

VOICES AND EMPOWERMENT IN A DEMOCRATICALLY-CONSTRUCTED
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
STUDY OF OUR BELIEFS

by

ROBERT PATRICK ROGAN

(Under the Direction of STACEY NEUHARTH-PRITCHETT)

ABSTRACT

Democratic education is a learning approach that encourages and respects the voices of students. Unfortunately, much of the research on student empowerment and democratic education has utilized antiquated techniques that were researcher driven and disempowering to the objects of their study, the children. The current research incorporated a participatory action design to study the impact democratic education would have on the beliefs of three elementary age students. As part of the process, the students were involved in almost every facet of the research process. As co-researchers, they had dual roles as participants and researchers in the study of their own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. During the process, we decided to utilize reflexive photographic narratives, kinetic drawings, and projective interviews as our primary sources of data because we believed that they are situated within the control of those being studied, instead of those doing the studying. The findings suggested that democratic education is a viable alternative to the current traditionally-based teaching approaches current utilized in many schools. The findings also indicated that the current methodological approaches for data collection often result in misinterpretations of the student's beliefs.

INDEX WORDS: Democratic Education, Student Beliefs, Kinetic Drawings, Reflexive Photographic Narratives, Student Empowerment, Image-based Research, Semiotics, Critical Theory, Social Constructivism, Projective Technique Interviews, Protocol Analysis, Narrative Inquiry, Participatory Action Research

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Robert Frost (1874–1963). Mountain Interval. 1920.

1. The Road Not Taken

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I would like to acknowledge all of the people who, in their own extraordinary way, helped me discover my own path towards fulfillment.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Purpose of Study	4
Research Questions	5
Theoretical Framework	5
2 Review of Literature	10
History of Power from a Critical Theoretical Perspective	10
Power in the Classroom.....	18
Democratic Education in the Classroom	20
Review of Research on Student Beliefs	28
Review of Research on Semiotics	34
3 Research Design.....	40
Data Sources.....	44
Student Belief's Scales.....	44
Student and Teacher Led Interviews	46
Participants' Reflective Photographic Narratives	53
Primary Researcher Field Notes.....	55

	Context of the Study.....	55
	Participants in the Study.....	57
	Data Analysis	57
	The Voices of Our Research	60
4	One Teacher’s Story of Action in the Classroom.....	64
	My Classroom Before Democratic Education.....	72
	Say ‘Hello’ to Democratic Education	74
	A Reversal of Roles, Part 1	82
	My Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom.....	103
	Projective Interview of a Nondemocratic Classroom Drawing.....	106
	A Reversal of Roles, Part 2	109
	My Drawing of a Democratic Classroom.....	121
	Projective Drawing: What I Thought They Said, Part 2	126
5	Joey’s Story.....	132
	How Joey Became a Research Participant	133
	Joey’s Initial Thoughts about Democracy	136
	Joey’s First Projective Interview	138
	Joey’s Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom.....	143
	Joey’s Second Projective Interview	146
	Joey’s Drawing of a Democratic Classroom.....	155
	Joey’s Projective Interview of his Democratic Classroom Drawing	158
	Joey’s Reflective Photographic Narrative	162
	Joey’s Responses on the Posttest.....	167

6	Zoey’s Story	169
	How Zoey Became a Research Participant	170
	Zoey’s Initial Beliefs about Democracy.....	174
	Zoey’s First Projective Interview	176
	Zoey’s Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom.....	185
	Zoey’s Second Projective Interview.....	188
	Zoey’s Drawing of a Democratic Classroom.....	197
	Zoey’s Projective Interview of her Democratic Classroom Drawing	201
	Zoey’s Reflective Photographic Narrative	208
	Zoey’s Responses on the Posttest.....	212
7	Chloe’s Story	214
	How Chloe Became a Research Participant	216
	Chloe’s Initial Beliefs about Democracy	219
	Chloe’s First Projective Interview.....	220
	Chloe’s Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom.....	225
	Chloe’s Second Projective Interview	228
	Chloe’s Drawing of a Democratic Classroom.....	233
	Chloe’s Projective Interview of his Democratic Classroom Drawing	237
	Chloe’s Reflective Photographic Narrative.....	243
	Chloe’s Responses on the Posttest	245
8	Summation and Conclusion	246
	Summation and Conclusions about Joey	246
	Summation and Conclusions about Zoey	251

Summation and Conclusions about Chloe	256
Commonalities between Joey, Zoey, and Chloe	262
Limitations on the Research.....	265
Implications for Future Research.....	267
REFERENCES	273
APPENDICES	
A Parent and Student Consent Forms	286
B Democratic Education Scales and Attribute Chart	289

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Attributes and descriptors for Preferred/Perceived Beliefs Scale.....	285
Table 2: Attributes and Characteristics of Democratic Education.....	286

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future. (George Bernard Shaw).”

For, just as a flame is nurtured by the presence of life sustaining oxygen, our futures are fostered, not by our own accomplishments, but by the unforeseen aspirations of children. As children traverse the world of possibilities, we as fellow learners, become the compasses that provide guidance on their journeys. As children ascend the mountains in search of personal fulfillment, obstacles will inevitably be placed in their way. During these encounters, we, as fellow travelers, methodically scrounge through our packs hoping to unearth the academic tools necessary to resolve the issues confronting them, thus assuring that the journey (the process) continues. For the reward isn't concealed in isolation like a pirate's treasure on a long forgotten beach, it continually immerses us in its warm embrace throughout the adventure of learning itself. Isaac Newton reminds us of the importance of children when he states, “If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants.” I, too, have stood on the diminutive shoulders of giants, my children, my students, and have been captivated by what they have taught me. For without the children, I would still be wandering the wastelands of humanity searching for a meaning and purpose to my life. They have taught me that the worth of an individual isn't measured by titles or possessions, but by the nature and quality of the relationships you have with others. So when I am asked about the purpose, the passion of

my study, I merely have to look into the many faces of the future that encompass my other family, the classroom. For like a loving parent, I have dreams for these children, but they have nothing to do with success, money, or fame. I long for them to be seen for who they really are, for what they could be, not by the characteristics society transposes on them as inconsequential wards of the state. My hope, my aspiration, my vision for this study is that it awakens the childhood memories in all of us when we wanted so much to prove ourselves, to bellow out for all to hear, “I can do it if you will only hear my voice and give me a chance.”

Statement of the Problem

According to Dewey (1916), “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. Democracy is about living together and education is an essential component of a democracy.” (pg. 87) Goodlad (2001) suggests that education is like the thermometer to the physician for it is the “institution in which democracy becomes conscious of itself.” Therefore the cultivation or demise of the democratic ideal in society is directly correlated with the encounters, interactions, and experiences with democracy in the classroom.

Unfortunately, “today’s classrooms and schools represent a ‘culture of power’ to the extent that they mirror unjust social relations existing in the larger society” (Jennings, Okeefe, and Shamlin, 1999, p. 12). The hopes and promises of a democratic future are reliant on a generation of students who are learning to “walk the talk” (Glickman, 1998, pg.19) of discrimination and exclusion through their schooling experiences. Newell and Buchen (2004) believe that this may be explained by the naturalizing effect of “the past

which can become so urgent, powerful, and tenacious that it arrogantly displaces or empties the future of its unique content. Or the momentum of continuity is so reassuring that it appears to hide or trivialize” (p. 1) the oppressive practices that permeate throughout society.

“What untapped brilliance has remained dormant because young people didn’t know what they might become? Potential is a mystery (Kohl, 1994, p. 84)” that can only be actualized in the next generation if they are given the implements necessary to eradicate the malignancies of the educational system. One such malignancy, according to Apple (1996) involves the misguided belief in the objectivity of a national curriculum. He believes that “it must constantly subjectify itself. That is, it must acknowledge its own roots in the culture, history, and social interests out of which it arose. Accordingly, it will homogenize neither this culture, history, and social interest, nor the students. The same treatment by sex, race and ethnicity, or class is not the same at all (pg. 33).” Freire (1970) believed that there must be a reconciliation of the hypocrisy of the “teacher-student contradiction. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator....to remove the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.” (pg. 62)

According to Shor (1992) the remedy for the parasitic practices that have engulfed education entails the infusion of “critical-democratic pedagogies for self and social change....a student-centered program for democracy in school and society that defines individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other.” (pg. 15) Beane (1997) notes that society must “have faith in

the capacity of people (students) to work out intelligent solutions to issues that face them” (pg. 91) for “if schools are really supposed to play a crucial role in maintaining and extending the democratic way of life” (pg. 92) they must have the freedom to inquire and act upon the issues that impact their lives. With the collaboration of my students in this participatory action research study, we hope to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences democratic practices have on our beliefs about power and how it materializes within our classroom. We hope to create spaces for all of us to grow and change as students, teachers, and citizens.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of one fifth grade teacher and three of his students as they came to terms with the construction of and sharing of power in a democratically situated classroom. Of particular significance, was the desire of the collaborators to find an empirical mechanism that adequately deciphers and communicates our implicit beliefs about power and democracy in the schooling experience. Cognizant of the nature of the study and the relationships espoused by democratic ideals, all members of the study were involved in the design of the study as well as the data collection process. The main data collection techniques included student and teacher-led projection technique interviews, student- and teacher-generated reflexive photographic narratives, protocol analysis of narratives and drawing construction, and student- and teacher-fashioned kinetic drawings of the classroom setting, characters, and plot.

Research Questions

The essential question that embodies this research is, “*How does the implementation of democratic ideals impact the researchers’ beliefs about power and democracy in the classroom?*”

The following questions were utilized to provide the necessary supplemental information required to adequately respond to the essential question of the research:

1. How are the students’ and teacher’s beliefs about power and democracy manifested in their questions and responses during projection technique interviews?
2. What effect, if any, did the implementation of democratic ideals have on the students’ and teacher’s beliefs about power in the classroom?
3. What symbols are utilized by the participant researchers’ kinetic drawings that communicate their beliefs about power and democracy in the classroom?
4. What do the students’ and teacher’s narrative plots, as revealed in their construction of reflexive photographic narratives indicate about their beliefs about power in a democratic classroom?

Theoretical Framework

According to Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Patton, 1990), when comparing the observations of the human, the natural, and the physical world, one concludes that there are obvious differential human experiences that preclude researchers from utilizing preexisting inquiry techniques. Social constructivism addresses this disparity when it suggests that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent

upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).” Oldfather (1999) defines social constructivism as “a particular view of knowledge, a view of how we come to know...within a specific socio-cultural context.” (pg. 8) “All reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed. There is no exception...the chair may exist as a phenomenal object regardless of whether any consciousness is aware of its existence. It exists as a chair, however, only if conscious beings construe it as a chair. As a chair, it too is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life (Crotty, 1998, p. 54).”

Dewey (1916) noted the social nature of human interactions necessitates a connectedness with others that precludes human beings from “performing his own activities without taking the activities of others into account. For they are the indispensable conditions of the realizations of his tendencies.” (pg. 12) Blumer (1969) suggested that social interaction is a formative process involving humans as active agents in the directing, checking, bending, and transforming of their lines of action in response to the actions of others within a particular environmental context. “It makes us conscious of the diversity and difference in humanity...it rightly cautions us against assuming that ‘we’ (whoever ‘we’ are) can legitimately speak on behalf of ‘them’ (whoever ‘them’ are).” (pg. 27) This recognition of difference and diversity is in general a positive feature, since it rightly reminds us that when our egocentric communications feebly attempt to formulate absolute truths or explanations about human interaction, all that is truly accomplished are transpositional framings of our worldviews on others (Parker, 2000). This is suggestive of the notion of “ontological relativism, which holds that all tenable

statements about existence depend on a world view, and no worldview, is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world (Patton, 1990, p. 97).” Hence, the positivistic notions of a value free knowledge sterilized by an experimental design is both incomprehensible and ludicrous at the same time.

Goffman (1974) advocated that these worldviews or frameworks are the primary sense-making instruments utilized by humans when trying to confer meaning upon experiences. These frameworks are often undefineable by the subject yet they assist us in selecting what we acknowledge and what we dismiss. Through a process of selective appraisal of action, humans engage in a decision making process that while appearing inherently individual, is often predicated on the powers of the social situations around the subject. Cooley (1998) noted that the notion of “a separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals. The real thing is Human Life, which may be considered either in an individual aspect or in a social, that is to say a general, aspect, but is always, as a matter of fact, both individual and general. In other words, ‘society’ and ‘individuals’ do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing...” (pg.103) Burr (1995) stated that “social constructivism...regards as the proper focus of our enquiry the social practices engaged in by people, and their interactions with each other. Explanations are to be found neither in the individual psyche nor in social structures, but in the interactive process that takes place routinely between people.” For the *self* is determined by the *generalized other*, the populations of people encompassed within the act, that provide the lens to the experiences and beliefs that are synthesized in these frames (Meade, 1934).

Social constructivism “holds that knowledge is constructed within a social context through language and other sign systems...focusing on sense-making (Oldfather & West, 1999).” Burr (1995) agreed “that people construct it [this refers to how knowledge is formulated] between them. It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated. Therefore social interaction of all kinds, and particularly language, is of great interest to social constructivists.” (pg. 18) The utilization of language as the primary agent of communication, led Dewey (1916) to posit “that the use of language to convey and acquire ideas is an extension and refinement of the principle that things gain meaning by being used in a shared experience or joint action.” (pg. 16) Freire and Macedo (1995) concurred when they emphasized that learning is a social endeavor that utilizes language through dialogues in the construction of knowing.

For to “converse with another, through words, looks, or other symbols, means to have more or less understanding or communion with him, to get on common ground...a sharing of a mental state that can be communicated (Cooley, 1998, pg.93).” The mental states or thoughts utilize language which is “entwined with thought and thus lies at the heart of our sense-making about the world. As our inner thoughts are rooted in language, they are inherently social, like language (Oldfather & West, 1999, pg. 10).” Hence, knowledge and language are two equivalent constructs that are dependent on and constitutive of each other; a symbiotic relationship between two compatible human variables (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Goffman (1959) suggests that in order for humans to present themselves correctly in a team or social environment, one must have access to the official ideas transmitted through language in order to know how to act and react in

socially appropriate ways. For language is a significant symbol that arouses in others the same meanings as it does in us leading to human action or inaction (Meade, 1934)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide you with the pertinent literature that embodies the essence of how I framed this study. In the first section, I discuss the history of power from a critical theoretical perspective. Next, I review the literature that expounds upon the relationship between power and education. Then, an in-depth discussion of the literature relevant to democratic education is presented with the explicit purpose of demonstrating how democratic practices may be implemented within educational settings. Next, I provide a review of the research on student beliefs and identify limitations that exist in the methodological choices utilized. Finally, I discuss the fundamental components of semiotics with the explicit intent of demonstrating its utility in student belief research.

History of Power from a Critical Theoretical Perspective

According to Marcuse (1972), “there is one brute act that must guide any unideological discussion of freedom: since the beginnings of recorded history and to this very day, the liberty of some has always been based on the servitude of others, and the only concept of freedom that corresponded to the facts was the concept of freedom, inalienable and practicable even in prison and at the stake.....this has been to this very day the only freedom available to man as man: essential human freedom.” (p. 213) This freedom that he speaks of has an antithetical component, for if freedom is to exist then unfreedom must all exist in the form of power (Crotty, 1998). “It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known...the dualization of nature as appearance and sequence, effort and power, which first makes possible both myth and science, originates

in human fear, the expression of which becomes explanation.” (p. 15) The rational answer to the unfathomable differences that compel humanity to search for definitive explanation of differences has forced a bipolar existence fraught with antagonism and contradictions.

