790	Fairy Tale
Ciara	11	African American	Female	900	Fiction
Jay	10	Caucasian	Male	900	Sports
Gina	11	Caucasian/Hispanic	Female	730	Fiction
Mary*	10	African American/Hispanic	Female	940	Fiction
Beth	11	African American	Female	790	Non-Fiction (Sports Biographies)
Jordan	10	African American	Male	790	Non-Fiction (Animals)

\*Student has been referred to the Intervention and Referral Services team in the previous school year.

Kate, Ciara, and Gina are very intelligent students receiving high marks on their report cards. Ciara and Kate participate quite often in class where Gina can be shy and lack confidence. These girls are all very friendly and have had classes together the past 3 years. They all possess an interest in reading but do not enjoy writing.

Izzy and Mary are most distracted and get off task in the classroom during reading time. Izzy enjoys art and likes to make people laugh. In the classroom, she finds it hard to work in group work and does not enjoy participating. Izzy expresses that she does not enjoy school but likes to read fantasy novels. Mary is very distracted in the classroom and does not receive high marks in all subjects. She does not have many friends and finds it hard to make connections with others. She enjoys reading sometimes in her spare time but not in a group.

Jay and Jordan is the only male participating in the study. Jay and Jordan are not initial friends but seem to be growing closer as book club continues. Jay is intelligent and likes to state his opinion in a calm demeanor. He is very aware of how to behave socially and is regarded as being a sweet student. Jay works well with others in groups and participates frequently in the classroom. Jordan is much shyer than Jay. He only participates in group conversations when others ask him a question or he has to take a turn to speak. His teachers describe him as “sweet and is on track in class.”

Beth is new to the district this year and is very quiet. She moved from a different state and has no connection to anyone at this school. Though she is intelligent, she does not participate in class. She also does not test well hence her Lexile score. She is friendly with everyone but prefers to shoot baskets by herself at recess. She enjoys reading as an “escape” and loves to read non-fiction books about basketball and famous people.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “How do fifth grade students participating in a book club reading a multicultural novel respond aesthetically to the text?” I reviewed and looked for commonalities in every aspect of my data: audio transcriptions of book club, reader’s notebooks, and teacher reflection journal. By looking across all three sources of data, there were three themes that reoccurred throughout the study as students responded to the novel, *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999). These included feelings of sympathy, feelings of empathy, and connection to their lives. In this chapter, I will discuss each commonality found and examples from the data.

#### **Determination of Aesthetic Response**

Before unpacking the data, it is important to situate what it means in the context of the study to respond with an aesthetic stance. To fully encapsulate the reader is to make an aesthetic connection. Louise Rosenblatt (1988) has called aesthetic response, “the process in which the reader selects out ideas, sensations, feelings, and images drawn from their past linguistic, literary, and life experience, and synthesizes them into a new experience.” From this I created categories to then determine how individual student response represented the aesthetic stance by either: 1. evoking feelings and creating images, 2. relating associations with text, life, and others, and/or 3. synthesizing and

hypothesizing. I sorted each aesthetic response that emerged into one of the categories. By sorting in this way, it revealed which response occurred as an aesthetic response. These themes also relate to the level of higher level thinking demonstrated. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), synthesizing and hypothesizing are the highest forms of thinking whereas creating images and relating associations are lower levels. With process of categorizing, I was also able to discern which students were demonstrating critical thinking.

### **Feelings of Sympathy**

“Sympathy (‘fellow feeling’, ‘community of feeling’) is a feeling of care and concern for someone, often someone close, accompanied by a wish to see him better off or happier” (Burton,2005). In relation to aesthetic response, feelings of sympathy fall into the category of evoking feelings. Students involved in book club felt sympathy towards the main character, Bud, many times throughout the term of book club.

During the first week, this commonality was one that was seen throughout all forms of data repeatedly. Each student said in their reader response journal the first week that they felt bad for Bud because he got beat up by his foster brother or that his mother had died. Altogether comments like “I feel bad for Bud” or “That is a shame for Bud” were said 124 times throughout student’s reading response journals and book club discussions. Below is a clip from the transcribed audio recording of book club on November 7:

Gina: “It’s really sad because he lost his parents and I don’t like that. So, yeah.”

Jordan: “Yeah. I really feel bad for him.”

Kate: “Same, it is really sad.”

Comments like the one shown here were given most of the time when student’s brought up a topic in the story that they wanted to discuss. Once a feeling of sympathy was made others agreed quickly and sometimes expanded from there.

