

Third Graders Aesthetic Response to Multicultural Literature

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In their picture book, *My House Has Stars*, McDonald and Catalanotto (1996), beautifully explain through words and illustrations, the diverse community of learners that exist within a universal setting. The reader has a glimpse of life from the homes of children living in the Philippines, Nepal, Ghana, Japan, the American Southwest, Mongolia, Brazil and Alaska. Still other children tell their stories in words and paintings of their lives as refugees in, *One day we had to run!* (Wilkes 1994). These multicultural text samples provide the diverse populations in our classrooms with an opportunity to identify with literature that relate to their culture. Fuhler (2000) states that in order for a strong connection to be made with a book, every child needs to see themselves reflected in the pages of the book. Cultures should be represented in an authentic manner. Although different cultures are rapidly filling our nation's classrooms, the books that reflect their culture are not necessarily present in the learning environment (p.x).

Au and Asam (1996) share the dilemma of how to bring students of diversity to higher levels of literacy achievement. These students differ from the mainstream in American classrooms in terms of their ethnicity, social class, and primary language(p.199). Au (2001) suggests "culturally responsive instruction" as an aide in assisting culturally diverse students to achieve optimal levels of literacy. "Culturally responsive instruction has the goal of helping students grasp academic concepts through means and content responsive to their cultural values and practices" (p.3). Culturally responsive instruction aims at making learning meaningful which improves students' higher level thinking about text, including their personal response to literature. Au states that "highlighting multicultural (in contrast to mainstream) literature is one way to begin a shift toward culturally responsive content" (p.6).

The effective use of multicultural literature may serve as a bridge for connecting personal experiences of diverse populations with text. Each reader's interpretation of a text is unique. Therefore, reader responses can be examined from five interrelated perspectives which include social, cultural, experiential, textual, and psychological (Beach, 1993). "Quality literature is at the center of this dynamic view of reading. What one reads must ultimately be as important as how one reads" (Lehr & Thompson, 2000, p.480). In some closing remarks regarding evocation and response, Rosenblatt (1993) refers to literature as "an endangered species" (p.22). This metaphor implies a devaluing of the essence of literature, which is the individual, aesthetic response that is inherent in a piece of literature or any art form.

There is limited research that examines young children's aesthetic response to literature. The question as to whether multicultural literature may serve as an affective tool for enhancing children's responses has not been addressed.

Multicultural Literature

How can multicultural be defined in terms of literature? A wide range of cultural differences must be considered in this definition. Elizabeth Martinez views multicultural literature as that which "emphasizes respect for the different historical perspectives and cultures in human society." (Madigan, 1993, p.169). This definition highlights the realization that culture involves a lot more than racial diversity.

Cai and Sims-Bishop(1994) discuss complexities related to defining multicultural literature. The term, derived after the multicultural education movement of the 1960s has assumed various views. Dorsey (1977) and other educators share a view of multicultural literature as a pedagogical term related to curriculum. Yakota (1993) emphasizes three important understandings underlying multicultural literature which include, "defining cultural group", the concept of "culturally conscious literature", and "the importance of inside perspective" (p.186).

Hill and Carson (2001) address considerations and concerns in selecting “culturally conscious” literature. They first suggest selecting literature which represents a culture in their contemporary lifestyles and everyday settings. This is a challenge with much of the multicultural literature available today because many of these books portray a traditional, often times stereotypical view of various cultures. Children need to identify with literature that relates to their lives in order to interpret reality.

Kuperus (1992) conducted an action research project to study the multicultural/multiethnic attitudes and awareness of third graders before and after interacting with various selections of children’s literature. The author’s rationale for use of children’s literature was that in teaching concepts about world communities in social studies, textbooks did not provide different cultural perspectives. The lives and perspectives of people around the world were better represented in children’s literature.

This descriptive study involved 23 third graders, 12 of whom are girls and 11 boys. The group was predominantly white, middle-class with the exception of one Korean American student, and one student born in Nigeria. The students attending this tuition-based private school of approximately 380 students, maintains a stable population. All but two of the students in the study had been in the school since kindergarten.