“Dialectical theory attempts to tease out the histories and relations of accepted meanings and appearances, tracing interactions from the context to the part, from the system inward to the event. In this way, critical theory helps us focus simultaneously on both sides of a social contradiction (McLaren, p. 171).” These dialectical notions have historical implications: for if we are to understand the essence of the conflicts that exist in the disenfranchised experiences today we must revisit the histories of the antagonists (Freire, 1970). These differences provide the foundation for defining who we are and what we want to be associated with, but while “reason can function critically.....it cannot ground itself in any one perspective. Reason under the image of self-preservation can only function for the purpose of domination (Rasmussen, 1996, pg.45) thus furthering the dialectical of oppression. Habermas suggested that such an approach is representative of strategic communication emphasizing the singular desires of the individual in attainment of one’s own objectives at the expense of the other. For one ideal to receive accreditation the other must be seen as a misrepresentation, a delusion of reality. The oppressed and disenfranchised are not seen as the “knower; the knower was the “Reason” which operated through the him. The individual interfered at his peril, and only to the detriment of the truth” (Dewey, 1916, pg. 292).

“The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the

antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so (Freire, 1970, pg. 73)” Through solidarity, humanity is attempting to escape the grasp of the dialectical rationality that embodies ambivalent human relations. Critical theory is a tool of reason which, when properly located in an historical group, can transform the world (Rasmussen, 1996) through an awareness of the bipolarity that underpins our existence. According to McLaren (1998), critical pedagogy attempts to heal, repair, and transform the world through liberatory practices that unshackle the ideological chains that imprison the disenfranchised. Heilman (2003) noted that at its best, “critical theory offers compelling insight into the function of power at a range of levels: at the macro level of policy and economic structures: at the cultural level through language, texts, and curriculum: and at the micro level in the immediate experiences of freedom, possibility, control and oppression....” (pg. 255)

Critical theory’s foundations are based on the Marxist notions of *dialectical materialism* (Sim and Loon, 2001) and *historical materialism* which according to Crotty (1998) are concretized in the disenfranchisement of the proletariat through class struggle for control over the production of goods. Marx believed that all human social and political experiences are inexplicably fused to the economic situation of man (Tyson, 1999). Marcuse (1972) suggested that these capitalistic notions “treat man as something unessential whose whole existence is determined by the separation of labour, capital and land; and by an inhuman division of labour, by competition, by private property, etc. This kind of political economy scientifically sanctions the perversion of the historical-social world of man into an alien world of money and commodities; a world which confronts

him as a hostile power and in which the greater part of humanity ceases to be anything more than abstract workers (torn away from the reality of existence), separated from the object of their work and forced to sell themselves as a commodity.” (pg. 21) Marx believed that in order to change man’s existence, man must be cognizant of where the oppression originated at, the Bourgeoisie, and to take action in the form of a revolt against it. Only through human action in an objectified human experience can man emancipate himself (Rasmussen, 1996). Contrary to Hegelian notions of the abstraction, Marx wanted to ground his beliefs in quantifiable and evidential occurrences within society, thus the inclusion of historical materialism as the causal factor of conflict.

The Marxian notions of conflict, power, and class struggle provided the foundations for Critical Theory. Critical Theory can be labeled a general theory (Althusser, 1972) because of its universal applicability to the ideas of conflict, power, and oppression throughout the world. However, it also has a regional fluidity, through the Marxian notion of objectification that allows it to acculturate itself to the socio-cultural contexts of the conflictual experience. The inextricable relationship between the object, the human, and the action, the praxis, negates the plausibility of a universal knowledge, an all-encompassing solution, to the tensionalities that exist in society (Rasmussen, 1996). For each human’s socialized experiences are unique and thus not generalizable. As a consequence, fluidity is a prerequisite of what Freire (1990) terms the potential reality; a nonexistent but plausible truth (Heilman, 2003); a reality that can only exist through an awareness of the “dynamic nature of society” and thus the dynamic nature of experiences and theories that attempt to explain them (Althusser, 1972). “Theory emerges out of the intersection of the past and present; they respond to and are shaped by the conditions at

hand (Giroux, 2003, pg. 42).” Critical theory has been regionalized to explain these disparate experiential relations that exist between the oppressors and the oppressed who’s racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or economic situation differ from ideological orientation of those in power (Tyson, 1999).

Critical theory is a unique theoretical perspective because it is “a contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and a research that challenges...between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression...between a research that accepts the status quo and a research that seeks to bring about change (Crotty, 1998, p. 113).” It is a theory that creates tensions where none are felt, contradictions where irrefutability is understood, attentiveness when one is already aware. It is a “pedagogical surrealism that attempts to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange...to heal, repair, and transform the world, all the rest is commentary (McLaren, 1998, pg. 167).”

Freire (1970) suggests that we need to utilize a problematic vision of the world that allows us to gaze critically at these immortal realities in order to unearth the contradictions that exist in our human experiences. For “symbolic formations are, it is true, generated by the productive human mind; but though they are themselves products, they confront subjective mind with the objectivity of a problematic, uncomprehended complex of meaning that can be opened up only through intellectual labor.” (pg. 85) The products of the human mind immediately turn against it as problems (Habermas, 1984). To be reflexive; to ask the questions relative to the oppressive conditions that tend to utilize coercion and subterfuge in the continuation of the status quo. For those who have power usurp the implicit right to choice of others through the covert control of normal

everyday interactions in human conduct (Foucault, 1994). “What is done to all by the few, always occurs as the subjection of individuals by the many: social repression always exhibits the masks of repression of the collective (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1995, pg. 22).” For if the oppression is to continue it depends on the oppressive notions of instrumental mastery (Habermas, 1984) , naturalness (Rasmussen, 1996), hegemony, (Sim and Loon, 2001) and an ideology of accommodation and a culture of silence (Freire, 1970). Knowledge is never neutral, it is always embedded with the seeds of a silent logic (McLaren, 1998) incorporated within the cynical performers (Goffman, 1959) facades perpetuating the production of a particular self-serving worldview. “The peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a nonhistorical reality, i.e. an omnipresent reality, in the sense which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history (Althusser, 1972, pg. 106).” For that which seems the most natural is an “instrumental reason representative of the ever expanding ability of those who were in positions of power in the modern world to dominate and control society for their own calculating purposes (Rasmussen, 1996).” According to Goffman (1959), the world is but a drama constructed by the oppressors to conceal the true nature of the performance from the audience, the oppressed through dramatic dominance; an appearance of empowerment that only beguile the true essence of the conspiracy.

“The unification of the intellectual functions by means of which domination over the senses is achieved, the resignation of thought to the rise of unanimity, mean the impoverishment of thought and of experience: the separation of both areas leaves both impaired (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1995, pg. 36).” An ideological-based rationality is

utilized as a manipulative tool that legitimates the views of the powerful through the inhibition of differences in the name of a singular historically concocted reality. For while power is globally associated with forceful attempts at prohibition, the disenfranchised and down trodden should be cognizant that “it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (Foucault, 1994, pg. 120).” Marcuse (1972) suggests that we need only look at the resiliency of “capitalism” which “reproduces itself by transforming itself, and this transformation is mainly in the improvement of exploitation” through compensatory economic and emotional practices to truly understand the essence of oppression. Goffman (1959) suggests that the transfusion of enticing material rewards has transformed the wardrobes and portrayals of the disillusioned into the consummate exemplars of oppression. Modern power is more sinister, maniacal, and camouflaged, and thus less recognizable and defensible by those oppressed souls it beguiles. Power is not “an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of an agonism – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation (Foucault, 1994, pg. 342).”

This impairment impedes the disenfranchised from reflecting on the epiphanic experiences (Denzin, 2000) that exist between their thoughts and experiences, between who they are and how they are viewed. This leads to what Althusser (1972) refers to as the “ultimate condition of production” (pg. 85) because the oppressed then become the agents of the oppressors in the continuation of the status quo, through a “false consciousness” (Tyson, 1999, pg. 55); “an ambiguity of freedom” (Greene, 2000, pg. 8). Marcuse (1972) postulated “how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting

others, but rather; how can he satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus which, in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude?" (pg. 42) McLaren questions these voluntary contractual agreements, these choices whose only alternatives are starvation, disease, and death. Do the oppressed really have the freedom of choices or merely the ability to select between preordained and manipulative coercive options? For as Dewey (1916) posits, "when we find the successful display of our energies checked by uncongenial surroundings, natural and social, the easiest way out is to build castles in the air and let them be a substitute for an actual achievement which involves the pains of thought." (pg. 102)

Freire (1985) suggests that through a process of introspection of the *data of experiences* humans can become aware of their own negativities that constitute the *data of domination* and reproducers of oppression. For as Apple (1996) reminds us, "the practical, then, could never be divorced from historical, ethical, and political understanding without losing something in the process." (pg. 100) Only through the simultaneous reflection and action can humanity liberate itself from the abyss of oppression. For "authentic liberation-the process of humanization- is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970, pg. 66)." Marcuse (1972) believed that the global liberation of the downtrodden could not be constructed from the material resources of the established societies because their rationales and reasonings were implicitly assembled to regenerate the existing power differential through institutional and ideological manipulation. For if humanity is to transform the world, they must first gaze in the self-

reflective mirror as the wicked queen in Snow White did. They may initially abhor the images that are communicated to them, but upon further thought, the insipid portrait emancipates them from their duality of their existence as cultivators of oppression. As Freire (1970) states, “it is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves” (pg. 42) for the internalized ideology legitimates the ironic, trivializes the contradictions, and answers the problematic. Lather (1994) also reminds us that we cannot represent or advocate for the oppressed because that is merely emancipating others through the imposition of one’s own political agenda.

In the *Dialect of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1995) caution against an overly optimistic outlook towards emancipation for life is cyclical and therefore repetitive. The appearances of oppression may have changed, but the fundamental incongruities in society are still intact as evidenced by what Foucault refers to as the “margins” of society. Critical theorists recognize the existence of the ever-increasing margins that exist in our world, but recognize that these incongruities, these agonizing experiences are rectifiable. According to Lather (quote from poster, 1989), “we live amid a world of pain, that much can be done to alleviate that pain, and that theory has a crucial role to play in that process.”

Power in the Classroom

Classrooms and schools represent a culture of power to the extent that they mirror unjust social relations existing in the larger society. Manke (1997) suggests that this, “power is a structure of relationships – a structure in which teachers and students can build or participate. Power is not an object and cannot be owned by anyone. The structure

of relationships is called power ...it, is what shape's people's actions." (pg.1) Foucault (1994) concurs stating that "the term power designates relationships between partners...power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action" (pg. 337) does power exist. Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) believe that it "is best understood as something that resides neither entirely within an individual nor in the group, but rather in the complex interplay between them; like language, it is both personal and social." (pg. 50) They further stipulate that "power is not something one can get rid of in the classroom. It is a constant. Power relations are inescapable in pedagogy....it is not exercised exclusively by the teacher upon the students; rather, power is like discourse, requiring ongoing participation and negotiation by all concerned." (pg. 55)

Manke (1997) asserts that if we understand power as a matter of relationships then it is inconceivable to presume that power in the classroom is at the sole discretion of the teacher. To the contrary, "If we view classrooms as arenas in which power struggles occur between predetermined and repressive practices and the individuality of students, then we may realize that students are not as powerless as we sometimes think. Indeed, they may have the ultimate power in classrooms—the power to withhold themselves through passive—aggressive job reactions....it leads to failure at the tasks that emanate from instruction (Hopkins, 1994)." Power is present whenever and wherever social pressures operate on the individual to induce desired conduct (Mannheim, 1950) through either coercion or consent. However, "the power between the dominant group and the others is not based on force, like that of the medieval king or modern dictator. It needs to be maintained by a continual courting. Hegemony treats particular values as though they

were universal, and as if consensus were simply a matter of following one's feelings...to resist seems like resisting one's own desires. This is how it is so resilient and so enduring. (Thwaited, Davis, and Mules, 1994, pg. 170)

Carlson and Apple (1998) postulated that the subject matter and the mode of delivery have become the ultimate battlefield for cultural skirmishes between teachers, students, and society. In schooling these confrontations are manifested through students' overt and covert acceptances and resistances to the educational experience. Giroux (1988, as cited in Darder) defines resistance as "a personal space, in which the logic and force of domination is contested by the power of subjective agency to subvert the process of socialization...a form of negation or affirmation placed before ruling discourses and practice." (p.162) Kohl (1994) refers to these resistances as "creative maladjustment" because they are revolting against the socialization process while simultaneously reaffirming the essence of themselves. By creating an unreal space the marginalized are denouncing the real world socialization process.

Democratic Education in the Classroom

Traditional teacher-centered education that follows the teacher-as-lecturer model of instruction devalues the differences that exist between learners focusing on the commonalities that are predetermined by state and national curriculum mandates. Freire (1970) refers to this as the "banking concept" because the students were considered passive recipients of information as they accepted the deposits of educational materials made by the teacher without having access to or control over what was received or how it was utilized. In such a system, Barthe (1972) suggests that "the child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it; there

are prepared for him, actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy.”(pg.54)

Accordingly, today’s educational endeavors “serve to reproduce the technocratic, corporate, and capitalistic ideologies that characterize dominant societies. It is, in fact, reasonable to argue that education programs are designed to create individuals who operate in the interests of the state, whose social function is primarily to sustain and legitimate the status quo (McLaren, 1998, pg. 1)” irregardless of the needs, desires, and interests of the primary stakeholder, the child.

“The only weapon of power,” and therefore education is “its only strategy against this defection, is to reinject the real and the referential everywhere, to persuade us of the reality of the social...to this end it prefers the discourse of crisis, but also, why not? That of desire (Baudrillard, 1994, pg. 22).” The quandary confronting today’s educational institutions is that children are becoming cognizant of the conventions of power that permeate their educational experiences through the purposeful fabrication of binary opposites based largely on performance. “Binary opposition occurs when two terms are related through a quality which is present in one term and absent in the other....all relationships are reduced to the single scale set up between two opposing terms....where one particular term comes to stand for all terms; within that, one particular race comes to stand as the yardstick for all; and one particular possible relationship among terms comes to stand for all relationship (Thwaites et al. 1994, pg. 67).” Kozol (1992) wrote in *Savage Inequalities* that the children seemed to wrestle with the kinds of coercive and inequitable practices that constantly bombarded their educational existence. Perceptive children began to question these inequities, “their observations were so trenchant that a teacher sometimes would step back and raise her eyebrows and then nod to me across the

children's heads, as if to say, 'Well, there it is! They know what's going on around them, don't they?'" (pg. 5) This awareness has led to the rebirth of Deweyian notions of education.

Dewey (1916) believed that education was a social derived entity that provided the guidance and nurturance necessary for the immature to participate within the larger group commonly referred to as a society. He reminds us that a society may be semantically singular, but its substance is comprised of multidimensional plurality. What are these many things that constitute society? Lempert (1996) suggests that the contractual responsibility of a society is to assure the continued existence and satisfaction of an individual's needs within the context of a larger group. "The curriculum ...should not be presented as 'objective'. Rather, it must constantly subjectify itself. That is, it must acknowledge its own roots in the culture, history, and social interests out of which it arose (Apple, 1996, pg. 33)." Thomas Jefferson posited that while he didn't believe that humanity would ever achieve perfection, he did "believe that the world was susceptible to much improvement and...that the diffusion of knowledge among people is to be the instrument by which it is to be effected (Glickman, 1993, as cited in Randall)." Only through a pluralistic education, nurtured by the idiosyncratic socio-cultural experiences, can the marginalized students of today become tomorrow's hope. For "education...must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs of the given individual to be educated (Dewey, 1916, pg. 107)." Steadfast in this conviction, one presumes that the current national curriculums and banking methods are practices in futility for they neither meet the needs of the individual nor address the existing oppressions that fester and propagate through schools like parasites on their host.

How can society release the students from common sense bondage? “Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination in the name of liberation (Freire, 1970, pg. 66),” but without the power to express one’s thoughts in verbal and written discourses student empowerment isn’t only implausible but also unachievable (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002). Freire (1985) suggested that this ability “to ‘proclaim’ the world, to express it, and to express oneself” through our voices “are the unique qualities of human beings.” (pg. 21) “What untapped brilliance has remained dormant because young people didn’t know what they might become? Potential is a mystery that must be actualized (Kohl, 1994, pg. 84)” through the infusion of democratic ideals within educational practices.