In the second week of book club, I overheard a conversation similar between my students, Kate and Gillian, when they were getting packed up at the end of book club as seen in my teacher journal. They were discussing how this book was sad because of all the terrible things that happened to Bud. They talked about how they do not understand how a kid could have such a terrible life. They questioned if they thought anyone’s life was as bad as Bud’s and said they hoped not. I reflected on the fact that the students were beginning to get invested in the character and I hoped they continue to feel this way (journal November 7). At this point, I began charting the number of times this was seen in discussions and in the reader’s notebooks. Below is the data student:

Table 2

*Occurrences of Sympathetic Responses*

<b>Name</b>	<b>10/31</b>	<b>11/7</b>	<b>11/14</b>	<b>11/21</b>	<b>11/28</b>	<b>12/5</b>
Kate	4	5	4	3	1	5
Izzy	1	2	1	Absent	1	1
Ciara	3	2	1	2	3	2
Jay	3	4	3	2	2	5
Gina	4	5	4	2	2	4
Mary	Absent	2	Absent	Absent	1	1
Beth	4	4	3	2	1	6
Jordan	4	4	4	4	2	1

Overall, the data showed that students had no issue evoking feelings towards Bud and other characters in this story. This was suggested by the immense amount of feelings of sympathy in their reader's notebooks, book club discussions, and my own reflections in my teacher journal. Students were comfortable expressing their feelings from the beginning in their discussions. As you can see above, students began to share their feelings of sympathy more as the sessions went on and ended the book club with creating less. This was due to the amounts of other aesthetic connections made. Another important theme to mention was how students created these feelings of sympathy. All topics the students were discussing that connected to these feelings of sympathy related to poverty issues (homelessness, hunger issues, etc.) and the fact that Bud did not have a family. Poverty issues and no sense of family is one category that Davis, Brown, Rice, and Soeder (2005) determine a multicultural novel. If another type of novel was chosen, this type of aesthetic responses might not have been made based on the times students had feeling of sympathy. Finally, in multicultural literature, it is not always the goal to have students develop feelings of sympathy. In this case, it is an important theme because it led to feelings of empathy which is important in multicultural literature. From the data, students began with sympathetic comments and moved into empathetic. Throughout this study based on the data, I was able to conclude that students can evoke feelings of sympathy when using a multicultural novel in book club discussions.

### **Feelings of Empathy**

Another major theme over the course of the study was an increase in empathy for Bud. Though often confused, sympathy and empathy are different feelings. "To sum up the differences between the most commonly used meanings of these two terms:

sympathy is feeling compassion, sorrow, or pity for the hardships that another person encounters, while empathy is putting yourself in the shoes of another” (Burton,2005). In the first few weeks, students were only displaying feelings of sympathy as seen above. There were simply just statements like “I would not be doing that!” or “I felt sad.” By the final weeks of book club, students were reaching their highest forms of aesthetic response and levels of thinking by being empathetic and hypothesizing ways to help him and putting themselves in his shoes. This was not seen in the first few weeks. When categorizing each aesthetic response into the categories of evoking feelings, relating associations, and synthesizing and hypothesizing, the numbers grew from 0 to upwards of 3 higher level learning aesthetic responses in the final category. Kate was the student who reached the highest form of thinking (hypothesizing and justification) the most often. Kate empathizes and supports her answer about why she would eat the gross food that Bud was served in the book club discussion on November 21.

Izzy: “No, I would eat it because I am starving and at the same time I wouldn’t eat it because it was in a raggedy tin and a raggedy spoon so.”

Kate: “But still there is no reason why you shouldn’t eat it.”

Izzy: “Yeah.”

Kate: “Like you haven’t eaten in five days.”

Izzy: “Yeah.”

Kate: “Do you know what it’s like to be starving? You would eat out of a trash can! It don’t matter. You need to eat!”

Later in the discussion, she talks about what she would do if she was Bud.

Kate: “If I was Bud, I would go to a restaurant and go into their trash and eat that food. They usually throw out all the stuff they don’t use at the end of the night. My mom used to work at a diner and she said that’s what they do.”

In the discussion on December 5, Kate talks about what she would do if she did not have anywhere to sleep.

Gina: “In chapter 5ish, but still, would you be sad if you had to sleep under a Christmas tree like he did?”

Kate: “If I had nowhere to sleep, I feel like under a Christmas tree wouldn’t be that bad. There’s probably presents!”