The sequence of instruction included a general study of communities locally and globally followed by the Chinese and Chinese American study, the Japanese study and finally the Hopi Indian and Native American study. Different modes of instruction were used in each unit of study. Students participated in book discussion groups and read and responded independently in a variety of formats orally and in writing. In addition, students had the opportunity to read from textbooks as well as literature to gain information.

Each unit of study was approximately two to three weeks long. At the end of each, a different form of assessment was used to measure student knowledge. These included surveys, role playing, written responses, interviews, questionnaires, and written tests. An

attitude survey similar to the one administered at the beginning of the study was administered at the conclusion of the Chinese, Hopi Indian and Native American studies. At the conclusion of the three units of study, Kuperus interviewed the students as a class to assess new learning about the three cultural groups.

An analysis of pre and post study data indicated a slight gain in the area of perspective consciousness (+6%). Comments made by students throughout the study revealed a greater awareness and respect for cultural differences. Kuperus noted that often student responses indicated that greater knowledge of the culture studied was gained from the literature. Students also gave favorable feedback about the use of literature as compared to textbooks. Low-level readers appreciated a more comfortable readability. Other students commented that they enjoyed the fiction and nonfiction literature better because the text books were boring in comparison. They also liked the story format that presented some of the information. Students were able “to become empathic with characters and their situations, to reflect on their own frame of reference and perspective consciousness” (p.57).

There were many limitations of this study. First, the participant group was a primarily homogeneous, small sample not particularly representative of a mainstream U.S. population. How would this study affect a larger, more diverse population?

Kuperous (1992) employed a variety of instructional approaches to engage students with the literature. Therefore, one would question whether the students were commenting favorably to the experience or to the literature. An established control group would have been a good idea to isolate these variables. Measuring student attitude was also challenging because of its subjective nature and the possibility that third graders were looking for teacher approval in their responses. This was the first time Kuperous had taught with literature. It might have been more effective had the study been piloted first.

Finally, because the study is action research, conducted by a teacher with one group of children, it should not be generalized to other settings.

Questions in the literature still remain regarding the effects of multicultural literature on improving the literacy skills, self- concept, and multicultural sensitivity of minority populations. In an attempt to look at a minority population other than children of African American background, Liaw (1995) studied the impact of multicultural children's literature on a group of 11 Chinese children. Eight of the 11 children had lived in the United States for three to four years. The other three were born in the United States. The children ranged in age from six to ten years old.

The purpose of the study was to observe the responses of these Chinese children to well-known Chinese stories, and to see if they made a personal connection with the text. Three books were chosen for various purposes including familiar theme, similarity to an American tale and a Chinese text that had not represented the Chinese culture accurately. The children had two experiences with the three texts. In the first, students responded in writing to questions following each text read a loud. In the second, the researcher brought the three stories to students' homes for them to read the text independently, followed by response in writing.

Students demonstrated literal comprehension of the stories through brief summaries and retellings. In many cases, students were able to draw personal relevance to the stories. They responded favorably to illustrations as well. In addition, most of the children attempted to seek a moral from the story, perhaps in an attempt to please their parents. This could be considered a "culturally specific phenomenon" (p.195), although further evidence would be necessary. Limitations of the study were the small group of subjects and the number of books selected representing Chinese literature. In addition, the directed questions constructed by the teacher may have limited student response.

Additional studies have examined the relationship between student culture and literary response. Altieri (1996) conducted a study to determine if the culture or ethnicity portrayed in literature would affect students' aesthetic interaction with the text. Student subjects included a rural community of fifth and seventh graders. White, African

American, and Hispanic students were selected. Twelve short stories from literature anthologies, representative of these cultures were chosen. Students responded freely to the stories.