Glickman (1998) defines democratic education as a type of learning that promotes “freedom of expression, pursuit of the truth in the marketplace of ideas, individual and group choices, student activity and participation, associative leaning, and application, demonstration, and contribution of learning to immediate and larger communities. Such efforts are made in the context of justice and equality for all, a consideration of individual liberty and group freedom, and respect for the authority and responsibility of teachers in setting conditions for developmental learning.” (pg. 29) Brookfield and Sheldrake (1999) suggest that the “fundamental assumptions of democratic discussion – are – tentativeness of all knowledge, the infinite variety of perspectives and understandings that people bring to discussion, the endless nature of enquiry and the refusal to accept a definitive answer,

a genuine receptivity to other views, a striving for agreement that may impossible to achieve, and the patience to hear out all possible opinions.” (pg. 18)

Shor (1992) believes that democratic education is characterized by active learning through cooperative interactions with others in a specific social context. Gutman (1987) suggests that the fundamental components of democratic education include a sense of social commitment, political efficacy, a desire to participate in politics, respect for opposing points of view, critical distance from authority, and so on. Boler (2004) contends that the cultivation of these ideals necessitates an overwhelming consideration for “the common good or good will” (pg. 106) towards its citizenry. The tangible forms of these unifying imperatives are societies’ constitutional texts. It is an ideology that endorses the free exchange of ideas, the equitability of opportunities, and the recognition of uniqueness within the larger shared communal space (Goodlad, 2001).

According to McLaren (1998) the nucleus of any emancipatory curriculum must emphasize student experience, for knowledge acquired in school void of personal relevance, is tainted with the silent logic that is socially constructed and deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations. Brosio (2000) believes the curriculum is founded on the premise that the student is the curriculum and that all learning revolves around the needs, hopes, and strengths of the individual creating a personally relevant leaning experience. “Students who attribute their academic success to factors they believe are internal or that they control tend to show higher achievement levels than students who attribute their academic outcomes to external factors (Wentzel and Wigfield, 1998).” Homestead and Pate (1997) characterized democratic education as being collaborative, personal, integrative, and concretized in real world experiences.

However, the ideals perpetuated by democratic education are nontraditional and therefore incongruent with most students, teachers, and parents conceptions of schooling. Glickman (1998) reminds us that students haven't had the opportunities (staff developments, videos, and instructional handbooks) usually afforded to the teachers when they are about to implement something new or novel. Consequently, these students bring expectations to a new class from their experiences in previous classrooms. Teachers often find that students who have been conditioned by years of endullment (Shor, 1992) are often resistant to the changes in the status quo. Brookfield and Sheldrake (1999) contend that students are leery of voicing their opinions and will often dismiss their own experiences as anecdotal and idiosyncratic. They denigrate their personal experiences in deference to book knowledge, which seems codified, legitimated, some how truer than individual stories. As Beane states, "we do not know what to do with this freedom. It challenges and frightens us. I fear that we have come to love our chains (quote in Aikin, 1942, p. 16)." Consequently, the students initiate defensive maneuvers which allow them to assert themselves against the conditioned image of "authority of the teacher...sabotaging any regime that subordinates them (Shor, 1992, 142)" whether real or imagined. Freire (1970) reminds us that "the oppressed having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (pg. 31) and therefore can only be attained through the impetus of the disenfranchised themselves, not through false charity.

Democratic education is much like climbing Mount Everest, it beckons for you like a mother's warm embrace, but one soon surmises that a cautious pedestrian pace is

necessary to negotiate the precarious path to its peak. Teachers' must curtail their initial expectations of the outcomes of democratic learning for the students may be disinclined to acquiesce to the ideals immediately. Starkey (2005) posits that everything that is novel and innovative entails some degree of mental discomfort and possibly even anguish. However, without the tell tale signs of mental discomfort, one can be assured that genuinely new learning and progress haven't transpired.

Accordingly, Glickman (1998) recommends that teachers with students who have little prior experience with democratic pedagogy and have learned to be passive and dependent begin the acclimation process by being offered an escalating degree of choices so as to establish a zone that first meets the comfort level of students for imposed structure and then gradually lessens teacher authority and increases student responsibility. In accordance with Glickman's cautions, Gutman (1987) warns against "giving students equal control over the conditions of their schooling. Students lack the competence necessary to share equally in making many decisions. Ceding them equal control on all issues would mean denying teachers even a minimal degree of professional autonomy. The problem of authority within schools, there, does not lend itself to the democratic solution." (pg. 88) Shor (1992) suggests that initially "democratic teachers of content areas...start by discussing how students see the course matter, what questions they have about it, and how the subject area relates to their experience. This situates dialogue in student subjectivity....then problem-posing expands" (pg. 145) as students are gradually empowered with an increasing level of accountability for their learning objectives. Of course, even under the best circumstance, democratic education is still fraught with peril. Boler (2004) reminds us that the democratic "learning environments are unavoidably

risky in terms of the intellectual regions they engage, the emotional experiences they engender, the verbal exchanges they facilitate...” (pg. 15) Nevertheless, through their actions and interactions, teachers and students redefine prior practices as they formulate more personal definitions of what constitutes learning, writing, and discussing and what is considered as suitable explicit demonstrations of the essence of being a student in a democratic classroom (Boler, 2004).

As the acculturation process causes an evolution in the stakeholders learning experiences researchers such as Goldfarb (2000) have noticed that “young people who have been exposed to the concepts of democracy and practiced it have learned important skills and become engaged in the democratic process: they are more active, participatory, and contributing members of a democratic society at large.” (pg. 149) Placier (1996) found that the students who had encountered democratic ideals had an almost addictive desire for voice and agency as they realized the significance of their voices. Jennings, Okeefe, and Shamlin’s (1999) findings suggested that participatory and empowering environments promote enduring changes within the students’ relational expectations concerning future peer and teacher interactions. Pate, Homestead, and McGinnis (1997) noticed that as the students were slowly and methodically transitioned into democratic learning a positive change occurred in the following student behaviors; an increase in the student voice; feelings of student ownership of their learning; and a decline in disruptive behaviors. Wentzel and Wigfield (1998) found that “students who attribute their academic success to factors they believe are internal or that they control tend to show higher achievement levels than students who attribute their academic outcomes to external factors.” Chilcoat and Ligon (1998) concluded that the democratic ideals

utilized by the freedom schools resulted in an increase in student awareness of their oppressive experiences, a willingness to become social agents in their communities, and an acknowledgement of the value in human differences.

According to Greene (2000) “democratic classroom practices support students in observing, acting upon, and creating their lived worlds in response to and in concert with others.” (pg. 11) In essence, creating an atmosphere conducive to student empowerment, agency, and voice. Therefore,

“A person who is empowered believes in the individual’s right and responsibility to participate publicly; has a sense of political efficacy—knowing that one’s contribution is important; comes to value the principles of democratic life—equality, community, and liberty; knows that worthwhile alternative social arrangements to the status quo exist; and gains the requisite intellectual skills to participate in public debate” (Breault, 2003).

Review of Research on Student Beliefs

Prior to initiating any review of current student beliefs research, one must first define what a belief is. While numerous definitions can be found in the literature, the following exemplars illuminate the basic attributes of any belief system: an awareness of the belief, characteristics validate our schemas by mitigating doubt, and the establishment of a plan of action upon observing a cue to said belief. Kloosterman, Raymond, & Emenaker (1996) define beliefs as the personal assumptions from which individuals make decisions about the actions they undertake. Obando, Cruz, and Alvarado (2003) described a belief as one of the components of the implicit knowledge of an individual as defined by experience. Fenstermacher concurs when he suggested that, “The word ‘beliefs’ is intended to imply that these are personally held ideas requiring a different kind of justification than that required by other kinds of more formal scientific knowledge, that the ideas involve personal value as opposed to being correct or incorrect,

and that they can change over time and with experience .” (G. D. Fenstermacher, public presentation, 10 June 1994) Beliefs are founded in a perceptual constancy of one’s own socially derived and experientially situated schemata.

Pierce (1991) elaborated on his initial notions about the conception of beliefs in “How to make ideas clear.” In it he stated the following: “what we are *immediately* conscious of and what we are *mediately* conscious of, are found in all consciousness. Some elements (the sensations) are completely present at every instant so long as they last, while others (like thought) are actions having beginning, middle, and end, and consist in a congruence in the succession of sensations which flow through the mind. They cannot be immediately present to us, but must cover some portion of the past or future. Thought is a thread of melody running through the succession of our sensations....whose sole motive, idea, and function is to product belief.” (pg. 165) Pierce seems to be suggesting that the succession of sensations trigger cognitions within the human mind. If these cognitions have commonalities between them beliefs are then conceived of and essentially born.

Diaz-Obando (1994) defined a belief as “one of the components of the implicit knowledge of an individual...such knowledge is based on experiences related to the issues that individuals hold...In other words, experience and knowledge actually define beliefs” which “are largely cognitive in nature but are developed over a relatively long period of time” and elucidated to others through our actions and behaviors.” (pg.162) She further contended that doubt and confusion “stimulate the mind to an activity which may be slight or energetic, calm or turbulent images” of the experiences of their life as they “pass rapidly through consciousness, one incessantly melting into another” thus

chunking congruent experiences together into loose categories, “until at last, when all is over -- it may be in a fraction of a second, in an hour, or after long years -- we find ourselves decided as to how we should act under such circumstances as those which occasioned our hesitation. In other words, we have attained belief.” Pajares and Valiante (1997) suggest that “the process of creating and using beliefs is simple enough and rather intuitive. Individuals engage in behaviors, interpret the outcomes of their actions, use the interpretations to develop beliefs about their capabilities to engage in subsequent behaviors in the same domain, and behave in concert with the beliefs created (pg. 353).”

Over the last ten years, there has been numerous research studies that have been conducted on issues related to student beliefs, motivation, and perceptions. In each of these cases, the researchers were attempting to get smarter about the climates of learning in order to enhance the experiences of those who traverse and interact with the educational world on a daily basis (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Children are a “set of potentials, a project in the making...social actors in their own right, are active participants in the construction and determination of their experiences, other people’s lives, and the societies in which they live” (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 13). Therefore, it behooves all of us to doggedly pursue their beliefs about life and human interaction with the energy and zeal of an Olympic athlete pursuing a dream of gold.

Christensen and James (2000) however, cautions that this steadfast conviction to unearth student beliefs’ while laudable has still gone amiss because the, “research process is generally controlled by researchers not children...the product is data interpreted in terms of adult discourses about children’s development...the research process is weighted towards the researcher as the expert on the children, and on how to study children and

what to study about children.” (p. 12) For the children are just that children, and therefore lack the mental acuity, maturity, and personal motivation to undertake such an arduous task. Are we to assume that adults and children think alike? Corsaro (1992) believes that this would be problematic because each person’s understandings of societal norms and customs is dependent on their unique experiences. Therefore one’s understandings would be incomplete; the quintessential open-ended question.

If student beliefs are an open-ended question, then one must consider why a significant portion of student belief research is close-ended often involving researcher-driven questionnaires, surveys, and interview questions. Kloosterman and Coogan (1994) suggested that beliefs influence action and consequently actions are motivated by what an individual perceives are the outcomes of those actions. If students perceive the subordination imposed on them by researchers, then they will inevitably understand the nature of the interaction and begin infusing politically correct terminology within the dialogues thus creating an illusion of truth and reality. Buehl and Alexander (2001) stated that beliefs are “much like an iceberg, the bulk of such beliefs are not directly accessible, but instead submerged from clear view. This makes it difficult to assess their true depth and character.” (pg. 388)

Much of the research on student beliefs is dependent on the tip of the iceberg language oriented techniques of interviews (Kinchin, 2004; Shertzer, 2004; Kloosterman, 1996; Kloosterman, 1994), surveys (Diaz-Obando, 2003; Davis, 2003; Dahl, 2005; Anderson et al, 1988; Pajares, 2001), and questionnaires (House, 2003; Anderson, 1988; Mason, 2003; Kloosterman, 1994). Buehl and Alexander (2001) find these data collection techniques to be problematic, especially with young children because a student’s

“individual belief system is often unexplored and hasn’t been fully developed which means that the student often lacks the language to fully articulate his or her conceptions of it.” (pg. 388) Kloosterman and Cougan (1994) concur when they postulated that “a number of factors probably affect a child’s ability to verbalize beliefs, one may be the frequency with which students are asked about specific beliefs.... the fact that students are seldom asked such questions and thus had not formed an opinion about them.”(pg. 384) The language of choice is often inundated with verbage and perspectives that are incongruent with the thoughts, interests, and cognitive development of the subjects of the inquiry.

Beyond the verbal language, there is the unspeakable, which Van Manen (1990) terms epistemological silence. Polanyi (1969) claims that we all possess a silent and tacit dimension, and according to Van Manen (1990), painting speaks the language of this dimension. Vgotsky (1978) suggested that “children solve practical task with the help of their speech as well as their eyes and hands. This unity of perception, speech, and action....constitutes the central subject matter for any analysis of the origin of uniquely human forms of behavior.” (pg. 26) Consequently, it is advantageous, in a study about experiences, to use more forms of expression than only verbal or written language. Burns and Kaufman (1970) believe that young children typically convey their personas more effortlessly and instinctively through nonverbal communications as opposed to the language-oriented responses of adulthood. Diaz-Obando (2003) further questioned the validity of research dependent solely on language irregardless of the presence of a possible contradictory “belief-in-practice.”

By removing the students from the process; by advocating a submissive responsive role for the children we are inevitably disenfranchising and devaluing their contributions to society. The future of humanity is being politely escorted to “the margins of the social structure by more powerful adults, who would rather focus on the potential and the threat of children to present and future societies” (Corsaro, 1997), than the actualities of the students’ true beliefs. Corsaro and Miller (2000) find this to be problematic because children are not only actors in the social drama of life, but are also the directors who manipulate the dramatization as it unfolds.

“The role and influence of an individual’s beliefs have been widely recognized in the educational and psychological literatures....for playing a crucial role in how students’ approach and process information.” (Buehl, 2001, pg. 385) Diaz-Obando (2003) reasoned that beliefs have a significant impact on the types and quality of the interactions students have with others in academic settings. “Students mediate instruction and interpret tasks according to preexisting beliefs about themselves, teachers, learning, and tasks.” (Anderson et al, 1988, pg. 290)

A student’s self-beliefs are significantly correlated to a number of educational outcomes. (House, 2003) Therefore, examining beliefs is important since they are behind students’ opinions toward classroom learning and impact academic achievement. In particular, students with low achievement may be unaware of their implicit, maladaptive representations....and be less able to modify them, so these beliefs contribute negatively to their learning and achievement. (Mason, 2003) Shertzer and Shuh (2004) refer to these beliefs that often lead to disruptiveness, apathy, and passivity in the learning environment as “constraining or limiting beliefs.” (pg. 112) Murphy,

Delli, and Edwards (2004) believe that the earlier these beliefs are formed and the longer they go unchecked the more naturalized they become and resistant to change. These reified beliefs cultivate a more sustained effort, and greater perseverance and resiliency when obstacles get in the way of, or contradict the person's particular ways of knowing. "Therefore, identifying student beliefs may enable teachers....to devise learning strategies that support or correct beliefs and improve student proficiency." (P. S. Kuntz, public presentation, 24 October 1998) However, these remedies seem unlikely unless creative methodological plans are formulated that attempt to unearth the subconscious beliefs that currently degradate educations most significant stakeholders, the children.

Review of Research on Semiotics

"That the word 'meaning' is probably, in the whole language, the word the meaning of which is the most difficult to find. What does 'to mean' mean? It seems to me that the only answer we can give is that 'to mean' means the ability of any kind of data to be translated in a different language....now, what would a translation be without rules? It would be absolutely impossible to understand....to speak of rules and to speak of meaning is to speak of the same thing....(Strauss, 1978) In the preceding quote, Strauss highlights the primary function of a semiological system, the formulation of the guidelines for the interpretation of communication between peoples utilizing signs. Barthes (1964) suggests that the scope of semiological influence on these signs transcends the usual ideals of language with the inclusion of "images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these."(pg. 9) Hodge and Kress (1988) propose that "semiotics offers the promise of a systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of" the multiplicity of the "communications phenomena as a whole."