::laughs::

Jay: “Yeah maybe not at the library though.”

Kate: “If I had nowhere to sleep in the winter, I would go to the train station. I feel like it’s so warm down there when you come down from the street when you do the train in Philly. I would steal some blankets and sleep down there.”

In conjunction with these comments, I talk about Kate’s empathy in my teacher journal. On December 5 during observations I state that “*Kate is making the most intense progress in creating higher level aesthetic responses. She is not afraid to question other students and stand up for her feelings that she believes are correct. She also is starting to put herself in Bud’s shoes.*” (journal, December 5, 2017).

Gina and Ciara also show feelings of empathy in their reader's notebook in the final weeks. Ciara talks about eating the gross food too. She states:

*"Some people don't realize what it's like to be hungry sometimes. Like starving hungry is not a good feeling. So I would eat the food. Because if not I would die. And I don't want to die!"*

Gina justifies her feelings of not wanting to find her father if he was missing. She states:

*"I feel like I would definitely not want to find my dad. Everyone said they would but I feel like if he left, then he doesn't want to be with you. So I am not going to go finding him."*

After connecting my teacher journal thoughts and observations, audio recordings from book club discussions and reader's notebooks for each student, I can conclude that some students grew in their thinking in conclusion of book club by having empathy and putting themselves in his shoes. They realized that supporting their answers to their feelings strengthens their opinions and in turn causes other students to agree with their logic. Empathy is a strong aesthetic response and is important for student's emotional growth. "Empathy serves as a centerpiece for socio-emotional development, as it focuses on students understanding themselves and the perspectives of any number of others" (Catapano, 2016). This growth of empathy helps students develop into 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens. Catapano (2016) also states, "understanding and managing emotions is key to building healthy relationships and achieving academic, career and life goals." Louie (2005) also agrees with the importance of empathy on students. "Empathy development within readers may help them cross cultural gaps to understand perspectives, actions, and

attitudes...” (Louie, 2005). According to the data not all students reached this level, it was a common trend in growth from the first week the final week.

### **Connections to their Lives**

As I initially planned this study, I was concerned that my students would be reluctant to discuss their own lives in connection to the story because of all the intense topics of poverty being discussed. In my teacher journal before the study, I showed concern about my students wanting to discuss deceased family members, foster situations, and times they did not have a meal to eat (journal October 31, 2017). I decided the best way to help them feel comfortable and share only what they wanted to share is to speak briefly about this before students broke into their book club groups. In our second week, we discussed topics that can be hard to share and I shared a time in my life when my grandmother died and how I felt. I also connected it to Bud and how he must have felt missing his mother. I also discussed how if that made me feel uncomfortable I would not share it or share it only in my reader’s notebook. In my teacher journal, I note that a student came up and approached me saying “It felt nice to talk about my mom who had died in my journal. It made me feel better about it. I miss her and it is good to talk about it sometimes.” Essentially, I did not want them to be afraid to make connections and express their feelings in a way that was comfortable for them.

In analysis of data, I saw that students were not reluctant to make connections. Gina made more connections to her life than others and was not afraid to talk about some of the struggles her mom had overcome. In her book club discussion on November 7, the students were discussing the fact that Bud kept getting moved from foster family to



another foster family. Gina states “It reminds me of my mom and I feel bad for her.” She later opens up and talks about her mother getting adopted. “This makes me think of my mom because her parents were doing bad things, like really bad things, like drugs, and she had to leave them. She did not have any grandparents so she was in foster care. She said it sucked and the families were mean sometimes. But she feels better now.” Gina also brings up her mom again in her reader’s notebook on November 15, 2017. She states “My mom was in foster homes. I feel so bad for her that she was in foster care. I want to tell her that it is okay and that I love her.”

In my teacher journal, while writing observations, I state that Gina and Kate, who are close friends, continue to talk about Gina’s mom on the way back to their place in the after school program. They were whispering and looking around making sure no one could hear them. I could tell that Kate was trying to learn more about Gina and questioning about her mom’s hardships in relation to Bud. Gina made a deep personal connection in relation to her mom. I was glad that she shared and that she grew a deeper understanding of her mother’s childhood through this connection.

Jordan also had a personal connection to the main character Bud. Jordan expresses in book club discussions that his mother has passed away. On November 21, Jordan states his connection unprompted.

Kate: “I want to know if he will start finding his father.”

Ciara: “It’s really sad because he lost his parents. That sucks.”

Jordan: “This story makes me think of me because my mom died. I lost my mom.”