Altieri developed an aesthetic response scale to measure levels of aesthetic response. A quantitative analysis identified various patterns found in response. However, text reflecting students' cultures had no apparent affect on level of aesthetic response. These findings were not consistent with previous research, which had shown "the important role ethnicity had on a reader's comprehension" (p.245). These previous studies dealt with very diverse cultural groups who lived the majority of their lives outside of the United States. In contrast, the students in this study lived their entire lives in the United States. In addition, the nature of the stories in the anthology may have contained more familiar content than authentic text written from a specific cultural perspective. A qualitative research component may have provided greater insight into the connection of specific readers with specific texts. This study certainly added to numerous other studies regarding the benefits of using multicultural literature with students to enhance their literary experience.

Aesthetic Response

Theory on reader-response describes reading as a complex process, which involves the relationship between the reader, the text and the context. Rosenblatt's theory of response (1985), describes two stances a reader may take. One is an efferent stance in response to informational text and the other is an aesthetic stance in which the reader makes personal connections to a literary text. This aesthetic response is important because it brings the reader to a higher level of understanding than the efferent response.

In another study, Altieri (1995) examined the aesthetic responses of first grade students through oral and pictorial response. This study attempted to extend the research on aesthetic response. In addition, a comparison of written and oral/pictorial response was explored. A class of 22 first grade, Caucasian, middle class students were the subjects. The teacher selected six age appropriate picture books, three of which were chosen for

written response and the other three for oral/pictorial response. Responses were collected on three occasions over a three-month period.

An aesthetic response scale used in Altieri's previous study of fifth and seventh graders was used to analyze the responses. The results indicated that aesthetic response did improve over a three-month period. The written and oral/pictorial responses demonstrated valid growth, although in comparison, the overall aesthetic value of the oral responses was greater than the written responses.

Reading responses can be an important tool in evaluating students' understanding of text, in fact, research shows higher aesthetic response correlates to higher understanding of text (Cox & Many 1992a; Many, 1991). Samione, (2000) conducted a study to examine the relationship between students' reading ability while reading level-appropriate literature with their level of aesthetic response. The participants in this study were 28 fifth graders, 14 boys and 14 girls. There was little cultural or economic diversity and a wide range of ability among the 28 students in the area of reading and writing. Reading levels ranged from second through seventh grade. All students worked in the same classroom with the same teacher. Student reading levels were obtained using a QRI –II (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) prior to placing them in their level-appropriate books. Observational assessments from the fourth grade teachers as well as student read alouds were also used to determine book level accuracy.

Each student read three books during the six-month data collection period. Children began with historical fiction chapter books with a Native American theme followed by contemporary realistic fiction books with a personal exploration theme. The third group of chapter books had a fantasy genre. To encourage aesthetic response, students could choose their book from several choices pre-selected by the teacher.

An assessment tool measured aesthetic response from the lowest level one to the highest level four. To strengthen validity, several responses were scored by more than one judge. Although results of the study demonstrated that all students were capable of making

aesthetic responses at a mean score of 2.92, there was a significant relationship between students' reading levels and levels of aesthetic responses. Students with higher reading levels had higher level aesthetic responses than students of lower reading ability. Although the lower ability students' scores were attributed for the most part to a focus on words and their meanings rather than higher level connections related to self and other text, it was suggested that the limited book choices and the quality of the literature available to these lower level readers could have had an impact on their responses.

Summary

In each of the studies reviewed, various issues related to the use of multicultural text and response were explored. Text selected in each study was not necessarily multicultural due to a misunderstanding as to what constitutes authenticity in multicultural text, the manner in which cultures are portrayed. Improper use of this text can actually contribute to stereotypes instead of cultural understandings, which stress variability within groups. Lehr & Thompson (2000) confirm the need for further research in this area when they state, "A limited number of reader response studies informs the wider educational community as to children's responses to and the possibilities for infusing the curriculum with well- written multicultural titles" (p.481).

Ironically, the use of stories in our society is very often to teach efferent reading skills. This troubling and confusing issue is perhaps rationale for the limited amount of research on children's response to text. This study will extend the research in this area by examining third graders aesthetic response to text, specifically multicultural literature.