(pg. 1) Michel Foucault (1994) believed semiology was an “ensemble of knowledge and technology which enables us to distinguish where there are signs, what is the nature of a sign, and what are the ties between signs as well as which laws regulate those ties.” (pg. 116) Seebok (1994) believes that “semiotics never reveals what the world is, but circumscribes what we can know about it; in other words, what a semiotic model depicts is not ‘reality’ as such, but nature as unveiled by our method of questioning.” (pg. 4)

We do not inhabit a mere concrete, material world, but a world full of meanings that belong to the order of signs. According to Eco (1979) a sign can be defined as “everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie.” (pg. 7) Charles Peirce (1991) believes a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respects or capacity.” (pg. 141) “Anything can be a sign as long as it is received by someone in a fashion that is discernible and therefore communicates something about an object other than itself (Chandler, 2002, pg.17). Radford (L. Radford, public presentation, 15 October 1998) suggests that these interpretations highlight the plasticity of the human mind, as well as the capacity of signs to transfigure the human psyche like a sculptor molding the clay. “But in order that anything should be a Sign, it must “represent”, as we say, something else, called its Object, the key point being that a sign cannot be the object....it can only represent the Object and tell about it. It cannot furnish acquaintance with or recognition of that Object.” (Peirce)

Semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. “The relationship between the signifier and signified, the way in which a sensory impression points to or invokes a concept, is called signification.” (Thwaites, Davis, and Mules, 1994, pg. 31) The synthesis of these two entities leads to the formulation of a sign. Eco (1979) proposes that a sign is not a single all encompassing semiotic element, but rather the fusion of two independent ingredients known as the signified and signifier. Barthe (1964) defined the two elements as the following: “the signifier constitutes the plane of expression and that of the signifieds the plane of content (pg. 39).”

Barthe (1972) further explains multiplicity of a sign through the following conveyance: “We must here be on our guard for despite common parlance which simply says that the signifier expresses the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms. For we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them...in a sign which is the associative total of the first two terms.” (pg. 113) Additionally, Barthe (1964) contends that the signified isn’t an actuality, but merely a concept like “catness” that defines the qualities of the object. For if it was truly the object itself, one would be unable to grasp the meaning unless one had physically encountered it.

Consequently, Thwaites, Davis, and Mules (1994) contend that meanings are “not primarily a quality contained within or possessed by, an individual sign, but something which exists outside the sign, in its various relationships with other things and signs.”(pg. 180) “Since the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated, codes provide a framework within which signs make sense....codes organize signs into meaningful systems which correlate signifiers to signifieds.” (Chandler, 2002, pg. 147)

Furthermore, codes provide the guidelines which spawn the formation of signs as tangible occurrences in the communicative interactions (Eco, 1979). Strauss (1978) speculates on the effectiveness of a communicative process that was void of codes when he muses over “what would a translation be without rules? It would be absolutely impossible to understand....to speak of rules and to speak of meaning is to speak of the same thing.” Lotman (1990) agrees that if “elements occur in a text without any correspondence in the code” then they “cannot be bearers of meaning” (pg. 11) and are thus unrecognizable. “Suppose someone should tell me he could imagine two persons interchanging identities. I should proceed to reason on the pretended imagination and show that it was inconceivable.” (Hoopes, 1991, pg. 15)

Accordingly, one can only disprove of things that one first is able to recognize through a commonality of codes; a process that leads to skepticism over the plausibility of any universal truths or realities. Sebeok (1994) also questions “whether or not reality can exist independently of the signifying codes that human beings create to represent and think about it.” (pg. Xii) “Truth isn’t perfect or everlasting because experiences change and the truth was particular to that moment in time – if it was a universal truth, then we also have to stipulate that there were no changes in time – that every day is the same.” (Benjamin, 1996, pg. 276) Rockwell (2001) concluded that signs have a very erratic and volatile relationship with meanings because signs are temporary and doggedly correlated to the instance in which they are fashioned. “Truth and reality are therefore categories, from a semiotic point of view, which mark agreement over or challenge to the temporary state of the semiotic system” as realized through contextual and experiential qualities of the interpretant.

The most commonly recognized form of signification involves the use of language. In the context of natural language, Saussure stressed that “there is no inherent, essential, ‘transparent’, self-evident or ‘natural’ connection between the signifier and the signified.” (quoted from Chandler, 2002, pg. 26) The linguistic signs were randomly contrived groups of letters with no apparent relevance to the referent. Saussure’s notion of arbitrariness appeared to be justified by the plurality of meanings associated with language. Therefore, this “permanent impermanence” suggests that language is socially derived and culturally mediated by the individual’s contextual situation (Rockwell, 2001).

Barthes (1964) defines “a language is therefore, so to speak, language minus speech: it is at the same time a social institution and a system of values....it is the social part of language, the individual cannot by himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate....for it can be handled only after a period of learning.” (pg. 14) Given the nature of language acquisition, Eco, Santambrogio, and Violi (1988) believe that real goal of semiotics is to illustrate how language is associated to the world via the intervention of the mind. However, Eco (1990) suggests that such a goal is laudable, but problematic because once language “is separated from its utterer (as well as from the utterer’s intention) and from the concrete circumstances of its utterance (and by consequence from its intended referent) floats (so to speak) in the vacuum of a potentially infinite range of possible interpretations.” (pg. 2) He further states that “language always says more than its unattainable literal meaning, which is lost from the very beginning of the textual utterance” (pg. 2) due the differential social and cultural experiences of the

communicative participants. Benjamin (1996) contend that “the translation of the language of things into that of man is not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of the nameless into name. It is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge.” (pg. 70) Baudrillard (1994) concluded that we live in a world that has created the technological innovations necessary to supply humanity with an infinite amount of information, but less and less meaning. He concludes that because society is constantly inundated with information, primarily in the form of language, without a contextual foundation, the derived meanings are tainted and therefore misinterpreted and worthless.

“In every idea of genius or in every new human idea, or, more simply still, in every serious human idea born in anyone’s brain, there is something that cannot possibly be conveyed to others, though you wrote volumes about it and spent thirty-five years in explaining your idea; something will always be left that will obstinately refuse to emerge from your head and that will remain with you for ever; and you will die without having conveyed to anyone what is perhaps the most vital point of your idea.” (Lotman, 1990, pg. 107) While it maybe true that human communication rarely ascertains the full breadth and depth of meanings tenuously conveyed in signs, the semiotician’s effort have continually enhanced the range of things that interpretants can now recognize and therefore decipher.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Crotty (1998) defines methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome.” (pg. 3) Bentz and Shapiro (1998) suggest that methods “are ways of gaining knowledge” (pg. 171) through the comprehension and interpretation of data. “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.... attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pg.3)

Therefore, the purpose of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of whatever is being observed in its organic contextually situated condition from the point of view of the participants (Borg, Gall, and Gall, 1993). In our particular situation, we were trying to come to terms with our beliefs about what democratic practices are, how they will be integrated in the classroom, and how we can make sense of our educational experiences.

With this in mind, a qualitative methodology was chosen because of its congruence with a participatory action research study focusing on the participants’ beliefs about democracy situated within a particular social context. Denzin and Shapiro (2000) proposed that there are three fundamental “attributes that are often used to distinguish participatory action research from conventional research: shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward

community action.” DePoy (1998) believes that the attraction to this type of research lies in the authentication and validation of the beliefs of those who have had tangible experiences with an incident. Therefore, they would presumably represent the most competent individuals to examine it. In this type of research, the participant and researcher labels are discarded in favor of terms that revolve around collaboration and cooperation. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) envision a process that integrates all of the stakeholders “in the research design, data gathering, data analysis, and implementation of action steps resulting from the research.” (pg. 128) Action research is also a very personal plan that “takes a snapshot of the here and now of you as a researcher—what you care enough about to study....” (Hubbard and Power, 1999, pg. 65)

Patton (2002) states that qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples....selected purposefully... information-rich cases....from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance.” (pg.10) Accordingly, deviant cases sampling was utilized because as Patton (2002) previously stipulated, “this strategy involves selecting cases that are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way.” (pg. 230) In our particular study, the criteria for selection was based on the students responses to two likert scales; one measuring “Students’ Perceived Beliefs about Democracy in the Classroom”; and the other measuring “Students’ Preferred Beliefs about Democracy in the Classroom”. The differences in scores on each of nineteen attributes were tabulated and combined to give a raw score. The highest raw score was selected because its perceived and preferred responses were indicative of someone whose beliefs about learning were in opposition to actual experiences. The lowest raw score was selected because its perceived and preferred responses indicated a

match between one's beliefs about learning and actual schooling experiences. The median raw score was included in the research to provide a reference point in the determination of the degree of acceptance or rejection of democratic practices by the other participants.

Qualitative inquiry is not a solitary, monumental approach to research and evaluation, but a proliferation of forms that each addresses specific purposes, questions, and contextual situations. (Patton, 2002) The narrative form that provided the 'best fit' for our research was Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a "three dimensional entity" that entails the "personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)." (Clandenin and Connelly, 2000, pg. 50) Conle (2001) defines it as "the study of one's own experiences or that of other people with the understanding that action and beliefs are grounded in personal, cultural histories and should not be inquired into without accounting for these as well".

According to Polkinghorne (1988), there are two distinctive types of narrative inquiry; descriptive and explanatory. Descriptive, also referred to as analysis of narrative, implies an outsider looking in mentality consistent with a researcher studying others constructions of narrative stories. As an outsider, the researcher analyzes the other people's narratives as primary data sources, usually in the forms of case studies, for patterns, themes, and commonalities exemplifying a particular worldview or interpretation. The researcher's interpretive role is more reactionary as he/she responds to the interpretations and sense makings processes of the participants as they negotiate through their lived experiences. In analysis of narrative, the participant narratives are a contributing data source that provides thick rich descriptions of the "inner and outer, the

backward and forward” of the storyteller. In explanatory or “narrative analysis, the data are mostly not in a narrative form. The information comes from different sources...the researcher arranges events and actions by showing how they contribute to the evolution of a plot.... the narrative is the result of the research.” (Smeyers and Verheschen, 2001) The nucleus, the crux of all meaning making evolves around the researcher as they “look between and beyond the data itself to the ways in which storied accounts are socially and culturally managed and constructed.” (Nichols, Tippins, Morano, Bilbao, & Barcenal, 2006) In narrative analysis, the narrative is the researcher/narrator’s product, vision, and explanation of the experiences of others through their interpretive lenses.

In this study narrative analysis was utilized because the participants actively engaged in the cognitive processes of narrative formation as they experienced democratic classroom practices, created reflexive photographic narratives, constructed kinetic drawings of classroom interactions, engaged in protocol analysis, and continually interacted with other researchers. The “narratability” (Frank, 2002) of these qualitative episodes was dependent on the relevance and applicability of the experiences to the individual’s storied life. Subsequently, a “narrativizing” action “transforms what would otherwise be a mere string of meaningless, disconnected events into a meaningful, connected story.... with a plot or running theme.” (Freeman, 2003) The narrative plot was like seeds planted in rich and fertile soil because they both had the possibility of producing a value commodity. The offspring of our research was four “specific narratives” that provided a “resonant identification” (McHale, 2004) of the participants’ experiences and beliefs about schooling in a democratically constructed classroom. Wertsch (2001) refers to these specific narratives as concretized stories that are grounded

in specific events, settings, and involve specific characters. Through these stories we impose “a structure, a compelling reality on what we experience, even a philosophical stance....a way to domesticate human error and surprise.” (Bruner, 2002, pg. 89)

Data Sources

Data collection for this study began during the spring semester of 2005 and concluded with the fifth-grade graduation in May of the same year. The primary data sources that were utilized in this study included a pretest-posttest scales measuring preferred and perceived beliefs about democracy in the classroom, student and teacher-led projection technique interviews, student and teacher generated reflexive photographic narratives, protocol analysis of narratives and drawing construction, and student and teacher fashioned kinetic drawings of the classroom setting, characters, and plot. The synthesis or fusion of the all of these tidbits of information about the participants led to the construction of four explanatory narratives. According to Polkinghorne (1988) in explanatory narratives the, “explanations are retrospective. They sort out the multitude of events and decisions that are connected....draw together the various episodes and actions into....an account that makes the ending reasonable and believable.” (pg. 171) Bruner (2002) suggests that narrative explanations provide us with a way to “domesticate human error and surprise....stories reassert a kind of conventional wisdom about what can be expected, even (or especially) what can be expected to go wrong and what might be done to restore or cope with the situation.” (pg. 31)

Student Beliefs Scales

The “Student’s Preferred and Perceived Beliefs about Democracy in the Classroom” scales were constructed to gain some initial insight into the student’s beliefs

about democracy in our classroom. Initially, an extensive review of relevant literature on democratic practices was completed in order to ascertain the fundamental attributes indicative of most democratic classrooms. From the research, it was concluded that student voice, collaboration, group responsibility and accountability, active problem centered learning, and respect for differences were the most common features of empowering learning environments (Pate, E., Homestead, E., & McGinnis, K., 1997) (Dewey, J., 1916) (Glickman, C. D., 1998) (Boler, M. (Ed.), 2004) (Goodlad, S. J. (Ed.), 2001) (Lempert, D. H., 1996) (Beane, J., 1997) (Gutman, A., 1987) (Shor, I., 1992) (Brookfield, S. D. & Sheldrake, S., 1999). Table 1 illustrates the relationship between the descriptors on the scale and attributes that they exemplify.

The likert scales consisted of eighteen descriptors that students rated on a five point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Table 2 provides an example of the scales that were disseminated to the participants prior to sampling selection. The differences in scores on each of eighteen descriptors were tabulated and combined to give a raw score. The highest raw score was selected because its perceived and preferred responses were indicative of someone whose beliefs about learning were in opposition to actual experiences. The lowest raw score was selected because its perceived and preferred responses were indicative of a match between one’s beliefs about learning and actual schooling experiences. The median raw score was included in the research to provide a reference point or ground zero when making comparison about the level of deviation between the bipolar cases. Patton (2002) suggests that deviant cases are “information rich because they are unusual or special in some way” (pg. 231) and often

provide the researcher with “lessons about unusual conditions or extreme outcomes that are relevant to improving more typical programs.”

Student and Teacher Led Interviews

According to Polkinghorne (1988) the primary form of empirical data for narratives is the interview. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit.” (Patton, 2002, pg. 341) However, this explicitness of the ‘other’ can be hindered or subjugated by the supplanting of interviewer biases within the questioning process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posited that “research interviews normally have an inequality about them. The direction of the interview, along with its specific questions, are governed by the interviewer.” (pg. 110) “The interview is a negotiated text, a site where power, gender, race, and class intersect....it is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality of the interview situation.” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pg. 633) Nevertheless, Riessman (1993) believes that the respondent can be empowered through “open-ended questions which are more likely than others to encourage narrativization....and allow respondents to construct answers, in collaboration with listeners.” Therefore, while an abundance of interviewing techniques were accessible to the researcher, not all of them encompassed the prerequisite characteristics of both the participatory and democratic approaches necessary to empower to all of the voices in the interview process.

In our study, the respondents to the interviews were three fifth-grade students and myself. Initially, the plan was to have each of us construct sets of open-ended questions for each of our three interviews. The students were to be assisted in this process by a neutral third party, the counselor at our school. However, due to a medical crisis within

her family, the counselor wasn't available to assist the students during the research. Accordingly, I met with the students to discuss what possible alternatives could be implemented (since the counselor was no longer a viable option) to ensure that they had all of the requisite competencies necessary to have an enlightening and profitable interview experience. The overriding theme revolved around their feelings of detachment from the focus of our research, the classroom experiences. In essence, they needed some sort of stimuli to engage their cognitions and activate their undisclosed memories about the classroom interactions. Kress and Jewitt (as quoted in Kendrick, 2002) remind us that the stimuli that evoke "meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade in interpretation through many representational and communicative modes" (pg. 46) beyond just language.