Kate: “Are you still living with your family?”

Jordan: “I live with my aunt.”

Kate: “That is a shame. I am sorry.”

Jordan also brings this up in his reader’s notebook. Talking about how he feels like Bud sometimes when he misses his mom. He said that he wishes he would like to be friends with Bud because they have this in common. In my teacher journal after reading Jordan’s reader’s notebook, I talked about how I hope Jordan will feel better after discussing this with people and writing in his notebook (journal, November 23, 2017).

Other students like Jay made smaller connections like falling off their bikes like Bud in November 14 discussions but never elaborated from there. Statements from Jay included “I fell off my bike once too like Bud” and “Yeah I did that once.” Mary talks about eating something nasty once in her journal on November 21, 2017 stating “*I once ate something gross like Bud did. It was sooooo gross.*” Ciara also states in her journal on November 13, 2017, “*I liked when the people were playing music on the porch. When I go on vacation down the shore with my family, we sometimes play guitar on the porch. That is so fun. We dance and sing. My baby cousin loves it.*”

Connections were also made about their lives after further discussion. During discussion on November 14, 2017, Jordan commented, “I remember one time, I saw a train with the door open and I was so scared for whatever was in there.” After this

comment was made, Izzy comments, “I saw a train one time! It was at Christmas! I don’t know if it was real because there was lights all over but that train was going like so fast.” This happens at least 3 times during each discussion. Students build off each other’s connections. During discussion on November 7 2017, Kate talks about how Bud gets beat up by his brother. Students immediately started talking about other fights that they have seen.

Kate: “That was kinda sad when he got beat up though.”

Jay: “Did you see that fight between Isaiah and James in the cafeteria yesterday?”

Kate: “Yeah it was bad.”

Izzy: “I saw a fight last year in the cafeteria and it was so sad. The one boy was like bleeding.”

Jordan: “One time, I was at my cousin’s house and his friends started fighting. It was kinda scary. They were like older so it was bad. But my other cousin started to break it up and it was fine.”

Kate: “Okay, let’s get back to the story.”

Jordan and Gina exemplified students making deep connections to the text from their personal lives. Through reader’s notebooks, book club discussions, and teacher journals, I can conclude that students make aesthetic response through personal connections to a multicultural novel. Jordan connected to his own personal life of dealing with the loss of his mother. Gina made a connection to her mother’s life in where she was

in foster homes and eventually got adopted. Jay and Mary made smaller connections to their own lives with smaller happenings in the story. Izzy and Jordan also made a small connection to an event they witnessed in school and at home. Making connections is significant in comprehension. Students are more likely to relate to the text, grow an interest in the text, and understand the text more because they have experience with the situation. With small guidance, students expressed their personal experiences in a way in which they were most comfortable. This was strongly suggested through their small comments and deep discussions about their life during book clubs.

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

Students showed signs of feeling sympathy, feelings of empathy and making a connection their personal lives. This was something initially that they did not feel comfortable doing in a book club setting. Additionally, they demonstrated the ability to create different types of aesthetic responses using all levels of higher learning. Students felt sympathy towards characters in the story. They were having empathy towards the main character and hypothesizing solutions. Finally, they were able to make connections in their own lives personally on all different levels. Students learn to question each other and defend their responses when given. The data suggests that most students can make aesthetic responses using a multicultural novel in a book club setting.

Feelings of sympathy were collected for a total of 124 times using reader's notebooks and audio book club discussions. Students were creating an aesthetic response by evoking feelings as explained by Rosenblatt (1988). Additionally, students were making connections using their personal lives. Students made connections to their family

lives, experiences in school and experiences outside of the classroom. Students related these associations in the text with their lives to in turn create deeper meaning of the story and understand the character's actions and feelings more based on their experiences. Finally, students had feelings of empathy which was the highest form of thinking. Students problem solved issues of poverty such as homelessness and starvation. Conversations lead to justifications of their empathy and hypothesizing solutions to the different and tough situations the character was in. Also, there was evidence of written empathetic responses in three students' reader's notebooks. Students overall empathetic feelings grew from 0 in the first week of book club to up to 3 times in the final session. The data showed students were creating aesthetic responses through discussions frequently using the multicultural novel book, *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis,1999).