Method

Participants

Children in this study attend an elementary school in the central area of Baltimore County Maryland. The total enrollment for the 2000-2001 school year, was 420 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. There were 63 third graders involved in the study from all three third grade classrooms. The socioeconomic level of these students ranged from middle to upper income. Only 5% participated in the free and reduced lunch program.

The ethnic composition consisted of 8% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 5% African American, 3% Middle Eastern, and 82% Caucasian. This population is a better representation of many U.S. classrooms than previous studies.

At the beginning of the year, the third-grade teachers had organized the students into three classrooms according to reading ability. In this study, we have labeled the groups, 'Above Average', 'Average', and 'Low Average'. The teachers work as a team to insure that all students meet the expectations of the curriculum, while selecting text at the appropriate reading levels to assure optimal success from students.

Materials

Texts, for this study were selected based on criteria suggested in the research on multicultural literature. (Hill & Carson, 2001). One of these criteria is an authentic representation of a cultural group in their contemporary lifestyles and everyday settings.

The multicultural text set selected, *In Vann's Classroom* (Nicholas, 1994) includes 11 books that were written about self, family and friends. An analysis indicated that each of the text met the criteria indicative of effective multicultural text. All of the books in the text set portrayed a particular cultural group, which was evident in the characters' appearance with the exception of *Flocks and Feathers* in which the characters were birds. In addition, a contemporary lifestyle and or everyday setting was apparent in each book (see Table 1).

Table 1*Multicultural Text Criteria*

Text	Contemporary Lifestyle	Everyday Setting
<i>Swivel Neck</i>	bike riding	pizza shop; movie theater
<i>Hard Wear</i>	basketball	neighborhood
<i>Under the Chinaberry Tree</i>	cheerleaders	park
<i>When Leslie Wears a Crown</i>	*	home; school
<i>Flocks and Feathers</i>	NE	NE
<i>Bar-B-Ques and Zs</i>	bar-b-que	backyard
<i>Fredericka's Name</i>	school projects	school
<i>Looking from the Underside</i>	NE	home
<i>Terribly Terrific Tease</i>	bicycles, skateboards	neighborhood
<i>Whose Eyes</i>	video games	neighborhood
<i>If I Volunteered</i>	volunteers	school

* Ceremonial dress portrayed

NE = Not Evident

In the book, *When Leslie Wears a Crown*, there was an element of traditional culture portrayed in the African American ceremonial dress. However, the book stated that this dress was for special occasions, which could be associated with the contemporary lifestyle of African Americans.

My House has Stars was selected because of its vivid portrayal of the diverse lifestyle of children around the world presented in short story format. Thus, it provided a perfect preface to the multicultural text set selected for students to use independently in the study. Further, the readability of this text made it conducive to read aloud, therefore creating an excellent text for teachers to use as a model with students.

A second criteria addresses “quality literature” (Lehr & Thompson, 2000) as it relates to narrative text comprehension. Lucariello (1990) describes two essential characteristics of narratives, which include a pentadic imbalance based on Burke’s “Pentad”(1969) and consciousness of the protagonist in the story. She states, “Good story hinges on breach or departure from expectation or conventionality. In her work, these two narrative elements demonstrated importance in more reflective responses, as opposed to literal retellings. Each of the 11 text included in the text-set was analyzed with respect to conscious elements as well as pentadic imbalance as evidenced in a breach of canonical state. (see Table 2).

Table 2

Quality Narrative Criteria

Text	Consciousness	Breach
<i>Swivel Neck</i>	I wish Manuel could swivel...	a swivel neck
<i>Hard Wear</i>	...I do not like having to dress like he does.	wearing hardware
<i>Under the Chinaberry Tree</i>	I was very proud to be able to read to daddy.	NE
<i>When Leslie Wears a Crown</i>	...I like it better when Leslie wears her crown.	NE