Patton (2002) believes that one of the most effective ways to interview children involves "projection techniques. The general principle involved is to have people react to something other than a question – an inkblot, picture, drawing, photo, abstract painting, film, story, cartoon, or whatever is relevant." (pg. 394) Catterall and Ibbotson (2000) suggest that projective techniques provide a plausible alternative to the more structured questioning format currently utilized in qualitative research. They further propose that these techniques "are fun and engaging....unusual and intriguing for respondents to complete, permitting them to express thoughts and feelings" which are often inaccessible. The abstract materializes before the interviewee's eyes "enabling him to project himself into a planned situation" (Meltzer, 1950, pg. 49) where recall is heighten through visual cues. Borg, Borg, and Gall (1993) contend that when interviewees are exposed to a "stimulus and have a freedom of response, the individual will "project" his inner

thoughts, fantasies, and structuring of reality onto the stimulus and this projection will be revealed in his stories.” (pg. 119)

The agreed upon stimulus for this study was photography. It was chosen because of the participants’ prior experience and comfort with photography as well as the emergence of photography in the empirical literature “as an integral part of the study of signs and symbols that constitutes research data and advances our understanding of events, behaviors, and scenes in context.” (Moran and Tegano, 2005) Collier, Jr. and Collier (1986) contend that researchers own research objectives cause binocular vision resulting in a tendency “to see only what we pragmatically need to see....the camera, by its optical character, has whole vision...it faithfully records this specialized subject and also all other associated elements within focus and scope of its lens. This capacity makes the camera a valuable tool for the observer...the mirror with a memory.”(pg. 7)

Consequently, the participant researchers were each given access to a digital camera. They were to use it to document the aspects of the classroom cultural experiences that they deemed were positive, negative, or particularly intriguing.

These photographic images became the resources that we utilized as the primary stimulus in the projection technique interviews. “The value of projective responses to photography is the powerful persuasion of realism. Often we think of psychological explosions in terms of symbolism; realism can be even more provocative. Not just photographic realism, but any real evidence can have the most explosive effect upon the witness.” (Collier, Jr. and Collier, 1986, pg. 129) Essentially, “photographic details provide a space that is continuous with the lived world, allowing viewers to establish a link with the everyday world that surrounds them.” (Cox, 1992) The photographs were

like the wardrobe in the “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”, for they had the ability to ‘hyperlink’ the present with the sensations and experiences of the past.

The two interviews were conducted approximately three weeks apart during our lunch and planning periods. The initial interview was scheduled at the conclusion of the third week of the study. The researchers felt that this would offer enough transitional time for all the participants to become comfortable with ‘modus operandi’ of taking and assembling photographic evidence. The collection of digital photographs were numbered by the camera and stored on floppy disk in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. At the outset of each interview the participants selected five numbers corresponding with five photographs. These five photographs became the cues that the participant researchers utilized in the interview process. To initiate a discourse between the researchers, a picture was selected from the subset of photographs and placed in front of the participant. Once a specific photo had been used by a participant it was removed from that participant’s collection to ensure that redundancy didn’t occur within that particular respondent’s portion of the study. They were then asked to respond to the following statement: ‘Tell me about the photograph.....’ The actual details of the interviews were audio-taped to ensure that the quotations of the respondents were recorded and documented verbatim. The audiotapes were also kept in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. As the participants responded to the initial “Tell me about the photograph” statement, “probes were used to deepen the responses to the question, increase the richness and depth of the responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired.” (Patton, 2002, pg. 372) This process was repeated throughout all five of the photographs and through entirety of the study.

The second form of interviewing that was enlisted in our study involved protocol analysis. “Protocol analysis or, more literally, the think-aloud protocol approach, aims to elicit the inner thoughts or cognitive processes that illuminate what’s going on in a person’s head during the performance of a task, for example, painting or solving a problem.” (Patton, 2002, pg. 385) In essence, the interviewee “verbalizes their thinking processes” (E. Camburn, public presentation, April 2000) as they encounter a problematic situation. This type of interviewing creates a “running commentary providing a richer set of information for analysis than simply recording keystrokes.” (Novotny, 2004, pg. 527)

In our study, “thinkaloud” was utilized during the participants’ creation of two separate drawings of schooling interactions; one from their experiences before the study began and one once it had begun. These drawings were scheduled once every three weeks with the first one occurring approximately five weeks into the study. The drawings were completed in the art room in conjunction with our lunch and planning period. Because of the nature of the task and the importance of the outcome, the participants were given as many planning periods as necessary to complete their classroom drawings. Prior to the initial drawings, the participants all were given one on one instruction from the school art teacher on the finer points of creating three dimensional characters and settings. This was done to ensure that the visual products were detailed enough to adequately communicate their meanings to the audience.

“The process of drawing emerges as a powerful medium for discovering and expressing meaning; for the young child, drawing brings ideas to the surface. Drawing is one of children’s many representational tools. It is a form of iconic representation that

reflects the distinctive features of the represented experience, a graphic image that represents what children know.” (Kendrick and McCay, 2002) Vygotsky (1978) contends that drawings should be seen “as a particular kind of child speech” (pg. 112) that elaborates on the “general qualities, such as an impression of roundness and so forth” (pg. 108) of the object of significance. For children tend to draw things based on what Pierce (1991) referred to as the “concept of it” as opposed to the more representational and mimetic approach utilized by adults. This is of particular significance because their conceptual understandings of objects are defined by one’s belief system and therefore provide the viewer with a glimpse into this inner sanctum. According to Malchiodi (1998) “Art making is a process that brings together many different experiences to create something new, personal, and unique. The process of making a drawing requires the child to choose, translate, and arrange in lines, shapes, and colors to convey a thought, feeling, event, or observation synthesizing numerous components involving content, style, form, and composition.” (pg. 19)

In our study, the particular type of ‘art making’ was referred to as kinetic drawings. These types of drawings emphasize the social interactions that occur among differing members of the populace within a particular contextual location. According to Malchiodi (1998) kinetic drawings “provide children with the potential to tell stories, convey metaphors, and present world views, both through what is present in the image itself and through their own responses to their images.” (pg. 43) In essence, drawings represent the “graphic voice of intention” (K. Ring, public presentation, 13 September 2001) as the “realm of the unconscious, collective or personal, is represented in art through images and symbols” (Furth, 1988, pg. 2) of the artist. “The main facts or

features of the object are contained in a mental or internal model and, when asked to draw something, it is the internal model that children draw from.” (Cox, 1992, pg. 88)

The participants were given the following instructions prior to the creation of their kinetic drawings (the drawings were constructed individually in isolation to ensure that their depictions were representative of their personal beliefs without influences from their coresearchers’ drawings): “I’d like you to draw a school picture. Put yourself, your teacher, and a friend or two in the picture. Make everyone doing something. Try to draw whole people and make the best drawing you can. Remember, draw yourself, your teacher, and a friend too, and make everyone doing something.” (Klepsch and Logie, 1982, pg. 82) Also, please make sure that you number each component (objects or people in the room, but not the room itself) of the picture so that the sequence of your drawing is recognizable. In Woleck’s (2001) study on mathematical problem solving using drawing, she found that “Self talk could often be heard as children talked themselves through their process of drawing. For some, it was as if they were living the drama of their drawing, and it was a drama that could reveal much about a child’s number sense to a teacher with an open ear... It is the language the child attaches to these pictures that gives teachers insights into the child’s understand and thinking....” (pg. 222) Thus, throughout the creation process, an audiotape was constantly capturing the “thinkaloud” discussions that transpired between the inner and outer self in the form of self-talk. These morsels of intuitiveness became what Patton (2002) refers to as “the prize sought by qualitative inquirers....the actual quotations spoken by the interviewees” while in the grasp of dilemma. While some of these quotations were ambiguous and needed clarification, it was the researchers’ contention that the “thinkaloud” process should proceed

uninterrupted until the process was completed. However, upon the conclusion of each of the drawings, an interview was conducted to elaborate on and present explanations for these uncertainties.

Participants' Reflective Photographic Narratives

Narratives are often referred to as the “language of storytelling.” (Patton, 2002, pg. 196) Stories are things that we have all grown up with and become accustomed to witnessing and portraying. They often evoke very fond memories of our childhood experiences with the multitude of storytellers in our lives. Therefore, the narrative approach seemed obvious given the participatory nature of our study and the relative age of our research group. We all felt that this was an appropriate way for us to scrutinize our own beliefs about life and learning in a democratic learning environment. From a narrative perspective, the story-telling process is “foundational to how an individual comes to know life at the practical level of everyday events, that is, how formal knowledge, personal aspirations and goals, and cumulative experience are integrated in an understanding of immediate, local situations.” (Sikula, 1996)

We decided to utilize a variation on Harper's (1987) “Reflective Photographic Narrative” in our investigation of our beliefs about democratic learning. According to Harrington and Schibik (2003), the participants' photographs are the primary stimulus during interviews. The researcher asks the participants to group the photos in to a logical sequence that expresses their experiences with the research. This is often referred to as a narrativizing action because it “transforms what would otherwise be a mere string of meaningless, disconnected events into a meaningful, connected story.... with a plot or running theme.” (Freeman, 2003) Polkinghorne (1988) defines the narrative plot as “the

organizing theme that identifies the significance and the role of the individual events...a transformation of a chronicle or listing of events into a schematic whole...by highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development and outcome of the story.” (pg. 18) Finally, after making sense of the data, the participants expounded upon their plots in “photo elicitation interviews.” (Harrington and Schibik, 2003)

The essential difference between our approach and Harper’s involved the inclusion of captions that unified the photographs into a fictional account of one character’s experiences with democratic education. We included these captions because we believe as Barthe (1964) suggested that “Where there is a visual substance, for example, the meaning is confirmed by being duplicated in a linguistic message so that at least a part of the iconic message is, in terms of structural relationship, either redundant or taken up by the linguistic system.” Eco (1979) posits that the rationale for this redundancy has to do with “Noise on the channel, which is to say any disturbance that could alter the nature of the signals, making them difficult to detect...” (pg. 9) Of course the noise that he is speaking of is actually the differences in perspectives and framings (Goffman, 1974) that may skew their interpretations of what has been signified.

We chose to write our narratives in the third person as fictional accounts because these stories are the portals “to the inner world of subjectivity” (Conle, 2001) providing privileged access to the deep recesses of “one’s subject position.” (McHale, 2004) Consequently, it would seem only natural that our defensive mechanisms would conceal the aspects of our existence that might jeopardize our social positions. However, if we wrote in the hypothetical, then the “other’s” thoughts and actions are the focal point thus

deactivating our defensive systems and opening the flood gates of true insight. Bruner (2002) also reminds us of the value of fiction when he stated that “We may like to say that literary fiction does not refer to anything in the world but only provides a sense of things. Yet it is the sense of things often derived from narrative that makes later real-life reference possible” (pg. 8) and indeed comprehensible.

Primary Researcher Field Notes

“Field notes are the most important determinant of later bringing off a qualitative analysis. Field notes provide the observer’s *raison d’etre*. If...not doing them, [the observer] might as well not be in the setting.” (Lofland, 1971 quoted from Patton, pg. 302) Throughout the entire process, I kept detailed field notes relative to the student/teacher interactions in our democratic classroom. In particular, field notes were taken during all of the following situations: participant researcher meetings, ‘Circle Time’ in the morning and afternoon, ‘Theatre of the Oppressed activities’, and during all of our primary data collection activities. All field notes included the date and time of the observation, the corresponding setting, primary characters involved in the encounter, a description of the ongoing activity, and the type of interaction that occurred (cooperative or hierarchical).

Context of the Study

The recently constructed small rural southeastern elementary school consists of six hundred students and forty-two faculty members. The student population is primarily Caucasian, but also includes a small percentage of African-Americans, Laotians, and Latinos. Due to its proximity to larger urban and suburban populations to the east and west of it, the school and county’s populations have significantly increased recently.

While the influx of residents has increased the demand for schools, the relatively minimal industrial base has curtailed the county's ability to properly equip and educate its clientele. Accordingly, redistricting and the transient nature of the population have seen a redistribution of the county's student population. The site of the study has consistently performed well on the state mandated criterion referenced tests thus acquiring "Choice" status among the elementary schools in the county thus further elevating the student population.

The micro setting for the study was a fifth-grade classroom. Upon entering the room one notices that the traditional décor of most classrooms is missing. The room is void of decorations with the exception of two banners on the front dry erase board and the American flag. Upon further inspection, one notices that the primary piece of furniture, student desks, has been replaced with six long tables situated in a semi-circle. Next to the exterior wall sits a large wooden shelving system that contained 26 cubbies where all of the students' belongings were placed. Next to the cubbies sits the teacher's desk. There are papers, books, and all other types of academic and nonacademic materials on the desk. It is apparent from the shape of the desk that it is primarily a dumping ground for materials that need to be kept or revisited later. It doesn't appear that it is used by the teacher because of the lack of room as well as the absence of a chair. On the board, are three different lists in dry-erase marker. The first list consists of the rights of the students as voted upon by the all of the members of the classroom. The second one contains a list of six rules with which the class complies. The final list contains all of the student-derived consequences for those who chose to be noncompliant to the rules and rights of the classroom. The one large bulletin board in the room has been subdivided into

five equivalent sections. Each section contains a heading and exemplars underneath it. These heading include “Things I like” and “Things I don’t like”, “Inspirational stories about kids”, “The five ways of knowing”, and “Things I need to do.”

Participants in the Study

The participants in the study are members of the researcher’s fifth-grade classroom. The class consisted of 18 males and 7 females ranging in age between 10 and 12 years old. Based on the prior year’s standardized test scores, the class’s academic performance could be classified as medium to high based on the prior year’s test outcomes. With the exception of two students who were purposefully placed in the researcher’s room at the beginning of the academic year, the remaining members of the class had been with the researcher during fourth-grade. At the conclusion of the previous year the parents were given the choice whether to have their child remain in the researcher’s classroom or not. With the exception of two students who relocated out of the county, all of the other student’s parents gave their consent to having their children remain with the same class and teacher. This simultaneous movement together of teacher and students in subsequent years is referred to as looping.

Data Analysis

“Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe.” (Patton, 2002, pg. 432) While our recipe was guided by other qualitative studies, we also varied our empirical ingredients in the hopes of adding our own authentic signature to the research. The foundations of our beliefs about qualitative data came from Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) definition of viable qualitative exemplars; “newspapers, movies, sitcoms, e-mail traffic, folktales, life

histories....narratives about getting divorced, about being sick, about surviving hand-to-hand combat....the good stuff of social science.”(pg. 3) Consequently, our sources included reflexive photographic narratives, kinetic drawings, projection technique interviewing, protocol analysis, and thick rich descriptive field notes.

During the data analysis phase we initially categorized and coded all the data utilizing Glaser and Strauss’s constant comparative analysis method. They (1967) suggest that “using the constant comparative method makes probable the achievement of a complex theory that corresponds closely to the data...it especially facilitates the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interactions.” (p. 114) At first, the raw data were coded into two separate distinct categories; linguistic signs presented in the photographic narratives and verbal responses during the projection technique interviews; and nonlinguistic signs presented in the kinetic drawings, researcher observations of participant demeanor, and included photographs in reflexive photographic narratives. As the data collection process continued, the continuing experiences and interactions of the participants with democracy resulted in the generation of commonalities or properties that became the descriptors of the initial categories that were based on the number of participants in the interaction, the structure and content of the learning, and the location of interactions.

We “started thinking in terms of the full range of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced, or minimized, its major consequences, its relations to other categories, and its other properties.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.106) At this point, we wrote detailed memos (the students documented their impressions in the captions to their photoessays at the same time as I utilized brackets [] to document initial

thoughts, connections, or epiphanies that had occurred or parenthesis () to add contextual information necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of the data) that provided us with thick rich descriptions that were the groundwork for qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002). Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that memos like these allow the researcher “to tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions.”(pg. 107) The process of memo writing forced us to make conscious choices about and empirical justifications for our categories, their properties, and the contents within them. After an extended period of data collection, it became apparent through the redundancy in themes and properties that data saturation had occurred.