Chapter Five presents the conclusions and implications of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

#### Summary

Moss (2005) states, “Literature has the power to touch the minds and hearts of aesthetic readers and to transform readers who enter into the lives of literary characters.” I believe that the students in my study were transforming and engaging as aesthetic readers while benefiting academically and emotionally. My students made aesthetic connections of empathy, sympathy, and connections to their own lives using the multicultural novel, *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999). Over the six sessions, data showed student stance from sympathetic responses to empathetic responses along with personal connections. Feelings of sympathy are significant because in this case they led to empathetic feelings towards the characters. Students who are empathetic grow emotionally. Hadler (2017) states, “Our research shows that students with higher emotional intelligence are better prepared to manage their emotional lives so that they can focus, learn, and do their best in school.” By incorporating a multicultural book, students created sympathetic and eventually empathetic responses. Hadler (2017) goes on to state, “This isn’t just a nice thing to do; it’s an essential, active skill. It’s foundational to embracing differences, building relationships, gaining a global perspective, conducting richer and deeper analysis, and communicating more effectively.” Moss (2005) additionally states,

“Readers who respond with empathy and compassion make emotional connections, and they imagine beyond the boundaries of their own experience and

gain new insights and perspectives about what it means to be human and about the universality of human experience and the uniqueness of individual human beings.”

Another aesthetic response shown in data was making connections to the text. Good readers think while reading and think beyond the text. Making connections to your personal life is an aesthetic response to grow as a reader and as a person. Moss (2005) states, “Students develop an appreciation for multiple interpretations of literature, with tolerance for and even an expectation of ambiguity; and a need for rethinking one’s initial responses” (p. 44).

At the conclusion of my research, I found that students demonstrated engagement in creating aesthetic responses to a multicultural novel using book club discussions. Academically, students formed aesthetic responses on all levels of learning to improve their cognitive and emotional abilities (Moss, 2005). Aesthetic reading provides students with the knowledge, awareness and compassion to become members of the richly diverse democratic society that makes up our country as well as the global world. Aesthetic readers can debate in a respectful manner, question without offense, problem solve different situations, and relate to others on a personal level. These are all skills that teachers want their students to be equipped with when they step into the world. By supplying students with the opportunities to develop these skills, teachers are building future citizens who can make a positive impact on our world.

## **Limitations**

The major limitation of this study was time constraints. This research was conducted in the fall marking period of school every Tuesday in the after school program. In the fall, there are many half days, days off, and holidays in the school schedule. Schedules had to be moved around but student attendance was not 100% because of these inflections. With that, students were not as focused because of holidays coming up. Additionally, the time frame of the study was very short for a longer book. Students had to read 3 to 4 chapters weekly then be able to discuss them in a 20 minute block. Some weeks this was an easy task but other weeks it was complicated because of the amount of activity in the chapters. This study would have been better if conducted throughout 8 weeks where students read 2 to 3 chapters weekly. If the time frame were expanded, students could have gone deeper into the happenings of each chapter.

Additionally, each student had to do work independently on their own time in order to be successful at the next book club meeting. Students did not realize how important it was to read until the third week in. Students came to book club not read the previous assigned chapters and lost in the conversations. Doing this activity in a classroom where you could remind students daily would be more beneficial.

## **Implications for the Field**

After analyzing the data collected to draw conclusions about fifth grade students using discussion in an after school book club to create aesthetic responses using a multicultural novel, I found that there were certain areas that could be further investigated. One area could be how data would change over a longer period of time. If



students were given more time to analyze each chapter, would they all create higher level learning skills like hypothesizing and justification in one book's time? This would allow a more in depth look at the character and reasons why the different things are happening to him. Teacher researchers who plan to conduct similar research in their classrooms would likely benefit from designing such a study to span an entire school year using various types of multicultural literature. This could also lead into further studies like charity projects to assist students in need or creation of ideas to help others.

Another implication is the emerging of new questions during the study. While outside the scope of my study, I wonder how students gain a classroom community through the use of book clubs. I soon realized that students create meaningful friendships during reading multicultural novels in this type of learning setting. I speculated how I could further extend my study to character education and acknowledgement of others' feelings in the classroom. I also wondered how this study would be in a different grade level setting. Students in high school would benefit immensely in understanding other students' needs and questioning each other.

In summary, the use of multicultural literature in book club discussions creates authentic responses. It is our job as teachers to provide students with the opportunity to create authentic responses and use literature in which they feel a connection based on their cultural needs. By having students discuss, interact, respond, and question, we are creating students who can compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment successfully. By using this method, we are preparing students with the first stepping stone to become a part of society and help them be conscious and accepting of all types of cultures in all walks of life.

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