<i>Flocks and Feathers</i>	I like that saying about flocking together.	bird characters
<i>Bar-B-Ques and Zs</i>	I sit back and think how funny this all looks to me.	highlighted B and Z words
<i>Fredericka's Name</i>	Fredericka wanted to use a nickname.	NE
<i>Looking from the Underside</i>	I can appreciate the way he takes care of himself.	words written to illustrate meaning
<i>Terribly Terrific Tease</i>	Bubba thinks he knows everything.	NE
<i>Whose Eyes?</i>	I sure hope she can stop him.	unknown eyes on each page
<i>If I Volunteered</i>	Kids like it when people know their names.	NE

NE=Not Evident

The second grade readability was also a consideration when selecting text so that all the participants could read the books independently. In addition, the brief, easy to read stories leant themselves nicely to the reading workshop format implemented.

Response tasks, A response form accompanied each text (see Figure 1).

Figure 1Swivel Neck

By Evangeline Nicholas

BEFORE READING

What do you think the word swivel means?

Why would people want to swivel their necks?

*Purpose: to discover how Swivel Neck got his nickname and what he might be able to do if he had a real swivel neck.

AFTER READING

1. Would you wish for a swivel neck?

Yes

No

Explain your answer.

2. List an advantage and disadvantage of having a super ability.

AT HOME

Ask family members about nicknames they had when they were children. Find out the story behind the nickname.

The structure of the response form was consistent for each text, designed to assist students with the before, during, and after reading thought process of proficient readers. Questions in the “Before Reading” section of the form access students’ prior knowledge of issues related to text content. The “Purpose” section provides the reader with a thought to ponder while reading the story. The “After Reading” section engages the student in thoughts, which may connect the story with personal experiences. Finally, an “At Home” section was added to enable students to share ideas in the texts with their families. This task was designed to examine traditions related to students’ own culture in an attempt to establish understandings that could be shared with their peers.

Students recorded their thoughts regarding each text in a journal at the conclusion of each reading workshop session. This was not a guided response. Students were encouraged to write whatever they desired. Several workshop mini-lessons were focused on encouraging elaboration of response.

Procedure

Students in each of the three classrooms participated in the reading workshop for a two week period. Atwell (1987) introduced Reading Workshop as an alternative mode to traditional reading instruction. Originally developed for middle school students, the model has been widely modified to meet the needs of students at the elementary school

level. The five main components of the workshop include a sharing time, a mini lesson, a state-of-the-class discussion, self-selected reading and response, and sharing time (Reutzel & Cooter, 1991,p.549). The most important benefits of this instructional model are the self-selection of text and the large amount of time students are actively engaged in reading. Teachers have experienced organizational problems implementing this model. Therefore, within the model employed in this study several structural strategies were infused to assist students with independence utilizing workshop procedures (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Reader's Workshop

1. Choose a book
2. Take a paper from the folder with the same name as the book you chose.
3. Answer the "Before Reading" question(s).
4. Read the "Purpose."
5. Read the book
6. Answer the "After Reading" question(s).
7. Get together with your group and share the answers.
8. Discuss with your group what you liked about the book.
9. Write in your journal. Tell me how you liked the book.
10. When you go home, discuss the "At Home" section with your parents or a family member.

In all three classrooms the teacher introduced the workshop model by reading *My House Has Stars* (1996). Teachers followed the reading with a class discussion. Possible responses to text were then entertained through the discussion. Following this lesson related to text response, succeeding lessons guided students through workshop

procedures, which included self-selection of text, use of the response form, journal format, and suggestions for small group discussions.

Students selected one of the 11 books each day. Multiple copies of each text provided small, varied groups for students to engage in intimate discussions with different students. Throughout each session, one to two additional educators in addition to the classroom teacher circulated among the groups to assist students with procedures and to observe response behaviors. This type of informal conferencing was crucial in facilitating appropriate next steps that were provided in subsequent mini-lessons.

At the conclusion of each day's reading and response period, small groups and individuals had an opportunity to share ideas with the whole class.