As an ongoing component of the research process, we had been constructing and revising our own “make sense of it” narratives about the data we had been accumulating.. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994) “storying is a process of moving simultaneously in four directions: inward (inside self), outward (toward community), backward (in time), and forward (also in time)” in search of the meaning of one’s experiences. During the narrative formation “the data were mostly not in a narrative form. The information came from different sources.....the researcher arranges events and actions by showing how they contributed to the evolution of a plot....the narrative is the result of the research.” (Smeyers and Verheschen, 2001, pg. 6) Freeman (2003) suggests that this “narrativizing” action “transforms what would otherwise be a mere string of meaningless, disconnected events into a meaningful connected story....with a plot or running theme.” (p.107) The students’ meaning-making narratives took the form of a “Once upon a time” fictional account, in a photoessay format, of their beliefs about democratic learning. The narrative impulses became “a liberating instrument through

which they” could “impose structure on the flow of experience and give meaning to their own lives and to the traditional materials of schooling.” (Hopkins, 1994, p.126)

At this point, the data reduction process had compiled, sorted, and synthesized all of the participant data into three comprehensive narratives about their beliefs relative to power and democracy in the classroom. Kramp (1988) suggested that the most distinguishing feature of narrative generation “as a mode of inquiry is that it is both the process – a narrator/participant telling or narrating – and the product – the story or narrative told.” Reissman (1993) reminded us that the process wasn’t complete for we still had to answer “and then what happened?” Consequently, these three narratives became the final pieces of the student beliefs jigsaw puzzle. A final comprehensive narrative was constructed that utilized the three individual participant narratives as its primary data sources. Bruner (2002) cautions against becoming enthralled with the solution for often times the appeal of a great narrative “is the invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving. It is deeply about plight, about the road rather than the inn which it leads.” Forewarned by Bruner’s comments, the final product of our research was but the first stone of many left to be unturned.

The Voices of Our Research

Throughout our research, we continually attempted to integrate all of our voices uniformly in the following sections of our study: research design, data collection, data analysis, and conclusions. For, if we didn’t strive for equality the students would have been “without a voice – that is, roughly speaking, the power to speak (or write) out and express one’s ideas and views, to “say one’s mind” (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002) thus limiting the potentiality of our “participatory” action research study. Consequently, the

majority of our methodological choices (reflexive photographic narratives, kinetic drawings, and projective interviews) were coupled with the perceived aptitudes of the students thus increasing the probability that their voices were recognized and appreciated as substantial contributors in our empirical undertakings.

However, while we were intentionally striving for the utopian notion of equivalency of voices, in reality, our preexisting societal roles as teacher/students and doctoral candidate/elementary school students ultimately influenced and overwhelmed the utopian equality we were seeking. An artificial, socially constructed hierarchy existed that tended to magnify and validate my contributions to the research over my esteemed counterparts, the children. We understood that the “outsiders’ beliefs” created the appearance of an inherent inequality in our voices, but we were also confident that all of our voices were heard and recognized for their contributions in our research endeavors.

CHAPTER 4

ONE TEACHER'S STORY OF ACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Welcome to "Participatory" Action Research (February, 2005)

I never thought the day would finally arrive when I could begin the data collection, "the meat and potatoes" of the research process, but it is finally here. It seems rather preposterous of me to be feeling so apprehensive about what will soon transpire, but I must remember that this is the culmination of six years of learning, questioning, learning, and reflecting, and 'yes', even more questioning. Soon, I will know who my companions will be as we embark on our quest of our beliefs about democracy in the classroom.

I imagine that part of my intrepidation is probably due to the participatory nature of the research that will be undertaken. I have sketches of how the process will most likely occur, but no absolutes. For this, I will need the input and collaboration of my future co-researchers. Having to depend on others to such a degree is a bit disconcerting given my propensity for tackling life's issues single-handedly. Inevitably, all humans must, at some point, depend on others for aid, assistance, and guidance. Well, it appears that if I want to truly understand the nature of the democracy purportedly cultivated in our classroom then I must be willing to open myself up to the gazes of others.

While I was distributing the first of two scales responsible for selecting my co-researchers, I began to wonder what the students' responses would be and if I knew them as well as I so often professed. Were the beliefs of the students transparent like a puppies desires for a mouthwatering bone or was their a deeper more transcendental aspect that

had as of yet remained concealed like a pirate's undiscovered treasure? This and many other questions were about to be answered.

Once every student had a copy of the "Student's Perceived Beliefs about Democracy in the Classroom" scale I read the following directions out loud to the class:

*Read each of the sentences below. Choose the response that most closely fits your beliefs **about democracy in the classroom**. Please circle only one response for each statement. Below is key defining the meanings of each of the possible responses:*

***SA** means that you **strongly agree** with the sentence. You know that this is true.*

***A** means that you **agree** with it, but there maybe some doubt or it may not be true all the time.*

***DK** means that you **don't know**. Either you haven't seen it in your class experiences or you are unsure about the meaning of the statement.*

***DA** means that you **disagree** with it, but there maybe some doubt or it may be true only some of the time.*

***SD** means that you **strongly disagree** with sentence. You know that this isn't true.*

After reading the directions I asked if anyone had any questions or concerns that needed to be addressed before completing the scale. While the students gave their verbal assurances to me that they understood the directions, the visual cues (raised eyebrows, wrinkled foreheads, and openmouthed looks on some of the children's faces) said otherwise. So, in response to my own uneasiness, I asked for someone to please paraphrase what was to be accomplished. While the responses indicated that the students understood the process involved in selecting possible answer choices, it was also evident

that they were unclear about what was meant by “perceived beliefs”. Consequently, I expounded upon the meaning by saying the following:

“Perceived beliefs are based on those things that you have witnessed or have actually seen in the classroom. This scale is not trying to find out what you would like to see, only what you have actually seen or experienced.”

Once again I asked if there were anymore questions, but this time the verbal and visual cues (nods of heads, eye contact, pencils in hands ready to begin) suggested that the students were more comfortable with the task at hand. For the most part, all of the students completed the scale in twenty minutes or less. I then thanked them for their assistance and grudgingly put them aside in a locked drawer of my file cabinet.

That afternoon I finally had the opportunity to sit down and examine the students’ responses. I must admit that I was surprised by some of the responses checked by the students. For instance, one of the brighter more conscientious students marked “disagree” next to the following attribute:

During group work, each student brings a special talent that improves the groups’ chances of learning and success.

Another student, who often demonstrated maladaptive social behaviors in groups, marked “agree” next to the following attribute:

Students are responsible for each others behaviors as well as their own.

And finally, one other student, who could be characterized as being shy and reserved, marked “strongly disagree” next to the following attribute:

When the classroom is developing projects, the students play an important role in deciding what will be included and how it will be presented.

In each case, as previously admitted, I was rather shocked by their beliefs and disgruntled at myself for being so oblivious to their individual needs. Ultimately, though, these epiphanic moments made me even more resolute in my desire to better understand my students' beliefs about our classroom practice.

Of course, I immediately wanted to redistribute the scales so that I could surmise what their "preferred beliefs about democracy in the classroom" would be. Unfortunately, I knew that if I did this, the students' previous responses would be fresh on their minds thus enhancing the likelihood of similar selections again. So, as planned, I waited three days before distributing the second scale. After distributing the "Student's Perceived Beliefs about Democracy in the Classroom" scale I read the same directions that were previously incorporated in the "perceived beliefs" scale. However, this time I also included the following clarifying statement about the meaning of "preferred":

Preferred refers to what you would like the classroom to be like if you could make it anyway you wanted it to be.

I asked if there were any questions or concerns about the scale, but none were indicated. This, of course, wasn't surprising given the fact that the two scales were identical with the exception of the words "preferred" versus "perceived". It took most of the students less than fifteen minutes to complete the scale this time. I concluded that the decrease in time was probably due to one of the following two reasons; the students familiarity with the scale; or the saliency of their convictions about their ideal classroom. Once again, I thanked them for taking the time to fill out the scales and put them in the locked filing cabinet with the replies from the preceding scale and impatiently awaited the conclusion of the school day.

The end of the day had finally come and it was now time for me to become acquainted with the ‘others’; the students whose responses had inextricably fused us together for the next four months. So, with paper and pencil in hand, I went about the process of calculating the differences between scores on each of the eighteen descriptors on the “preferred” and “perceived” scales of student beliefs for each of the twenty-five students in the classroom. As I was tabulating the overall scores I was continually dumbfounded by the results. It seemed to me that either I hadn’t been listening to their voices or I was selectively perceiving only those things that validated what I thought was a reasonably democratic classroom. One honor roll student who was an exceptional peer tutor and always willing to assist others responded to the following attribute with a strongly agree on the “preferred scale”, but a disagree on the “perceived scale”:

In the classroom, students are encouraged to listen and respect different ideas even if they don’t agree with them.

Another student who is constantly telling jokes, blurting out, or making inappropriate noises responded to the following attribute with a strongly disagree on the “perceived scale”, but a strongly agree on the “preferred scale”:

The students and teacher try to understand each others individual differences.

While these types of responses weren’t the norm, I was still startled by my inability to discern the contradictions that existed within the classroom. Was I so concerned about the unity of the group that I had obliterated one of the hallmarks of democracy, individuality? I certainly hope not. At the same time, I welcomed these responses because they provided me with the impetus for the critical action research we were about to undertake.

According to Whyte (Patton, 2002, pg. 221) action research welcomes the problematic

because “Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve those problems.”

It seems that at this point, I have wandered upon the proverbial crossroad where I, excuse me, we, must decide the directionality of the remainder of our research. I am reminded that I now have three co-researchers who will all have a voice in how the process continues. After informing the three students, who shall be referred to as Joey, Zoey, and Chloe, of their selection we had to decide when and where our first meeting would take place. After much discussion, we all agreed that all of our meetings would be held in the P.E. teacher’s office during our morning specials (lasting approximately forty minutes). We chose this time and place because it would offer us a secluded private location to speak freely, access to a computer with a floppy drive and printer, and most importantly, a large enough block of uninterrupted time for us to accomplish our goals. At the conclusion of these discussions, I posed the following questions to all of the researchers as prompts for our first official meeting (Glickman, 1998):

What does democracy mean to you?

What would a democratic classroom look like?

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

Are there things in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

What types of decisions should be made by the students? By the teacher?

To break the ice and alleviate any possible nervousness, I brought in refreshments (Cokes and Krispy Kreme Donuts) for our first official meeting. While munching on these delicious tidbits, I asked if it would be alright if we all shared our responses to yesterday's questions. Initially, after what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was probably only 15-20 seconds, each child shook their heads in agreement. However, these gestures lacked the forcefulness indicative of the self-assuredness that I was hoping they would have. In response to their discomfort, I asked if they would feel more at ease if each person shared someone else's answers to the questions posed to us during yesterday's initial get-together. This suggestion was met with a much more enthusiastic and affirmative response.

As we listened to each others thoughts, expressed our views, and debated over our notions of democracy in the classroom, I struggled with how often and loud my voice should be in the conversation. There were pieces missing from our proverbial jigsaw puzzle. I knew that their lack of prior experience with research and democratic education would necessitate some guidance, but I still was a bit uneasy [after all, the whole point behind our research was to move away from the more traditional teacher roles as leader and source of information] with being a more vocal participant. However, as Glickman (1998) indicated, "the teacher has a responsibility to use his or her unique attributes—position, experience, age, and wisdom—to guide students to the fundamental aim of learning to be free" (pg.) especially when their prior experiences are devoid of the essential knowledge necessary to make an informed decision.

During our second meeting I thought it prudent to begin discussing what data was and the sources we would incorporate in the collection of it. When I inquired as to the

meaning of data and the sources of data that they thought they might like to include Zoey, Joey, and Chloe each gave me an eyebrow raised open mouthed look as if I were talking in some foreign dialect. Of course, in reality I was. I had forgotten that while I was privy to the terminology of qualitative research, my collaborators were not. They were children who lacked the jargon of the field, but more than compensated for this with their unique perspectives on their peers' thoughts and beliefs. So, I surmised that I might have to restate my query in a more recognizable format. Accordingly, I used the word "data" and "data sources" in the following sentences [this was done partly because I am a teacher and giving away the answers is an unacceptable alternative for me, but also because one's framings and beliefs are contextually based. Therefore, practicing the art of interpretation seemed relevant]:

I took all of the data that I collected about Abraham Lincoln and put it in a report that I had to turn into my teacher for a social studies grade. I also had to give her a list of the data sources that I utilized including books, internet websites, and interviews with people who knew of him.

Once they had demonstrated an understanding of what "data" and "data sources" meant we were able to continue our methodological discussions. Because they had limited knowledge about the techniques of qualitative research, they decided to defer to my judgment. Uncomfortable with this because it reeked of a more authoritative "sage on the stage" mentality, I persuaded them to let me give them examples of some alternatives that they might choose from. Among the choices offered were interview guides, photo essays, narratives, drawings and sketches, and finally field notes.

From the outset, all three of the participants indicated that they would prefer not to have to do too much writing. This, of course, was no huge surprise since we had just finished an extensive review of the writing process in preparation for the Fifth-Grade Writing Assessment. It is also possible that the children [all three have struggled with their writing during the school year] recognized that their responses would be limited by their ability to effectively communicate their beliefs mediated through the written language. In response to their misgivings, I suggested that they might like to create a narrative based on a collection of digital pictures of our classroom as we interacted on a day to day basis. Of course the responses were a resounding “YES!” Not surprising, given most children’s affinity for anything technological.

Next, I asked how they would feel about being interviewed and interviewing me. They seemed less than enthused about this prospect, too. When I asked them what seemed to bother them the most about interviewing, the following responses were given:

I’m supposed to ask you questions?

I wouldn’t know what to ask you about.

What if you ask me something I don’t know? Is this going to be kinda like a test or something?

What if I don’t really have anything I want to know? What do I do then?

I reassured them that there wasn’t a right or wrong way to interview and that they could ask me anything they want to do, but they still seemed ill at ease evidenced by their increased fidgeting, the expressionless flatness of their mouths, and lack of eye contact with me. However, realizing that interviewing is and will most likely always be the primary form of empirical data for narratives (Polkinghorne, 1988), I continued to

negotiate with the children about interviewing. Ultimately, the overriding concern of the children seemed to be twofold: first, how to construct questions; and second, how to respond to questions from an interviewer. At this point I realized that visual prompts would appease their concerns and would most likely make the interview process much easier and less stressful. Consequently, I suggested that we might want to use the photographs we were going to take as well as possibly some artwork that we might create (with the assistance of the art teacher) as the primary focal point of all interview questions. The children's verbal responses as well as their smiles and chattering, all suggested that we had come to favorable resolution to our conundrum.

At this point, it appeared that we had addressed almost all of the logistical issues pertinent to the successful commencement of our research project. However, two things still needed to be attended to. First, I wanted to know if there was anything in particular that they wanted beyond what was originally promised to them in the following excerpt from their consent form:

You understand that you will receive some reward for participating that may include passes for the following items each week: Coke, one hour of free computer time, lunch passes. You will also have the opportunity to get a twenty dollar gift certificate to the book fair and three pizzas from Papa John's to be eaten during lunches with the researcher.

Zoey, Chloe, and Joey indicated that they would like to do something for the whole class because the research involved all of them. I asked what they had in mind and they suggested that they could earn some sort of play money (one of our projects that we do twice a month involves the kids creating a store and selling items for play money) that

could then be used to purchase things for the class. I inquired about what types of things they would most likely want to purchase. They weren't sure at that moment, but assured me that they would have a menu of items/prices for me by the end of the week. After spending two days worth of specials (physical education, music, art, and computer lab) on the task, the students, grinning from ear to ear, presented me with the menu and asked if the prices were reasonable. Practicing what we preached, we discussed some of the prices, especially the one related to lazy day and reached a compromise that satisfied both sides.

Second, how were we going to transition from a semi-democratic classroom to one that was fully engulfed by the democratic ideal?

My Classroom Before Democratic Education

It would seem prudent of me at this point to first describe the classroom as it was prior to the democratic intervention. The atmosphere in our classroom could loosely be categorized as a quasi-democracy. In comparison to many of the students' prior experience, our classroom had an enormous amount of freedom, but in retrospect, what they were comparing was kind of like the first bite of real food to a person who has been stranded on a deserted island without nourishment for weeks. It seems like the most delicious morsels that they have ever consumed, but the contextual moment may have distorted their views. It is not until later on when they are inundated with the full realm of possible choices that they realize the true taste of what they had devoured.

Our classroom would probably be defined as a project-based classroom in social studies and science. Two areas (science and social studies can be very exploratory in nature) where the project mentality tends to lend itself to successful learning

opportunities. Within these subjects, the students were usually given a rubric or checklist by me that detailed what (the specific content as well as the types of evidence that should be included) was to be a part of their projects, but they were given the discretion on how to research, collect, and present the information. As they progressed in their learning and demonstrated competency in their project development, I began to remove more and more of my input about how the project would unfold. I would monitor what was being done and provide feedback that would keep them moving in the right direction [still defined by me]. At the conclusion of the projects, the students would bring me what they had developed and I would then discuss it with them and assign a grade. [this was very much a one way exchange where I determined if they had met the criteria established on the rubric or checklist].

In math, language, and reading, I was solely responsible for the content, how it was delivered, what the students would do, and finally how to monitor their learning. They were often given a variety of different ways to learn the materials that were often very different than their prior experiences (they often referred to their past experiences with more textbook and worksheet-oriented teachers). Consequently, the students were often very engaged in the learning because it wasn't textbook driven and allowed [suggestive of who was in charge in these situations] them to move about the room and work cooperatively with others. However, while these situations were more egalitarian than most of their previous experiences, it still wasn't a democratic environment. Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) remind us "that without voice – that is, roughly speaking, the power to speak (or write) out and express one's ideas and views, to say one's mind", one cannot truly have or attain the democratic ideal.

Lastly, all behavioral aspects of the classroom were primarily dictated by me. The rules, consequences, and rewards for our classroom [ultimately it wasn't 'our' classroom at this time, but 'mine', but I would like to think that I leased them space in it] were already in place when they first came into the classroom at the beginning of the school year. It was primarily my responsibility to determine if appropriate [as defined by my views] behavior had been demonstrated and if had or hadn't I would divvy out the rewards and the consequences. Once again, as they became more aware of the expectations of a 'good student' they were then given [once again 'given' indicates who has the power to do this] greater control over the determination of their own rewards, but not consequences. "In other words, getting actions, words, interactions "right" in the discourses of school and work means that people are able to "pull off" being a good student or worker (Gee, 1999)." In essence, they had learned how to function within my rules of power.

Say 'Hello' to Democratic Education

I don't think I truly realized how undemocratic the classroom was until I started really trying to conceptualize what the literature said about democratic classrooms. As part of the construction of the "perceived" and "preferred" scales, I had to first decide what were the key ideas or virtues of a democratic classroom. After months and months of reading the literature on democracy I finally came up with the following components which I [it should be noted that there is no consensus on what democratic education is or how to achieve it] consider to be fundamental to any democratic endeavor: student voice, group and individual accountability, collaboration, active problem centered learning, and respect for differences. I now knew what I envisioned for the classroom, but this research

wasn't to be an "I", but a "We", so I now needed to find out what my coresearchers thought.

During our first get-together [I hesitate in calling it a meeting because that sounded way too ominous and the kids needed their first experience to be loose and relaxed], as previously mentioned in part 2, I had posed the following questions to them (Glickman, 1998) in hopes of getting an understanding of their perspectives on democratic education:

What does democracy mean to you?

What would a democratic classroom look like?

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

Are there things in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

What types of decisions should be made by the students? By the teacher?

These questions provided the students with the gentle nudge they needed to open a discussion and come to an agreement on what they considered to be the underlying principles of their version of a democratic classroom. From these dialogues the following responses were developed:

What does democracy mean to you?

Freedom of our choice of what we get to do.

[When stating this, an emphasis seemed to be place on the word "our". This question required the least amount of discussion before the students came to a

consensus about an answer.]

What would a democratic classroom look like?

Deciding on everything and voicing your opinions during circle time so we have a tiny bit of freedom. [The notion of a “tiny bit” of freedom intrigued me. It was a comment that would have to be readdressed later with the students individually. It reminded me of a concentration camp prisoner who is grateful for what little food he or she gets, not because it is so wonderful, but because it is so scarce that when you get the slightest amount you are overjoyed.]

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

So we can voice our opinions, learn, but have fun while we do it, and do what we want if it is suitable. [Who determines what is “suitable”? They continue to be insinuating that the final “yes” or “no” comes from another source beyond them. Once again this just reminds me of the stifling effects of the socialization process in our schools. How can I change their views about schooling when they have been so completely acculturated into the “traditional” ideals about student/teacher relationships?]

Are there things in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

In a regular classroom you don't get to choose what you do, you have to listen to what he or she says and do it no matter what, and the amount of work we do and when we do it would depend on the teacher in a non-democratic classroom.

What types of decisions should be made by the students?

What we do and when we do it, who we do it with, what we like to do.

By the teacher? Decide the things that are really important like what we have to do in a day (requirements) (CRCT), what projects we do. [It was interesting that they incorporated the word “important” when referring to what decisions the teacher should make. So does that mean that only unimportant decisions are made by the kids? I am beginning to wonder if this is the message that I have sent them through my words and deeds.] (CRCT refers to the Criterion Referenced Competency Test given once a year students in grade 1-12 to assess their knowledge of Georgia’s curriculum)

With a clearer and more complete idea about our version of democratic education in hand, it was time to begin deciding on how to promote these ideals. We all needed a mechanism for voicing our opinions and concerns about the day to day learning. We also needed to create a more unified, collaborative, and empathetic environment that would nurture and cultivate differences within a valued group. Then, we need to determine values that we want everyone to have and uphold. Finally, we needed a mechanism for resolving conflictual relations between members of our classroom society.

Kelly (1995) defines democratic society as “one where reasons are continuously put forward to justify behavior and where public spaces exist to permit free and uncoerced debate over questions of cognitive, normative, or aesthetic truth” (E. Kelly 1995, pg. 120). I knew that if our classroom democracy was to flourish, all of us would need a forum for debating on issues pertaining to classroom learning, interactions, and atmosphere. Having recently read Pate, Homestead, and McGinnis’s (1997) work on

curriculum integration, I was familiar with their ideas of “group processing.” During their research they had utilized team meetings as a vehicle for discussing crucial issues that affected the stability of the group. I decided that I would mention this to the class and see how they felt about having meetings every so often. The students thought that it was a wonderful idea and felt that we should have them as a part of our daily classroom routines. We then discussed the timing of these meetings along with the types of things that could be addressed during what eventually became known as our “circle time”. We called it this because we decided that by sitting in a circle everyone would have access to each other and the group as a whole. We also felt that this shape was conducive to the group mentality because the circle wouldn’t have a focal point or designated leader.

We decided that the guiding principles for our discussions were that everyone voice could be heard and listened to, that disagreements were okay as long as each side could present reasons for how they felt, and above all, we would make every effort to come to a consensus on all decisions through compromise [this component often prolonged our discussions to the point where portions of our group appeared to become disinterested]. We then determined what were deemed as appropriate issues for “circle time” dialogues. These included planning the order of events for the day, the content or subject matter for the day, and other issues relative to the group. However, we decided that individual issues between members of our class weren’t appropriate for this time because they often involved personal information that needed to be kept private and confidential.

Another area of concern was how to create a more unified, collaborative, and empathetic environment that would nurture and cultivate differences within our valued

group. Having read a lot on Critical Theory, I became aware of an interesting fellow named Augusto Boal. He is well-known around the world for his “Theatre of the Oppressed” programs. These programs teach the participants how to become more in tune with their bodies and minds. In particular, it focuses on the mechanistic tendencies that we all have which often hinder our ability to understand the value of the differences in all of us. The second truth it teaches is about how anything is possible if the group works together as one synergetic unit. So I asked the class at our first “circle time” if they would be willing to try out a few of the activities in Augusto Boal’s book, “Games for Actors and Non-Actors.” After describing some of the activities and providing the class with a justification for its inclusion, they concurred. (the activities became so important to them that we now do 1-2 activities every other day)

Examples of some of the activities that were included within our day to day interactions included “The Cross and the Circle”, “Columbian Hypnosis”, “Pushing Against Each Other”, “The Circle of Knots”, “Racing on Chairs”, “At a Right Angle”, “The Bear of Poitiers”, “Sticky Paper”, and “The Peruvian Ball Game”. These were just a few of the many very memorable activities that we incorporated within our community to help us coexist better.

One particularly memorable activity was “Racing on Chairs”. In “Racing on Chairs”, each group of five was given six dots that represent their safe zones. They were given the task of getting from one end of the hallway to another without ever falling off the dots or verbally communicating to one another. If any part of their body touched the floor or any member of the group talked the entire team was devoured by the ravenous piranha. Could the groups pick a leader without talking? Would each group trust the

person in front to determine the direction and fate of the team? How would they communicate and resolve issues without talking? And finally, were their members of the team that were selfless enough to give up their own chances at success so the rest of group could continue on?

Upon starting the activity, each team deferred to whoever was already in the front without hesitation. Next, with the exception of one group, all of the teams effortlessly exchanged dots and places while beginning to move forward. However, upon the completion of one full rotation, most of the students started to notice that dot placement was a crucial component of success for their groups. Essentially, they began to notice the uniqueness of each person's stride and how their own egocentric view's of comfortable distances were jeopardizing the team's mission [egocentric views were very destructive given the variability in physical size of the teammates].

At this point, most of the teams were working well together and continued to progress towards their objective. However, about halfway through their journey one dot from each team magically disappeared. Sensing their confusion, the directions were read again with one slight variation in them. The teams could still succeed if most of their team accomplished their goal. Instantaneously, without prodding from any teammates, a member of each of the remaining groups stepped off their dots into the infested waters. They were willing to sacrifice their own personal ambitions for the betterment of the team. Once again, the teams now had more dots than people and could continue towards their objective. Lesson completed, message heard, message learned.

We now had a vehicle for opening dialogues about classroom issues, activities to promote the value of individual differences, but still needed to establish what our rights

and responsibilities would be for ourselves and each other and find a mechanism for resolving conflicts between individuals in our class. In essence, we needed to create what Lempert (1996) referred to as a “Social-Contract Democracy.” We had previously studied our federal government during one of our social studies units. Because the students had some prior knowledge about how our government works, I asked the class,

What they thought about the idea of dividing themselves up into the legislative, judicial, and executive branches?

They thought it was an intriguing idea, but were unsure of how the three branches could be reconfigured to meet the needs of our class. So I asked them,

What was the primary responsibility of each branch of our government was?

In response, they indicated that the legislative branch made the bills that became laws, the executive branch enforced the laws, and judicial branch made sure that all laws were constitutional. I then asked them the following questions:

What would a bill represent in our classroom?

What would the executive branch enforce in our room?

What would be the role of the judicial branch as a court in our room?

The responses were that the bills would represent our class rules, the executive branch would be in charge of helping to enforce the laws and determine the consequences, and finally the judicial branch would be where we could go if we had issues that couldn't be resolved.

The final piece of the puzzle wasn't any type of activity, inspirational quotation, or philosophical stance about life, it was a warning. I reminded them that our classroom democracy was like a lost explorer in the middle of an overgrown forest. It may appear

that nothing was around the lost soul but an endless growth of trees, but if he looked closely there were towns surrounding him on all sides. Just because it appears that we are the masters of our own fate doesn't make it so. There are many levels of power in society and we are but the first rung on the ladder. There will be times when our democracy won't flourish, but they will usually be brief, and often times inconsequential moments that must be endured for our classroom democracy to thrive.

It appeared that we were finally equipped with all the necessary components to immerse ourselves in democratic education. I was feeling really good about where we were going with our democratic principles, but was also apprehensive about the possible chaos that may ensue. After all, this wasn't just another project that I was working on for one of my doctoral classes; this was my dissertation. But what was of an even greater concern, was the impact this might have on my ability to perform my professional responsibilities for the school and the students. During this moment of weakness, I remembered Goodlad's (2001) warning, "Living with the tensions will never be easy, but the alternatives to democratic education that promise to make us easier people are far worse." Just then, I knew that whatever direction the process might take us, we would in the end be better off for it.

A Reversal of Roles, Part 1

During my twelve year career as a teacher, I have become quite accustomed to questioning others about; what their thoughts were; why they chose to act a certain way; and what they might do in certain situations, etc. Now, however, I was to discover what it was like to have the shoe on the other foot. For if this was to be a genuinely participatory action research project then I would have to be more than just a researcher, but also a part

of the sample. So while the Zoey, Chloe, and Joey were all taking digital pictures so was I. When they were going to the art room for extra lessons in drawing characters and settings so was I. When they were trying to make sense of their photographic experiences during their reflexive photographic narratives, I too, was constructing a narrative plot. And finally, while they were responding to projective interview questions, I was right there along side of them.

As previously mentioned, most of our research meetings were conducted in the physical education teacher's office. During the digital photograph section of the projective interviews, the researcher would ask the respondent to select from one of five disks. Each disk contained approximately 15-20 photos taken by the participant researchers. Once a particular disk was selected and opened, the respondent then had to choose the number of the photo that they wanted to examine. Because only the number of each photo was in view on the computer screen, the selections were basically random. Once a photo was chosen, it was clicked on and left on the screen for the interviewer and respondent to see [the same photo could be used again as long as it was chosen by a different respondent] and reply too.

At the beginning of our third week, the projective photographic interviews began. The first person to interview me was Zoey. I remember thinking that as she was interviewing me I needed to be particularly aware of the pronouns I used [ever since I began reading about democratic education this pronoun phobia has haunted me]. At the time, it seemed very important to use "we" instead of "I", as if that singular difference would somehow validate everything we have tried to accomplish. It was important for me to respond to each of the photos with positive affirming statements about the significance

of democratic education. If I described them as undemocratic or even worse dictatorial, then I would be seen for the fraud that I fear I might be. Of course, because I was cognizant of my skewed thinking, I then wondered if I would try to overcompensate for it and respond to everything as being undemocratic. The following excerpts came from Zoey's first interview with me were based on photographs number 17, 30, 33, 35, and 50:

Questions related to photograph #17:

What do you see in this picture?

I see a copy of a court case affidavit that we use in class with our court cases.

Why do you think someone took this picture?

I guess to show that there is a way we can make sure everyone is doing what they are suppose to do. You know, we can take them to court and if they are found guilty a consequence will be given out.

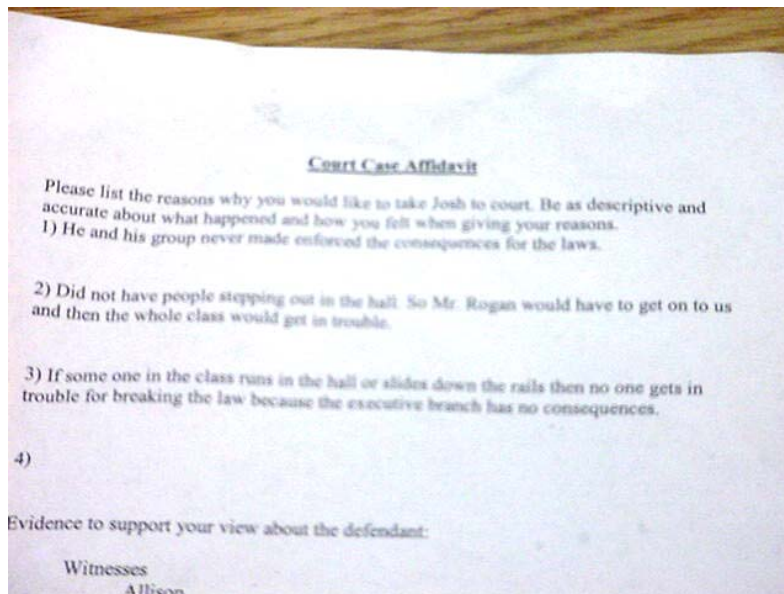
Do you think that it works?