Scoring responses, To increase the intra-rater reliability of the study, each of the four teachers in the study evaluated a subset of the journal entries using Altieri's Levels of Aesthetic Response scale. Scores were 98% consistent, providing reliable data. Figure 3 presents a description of expected response at each of the six levels. Aesthetic response was measured across books for each class. The homogeneous nature of each class with respect to reading aptitude provided an analysis of the relationship between aesthetic involvement and ability.

Figure 3

Altieri's Levels of Aesthetic Response

Journals were scored using a 6 point scale developed by Altieri(1996).

_Level 1- Responses are vague.

_Level 2- Certain characters or events are reinforced, but the reader does not connect the object or thing to an aesthetic element.

_Level 3-Story experience is supported; retelling.

_Level 4-Reader discusses events that are important to the reader.

_Level 5- Reader discusses events from the story that are personally relevant and tells why these associations are made.

_Level 6- Response from the text and personal experience are woven together.

*Three scorers were used to ensure reliability.

Although, the students' reactions and engagement in the reading workshop was positive overall, we were aware of the limited written language ability of students at this level as well as the novelty of this approach to reading and responding to text. Therefore, we utilized students' oral responses to text as another measure to assist in validating our results.

Results

Overview

Field notes were collected throughout the study. Each day, teachers observed the small discussion groups of students and took notes on student responses to text and to each other. Notes were also taken during the large group discussion at the conclusion of the study. Teachers got together to share their notes, compare, and interpret themes throughout. The results of these observations are an important component in the results of this study.

Ability

The ability to respond aesthetically to text is an indication that the reader has gone beyond the superficial connection with text. This desirable engagement with text is often related to a student's reading ability. Therefore it was important to examine this expectation. The majority of responses centered at level 3 and 4. The "lower" performing group had 70% of their responses within the first three levels of response, lacking the

elaboration of thought at the levels 4-6. The “high” performing group exceeded the other two groups overall in levels 1-3, but then fell behind the “middle” group at levels 4-6. However, 58% of the midline responses were generated from the “middle” achievement group, whose scores exceeded the “high” group at levels 4 and 5. The overall means of each of the groups indicates that there was no significant relationship between student ability and level of aesthetic response (see Table 3).

Table 3

Aesthetic Response According to Text (M)

Text	Low Average	Average	High Average
<i>Swivel Neck</i>	2	3	3
<i>Hard Wear</i>	2	3	3
<i>Under the Chinaberry Tree</i>	2	3	2
<i>When Leslie Wears a Crown</i>	2	3	3
<i>Flocks and Feathers</i>	3	3	3
<i>Bar-B-Ques and Zs</i>	2	3	2
<i>Fredericka’s Name</i>	2	2	2
<i>Looking from the Underside</i>	3	5	2
<i>Terribly Terrific Tease</i>	1	3	3

<i>Whose Eyes?</i>	2	3	3
<i>If I Volunteered</i>	1	3	2
<hr/>			
– X	2.00	3.00	2.50

Aesthetic Response According to Text

An individual text analysis was done to determine the effect of each multicultural text on the aesthetic response of students in all three ability groups. A mean score was obtained on the aesthetic responses for each text (see Table 3). Across texts, the mean score of the ‘Low Average’ group, 2.00 was lower than the ‘Average’ group, 3.00 and the ‘Above Average’ group, 2.50. However, the ‘Average’ group had more high- level responses than the ‘Above Average’ group. However, means vary for individual texts.

Subsequently, student text preference and elements of text were important to analyze.

Student Text Selection

An analysis of students’ text selection was done to determine additional information about individual text that was not apparent through student response (see Table 4).

Table 4

Student Text Selection (%)

Text	Low Average	Average	High Average
<i>Swivel Neck</i>	70.6	54.5	64.0
<i>Hard Wear</i>	76.5	50.0	52.0

<i>Under the Chinaberry Tree</i>	17.6	22.7	32.0
<i>When Leslie Wears a Crown</i>	35.3	36.4	24.0
<i>Flocks and Feathers</i>	29.4	27.3	36.0
<i>Bar-B-Ques and Zs</i>	47.1	63.6	80.0
<i>Fredericka's Name</i>	17.6	22.7	28.0
<i>Looking from the Underside</i>	64.7	36.4	48.0
<i>Terribly Terrific Tease</i>	29.4	40.9	44.0
<i>Whose Eyes?</i>	52.9	36.4	44.0
<i>If I Volunteered</i>	23.5	36.4	56.0

There were a few text, that appeared to receive the greatest percent of student selection in all three ability groups; *Swivel Neck*, *Hard Wear*, and *Bar-B-Ques and Zs*. The multicultural text elements are no different than the other text in the collection. However, out of all the text, a breach of canonical state is greatest in each of these texts.

The hard wear worn by the characters in *Hard Wear*, the highlighted letters of text in *Bar-B-Ques and Zs*, and the ability of the character to swivel his neck in *Swivel Neck* are quite unusual, unexpected story elements.

Aesthetic Oral Responses

Altieri's study of fifth and seventh graders found growth in aesthetic response as demonstrated pervasively through students' oral response rather than their written responses (Altieri, 1995). This result was related to preconceived expectations of the teachers with regard to written expression. We observed a similar trend after close examination of the journal responses of the third graders in our study. Field notes of discussions throughout the reading workshops in all three classrooms confirmed some aesthetic responses, which had not been relayed in students' written responses.

The functions of language in the classroom have been explored by many researchers because of the implications for teaching and learning. Halliday (1978), defined language in terms of deriving meaning through communication in various social situations. He identified seven functions, which include basic communicative purposes such as expressing basic needs to more applicable forms of communication, which relay information to others. The small group discussions that were an essential component of the readers' workshop employed in this study encouraged student expression that entered into the language functions implied in Halliday's research. Figures 4 and 5 portray samples from our field notes of student discussions with each of the ten books that demonstrate the "textual" function of language as described by Halliday and relate to theory on aesthetic response (Rosenblatt, 1993).

Figure 4

Aesthetic Oral Response Samples

When Leslie Wears a Crown

- I liked it because it talks about what people all over the world wear on their heads.
- I like the book because my name is in the title.

- The book made me sad because it reminds me of my great, great grandmother who was an Indian and wore a headdress.

Under the Chinaberry Tree

- It was a good book. It's like me because my grandfather had a bench under a pine tree. He read to me, and we wrote books together under the tree.
- I liked it. It reminded me of my friend and I sitting on her steps or my steps talking to each other.
- I liked it because it's like a part of another person's life and what is special to her.

Swivel Neck

- It reminds me when my brother is doing something and my other brother comes in being nosy. He is always in everyone else's business.
- It reminds me of my brother. He is so tall that he can see things I can't see.
- I'm like Manuel. I always look around at stuff. I would love to have a swivel neck so that I can look better.

Hard Wear

- I like it because it shows how alike they are and he wants to be a little different.
- It reminds me when my little brother always copies off of me.
- It reminds me of me because I like to dress like my sister.

Fredricka's Name

- It reminds me of my real name. I don't like to write my whole name. people say that I will like it when I'm older, but right now I don't like it.
- I think it was weird that she put made up names. My family calls me different names, but I only use my real name.
- I don't like the book because people call me "Eddie the Belly". I Sometimes want to change my name.

Figure 5

Aesthetic Oral Response

Samples

Flocks and Feathers

- I liked the book because I like being with other groups. How would you get to meet people different from you?
- I didn't like it when you put people in groups. It's not fair. They might get interested if you include all different kinds of birds.
- I didn't like the book because no one wanted to be with someone different.

BarB Ques and Z's

- It's kind of like my family during the holidays. All the boys have to unzip their zippers because they are full.
- It reminds me of my grandfather's death anniversary. We all sit around talking and remembering him and then the kids play.
- I like when they get a quarter from their uncle like my relatives do.

Terrible Terrific Tease

- Bubba is like my cousin Matthew who always teases me at my parties.
- I liked it because it reminded me of my brother who made fun of my hat, but then he made me a pizza when he got home.
- It reminds me of my sister. I won't let anyone else tease her, but I tease her a lot.

Looking

- My friend has a cousin who joked about being blind. He did become blind. He can't do things like he used to do.
- I like the book because I can see how it feels to be blind.
- I liked the book because it was good to show kids what it's like to be blind. I think it's really sad. Kids who are blind can get hurt.

If I Volunteered

- It reminds me when sometimes at dinner I'm the only one that helps my brother.
- It reminds me of my dad, who volunteers at school, and he always brings his smile.
- It reminds me a lot of my friends in class. Whenever I am sad they try to help me.

Whose Eyes

- It reminds me of my little sister who looks up to me too.
- It reminds me of me. I look up to my brother Andy. I want to be like him.
- I like watching my cousin. She is good at everything. I wanted to be just like her.

After all three classes had participated in the reading workshop, we organized an informal discussion for students to share their thoughts on the experience of participating in the readers' workshop and their views related to the multicultural books. This large group discussion encouraged conversations that were not necessarily evident in the small group discussions. We learned additional information related to the books as well as the process of the reading workshop.

Discussion

Extending from the acknowledged view of quality literature as pivotal to the dynamic nature of reading, this study proposed to examine possible relationships between multicultural text and students' aesthetic response. The third grade students involved in this study were able to make aesthetic responses to the multicultural text they read. In fact, two-thirds of the students constructed elaborate written responses related to the text as demonstrated by the levels of response achieved according to Altieri's Levels of Aesthetic Response scale. Students responded favorably to the familiar backgrounds they were able to relate to in the text.

The level of aesthetic response was not dependent upon the student's reading ability. In fact, the average performing students reached a higher level of aesthetic response than the

above average students. One pattern observed across journal responses was the higher ability students focused on word choice and editing skills in their responses rather than the content of their writing. Students overall demonstrated certain expectations in their writing. They were more guarded in their writing than in their oral conversations. Students were anxious to share their ideas orally and discussions were extensive.

The reading workshop provided an informal atmosphere to read and respond to literature. Students enjoyed choosing their own book each day. The experience of sharing ideas with different students each day in a small group discussion was also favorable. Recurring comments from students during our concluding, whole group discussion include, "I liked getting into groups to talk about things we didn't know".

"You can tell what other people think." "We made friendships when we shared our books." "We got to know our classmates better." And finally, "I like the 'At Home' part because you got to learn about other people's families." When we asked students what they thought of the reading workshop compared to other reading instruction they had experienced, they stated, "There were no right or wrong answers." They also shared positive statements about the amount of time they were able to read and discuss the books in the reading workshop.

In Conclusion

The implementation of multicultural text to enhance aesthetic response was evident with the third graders in our study. Students were able to make an array of connections related to personal experiences. In addition, two elements essential to quality narrative, including consciousness and pentadic imbalance had an effect on student selection of text. The level of aesthetic response was not dependent on students' reading ability in this study. This data confirms research that supports the capability of all readers to relate text to personal experiences.

The reading workshop model served as a supportive arena for students to explore ideas related to text. Organizational structures that were added assisted students in achieving independence throughout the workshop. Students were empowered with the ownership of

learning that stemmed from the personal choices as they read and responded to literature they selected. Teachers played an integral role in modeling procedures and response to create natural transitions for students. “Culturally responsive instruction” (Au, 2001) was evident as students explored culture through authentic text, within a collaborative, respectful, classroom community created through the reading workshop. Implications gathered from this study maintain the importance of effective instructional strategies to enhance optimal growth from students as they acquire literate behaviors within a diverse community of learners.

Future research should examine further written response to text versus oral response at various age levels and in varied instructional settings. In this study it was evident that students were able to respond at higher aesthetic level in their oral responses than in written response. There is a question as to whether the rich discussions stemming from the reading workshop format enhanced the oral responses of the students. In addition, there is question as to whether teachers’ purposes for writing or prior expectations in technical aspects of student writing stifled the written responses in this study. Finally, there is need for further investigation, which examines individual components of quality literature and the effect of each these components on aesthetic response of the reader.

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