It works when people use their own power to speak out and let others know that you aren't going to be pushed around. It just lets others know that we are all serious about trying to make it as a team and if anyone messes with our group we will vote them out.

What do you mean by "messes with the group"?

Anytime someone chooses to act a way that isn't good for the group. It is okay to be different, but we all need to be able to live together. That is why we have those group norms for us here. [I always emphasize the word "choose" because I am trying to send a message to the kids about accountability for one's own actions. However, individual choices often conspire to make us so different that working

within the groups' norms is often impossible and if we *choose* group assimilation than individual uniqueness is stymied. Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) believe that "Individual agency exists alongside constraining social forces, making relations of power a complex series of negotiations in which everyone participates." However, that seems to contradict the Americanized version of democracy?!



Questions and description related to photograph #30:

Six boys are all sitting and a rectangular table. The four boys appear to be apart of a large group that has splintered off into two groups of two people. They appear to be helping each other get ready for some type of assessment. I know this by the fact that they all have study guides in their hands and certain individuals seem to be getting help from others in preparation for the test.

What do you see in this picture?

I see four people working on a project and they are listening to each others voices. [Did I purposefully interject the word “voices” in there to validate my point about democracy. The more I try to be neutral in my responses the more I maybe am over thinking the answers. I wish I could just respond automatically like a reflex].

Why do you think that?

Because two of the individuals are looking at sheets while the other two appear to be looking at the individual with the sheets.

What do you think of when you look at that picture?

I think of what is possible for kids when they decide to work with each other instead of for themselves [I wonder if I put that in there in response to the way the day had gone. During that day there had been a lot of issues between individuals over what would be normally deemed inconsequential].

What kind of project do you think they are doing?

I don't think it is science because I don't see the equipment I would expect to see. It maybe math or something related to the beginning of a social studies project.

Questions related to photograph #33:

What do you think of when you see this?

I see kids taking responsibility for what they are learning and how they will determine how they performed on it. [But would some of the kids have taken the responsibility if it hadn't been thrust into their laps. As Freire (1970) reminds us,

the oppressed cannot be freed by others for that is but another form of subjugation.]

What is this sheet from?

It is from our circulatory system projects it is a rubric designed by the kids.

Why do you think someone would have taken this picture?

Uhhh. Either to show that they liked having the freedom to choose how they were assessed or because they thought it was something they shouldn't have to do, the teacher should. [what if a democracy isn't what the kids want. Am I forcing something upon them just because I think it has value?]

Your Subject: Puppet Show - Hunter's and Josh's World of Examination <http://rubistar.rubistar.org/index.php?user=CustomerTemplate&...>

RubiStar Rubric Tools (only)
Author: (http://rubistar.teachers.org)

Puppet Show - Hunter's and Josh's world of examination

Teacher Name: Dr. Jevy

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
costumes	Puppets were original, creative, and constructed well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were original and constructed well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were constructed fairly well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were not constructed well. Pieces fell off during the performance.
play writing	Play was creative and really had the audience's interest.	Play was creative and really had the audience's interest.	Play had several creative elements, but often did not hold the audience's interest.	Play needed more creative elements.
accuracy of story	All important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Almost all important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Quite a few important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Much of the story was left out or was inaccurate.
Scenery	Scenery was creative, added interest to the play, and did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery was creative and did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery got in the way of the puppets OR distracted the audience.
character	Puppeteers stayed in character throughout the performance.	Puppeteers stayed in character through almost all of the performance.	Puppeteers tried to stay in character through some of the performance.	Puppeteers acted silly or showed off.

Date Created: Jan 18, 2008 12:13 pm (CST)

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Question related to photograph #35:

What does this look like a picture of?

It looks like they are working on their virtual houses and making their math stories for them. [I used the term “they” but only see one set of hands. Was this a subconscious decision on my part to demonstrate one of the hallmarks of democratic education, cooperation?]

Why do you think someone took a picture of this?

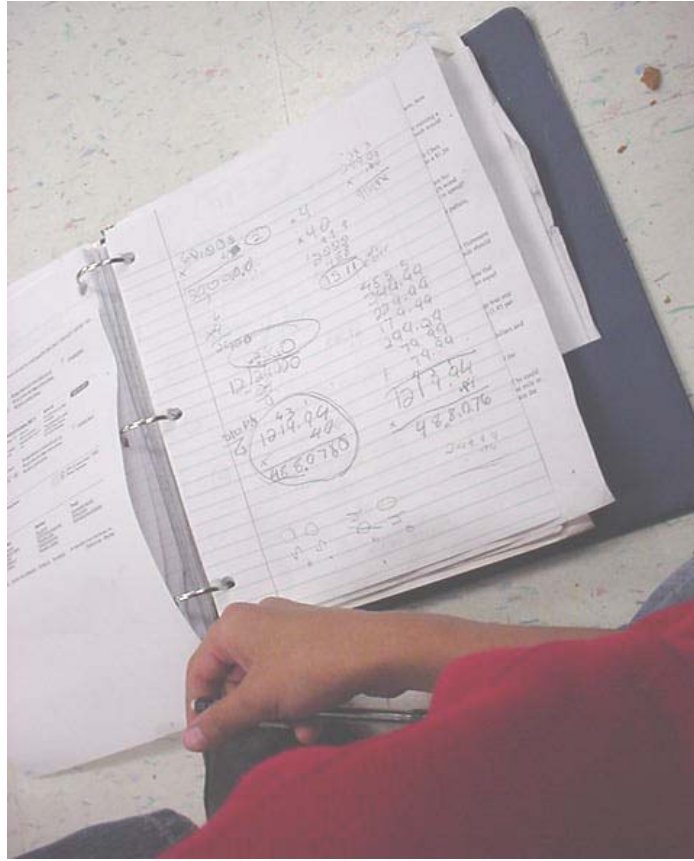
Once again either to indicate that they liked the activity and freedom to design their own experiences or to show that this wasn’t what they really want to do in math. [I am still unsure about whether I am doing the right things for the kids as evidenced by continually mentioning that they might not like it. A democracy depends a lot on participation by the people, but what if some members’ voices are conspicuously absent from most, if not all, dialogues.]

Would you like it if you were doing it?

I don’t know because I was always taught straight from the book and was good at math so doing problems and worksheets was okay for me.

Is there anything else?

No . [I think this addresses my own phobias about teaching. While I prefer the democratic way, I am very uncomfortable having others observe me (see even in these thoughts I am fixated on the “me” when in reality they are coming in to see “us.”) during our projects because the appearances of them are often chaotic. Not necessarily the vision depicted by society when looking at classes.]



Questions and description related to photograph #50:

In photograph #35 six girls are sitting at a rectangular table working on the first part of a scientific experiment. Each girl is writing down their hypothesis, prior to sharing it with the whole group. Everyone is engaged in the activity and appears to focusing on coming up with a best guess about what will happen.

What do you think this group of kids is doing?

With all the equipment on the tables I would assume that they are working on an experiment and probably writing their hypothesis down.

Why do you think this group of kids are working together and not by themselves?

I 'm not sure that they are working together. If they were I think I would see them talking together about what to put down on their papers. [From what I have said about the photo, proximity to others doesn't indicate that they are working as a group. For it to be a group activity some form of communication must be ongoing during the activity. Because I value a democratic classroom that may explain my discomfort when lecturing and everyone else is quiet. I don't associate that as a group activity where learning is occurring.]

Why do you think the people in the background are staring?

Uhh. Maybe they are already done with their experiment or they are observing what another group is doing looking for ideas. Because we don't all work at the same speed or have the same ideas it is possible that they are just at a different stage of the experiment. As I revisited this photo is as equally likely that they could have been just wasting time, but once again I seem to be trying to convey a certain image of democratic learning. It is almost as if someone thinks badly about our learning then they are also conveying that about me personally.]

Anything else about this picture?

I see everybody working and engaged in what is going on which means to me that they are interested and it has to do with their lives.

The day after Zoey interviewed me Joey got his opportunity to reverse the roles. When we sat down I wondered what kinds of questions Joey might ask me. If there was anyone in the class who always seemed to have a critical eye towards what I was doing it was definitely him. Now, by critical, I don't mean as in always trying to find the negative in things. Joey was just like me or least I would like to think he was because he tended to

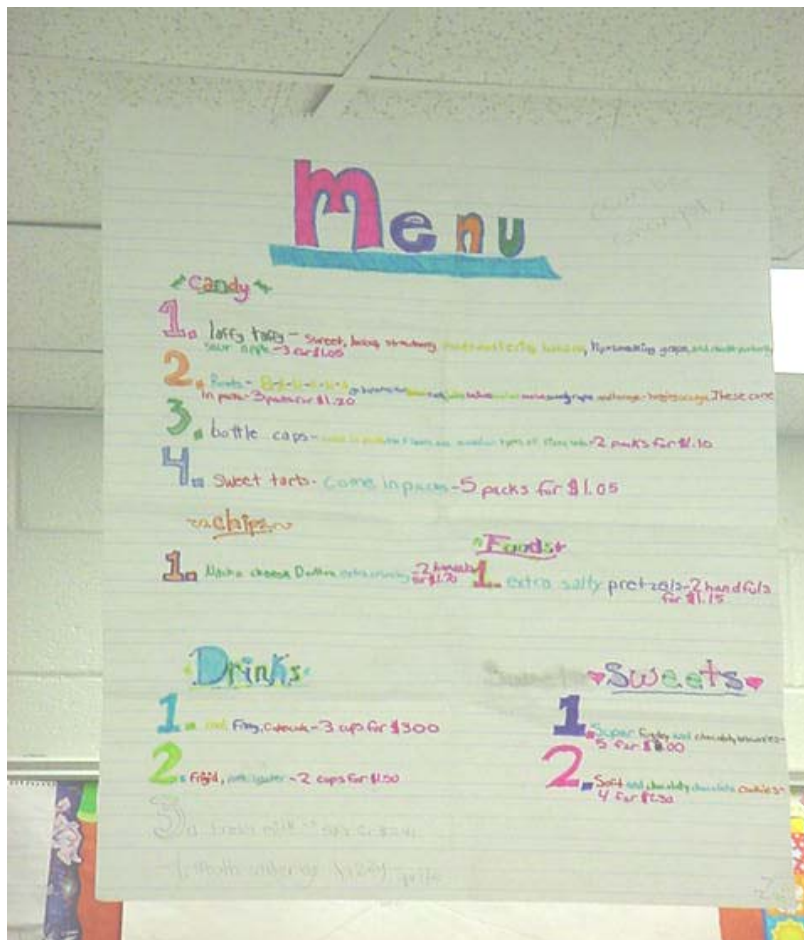
question everything. It wasn't that everything was wrong, it just wasn't right until someone could validate what they said or thought. With that in mind, I figured this interview could and probably would be quite time consuming. The following excerpts from Joey's interview with me were based on photographs 3, 6, 35, 26, and 41:

Questions related to photograph #3:

What do you think we see in this picture?

So are you asking me what I think the person who took the picture sees? No what everyone sees. I don't understand what you mean by everyone? Our class. It looks like it is a menu from our mall game and it shows what the kids have created to help them make money and understand what it is like out in the business world. [It threw me when Joey said "we". I took it to mean what did the kids see in the photo or more precisely the photographer who took the picture. I had to really think about what to say because I already had my response ready. In fact, my response almost came too quickly as if it was mechanized.]

Do you think this picture shows any examples of power or democracy? Yes, the menu had certain things on it that were determined by the teacher, but how they were put on there and what they sold was up to the kids. So there were instances when each of us had power in the picture. [This is where I really get out of my comfort zone because in the back of mind I can't get rid of the notion that in a democratic classroom the teacher shouldn't have a voice. The problem seems to lie in the fact that I feel some students do what I say, not because it makes sense to them, but because I am a teacher. If they agree with me it should be because my argument made sense, not because of my position.]



Questions and description related to photograph #6:

A young girl in our classroom [almost said “my” there. I really have to watch that. When I do that I think that subconsciously I must still be struggling with whole notion of power sharing.] has her head through a hole in a box that is being used as a decoration. She is smiling and seems to aware that the photograph is being taken. Based on the surrounding I would assume this photograph took place during our economics store activities.

What do you see here?

I see a student with a smile on her face doing something with our mall game. Uhhh...that is about it. [At this point Joey said, "I'm just use to the teacher asking the questions." He said this because he seemed to be having a difficult time coming up with the questions. When he made his comment I felt like putting my head in a hole. It signaled to me that my voice is still heard too much in our discussions, but I am at a loss.]

Is it showing democracy in any way?

Well she has gotten to choose how she makes her money, what she spends it on, and appears to be in control of whether her picture is taken or not so yes I think there is democracy and the student's voice is being heard.

Questions and description related to photograph #35:

In photograph #35 six girls are sitting at a rectangular table working on the first part of a scientific experiment. Each girl is writing down their hypothesis, prior to sharing it with the whole group. Everyone is engaged in the activity and appears to focusing on coming up with a best guess about what will happen.

What do you think is going on in this picture?

It appears that they are working as individuals on an experiment.

How do you know that they are working individually?

I don't see them talking or looking at each other. They are each writing things down on their own papers.

Do you think it shows democracy in anyway?

(I'm sorry these are the same questions) [I don't know if I am giving Joey certain

looks because he appears to be worried about the types of questions he is asking. I need to make sure I am aware of all of my signal, verbal and otherwise.] Well, in a democracy everyone has the right to choose how they accomplish things as long as they don't break the values of the group. It appears that they are all working on their own but are sharing a space and allowing each other to go at their own pace. So yes I do see democracy. [So whose power usurps the others or am I seeing this as to much of a dichotomy? Is it okay to be an individual as long you don't disrupt the group norms or is it okay to be a group as long as the individuals have complete discretion over how they live their lives?]

Is it showing power?

The kids have the power to choose what they write down and whether they do the activity or not, but I don't know if the teacher gave any requirements before hand so there could be power at different parts for different people. [They can choose what they write down, but are also aware that if they haven't written down a thoughtful statement about the causal relationships between ingredients they will most likely have to rewrite it. To me there is the power of justification here.

According to Habermas's (1984) notion of communicative action, one should believe that others speak the truth, that both sides will listen to each other with open minds, and that justification will inevitably determine the outcomes.]

Questions related to photograph #26:

What do you see in this picture?

I see a behavior contract that we use in the classroom to help certain kids stay focused. [What did I mean by certain kids? All of us could learn to be a little more

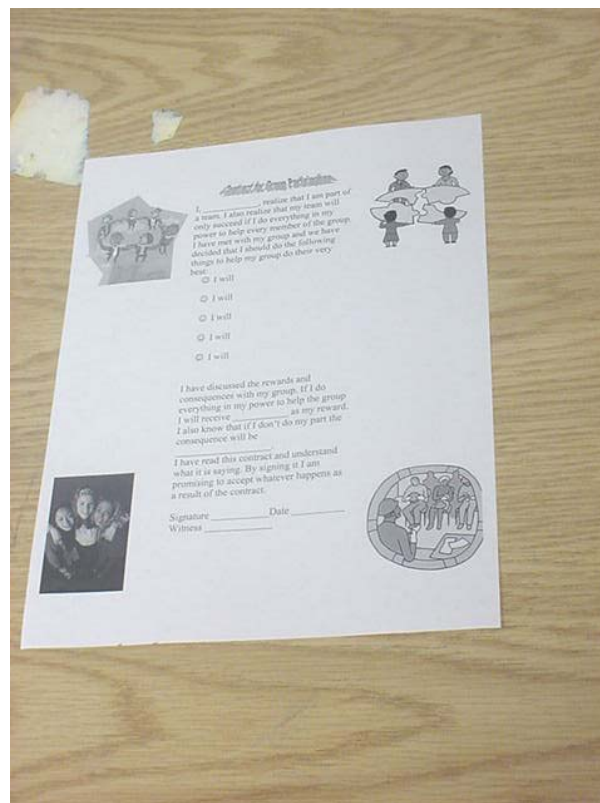
accountable to each other if we utilized these contracts. It bothers me that I didn't include myself in the statement as if I am placing the issue of collaborative dilemmas solely on the shoulders of others.]

Do you think this is showing democracy?

I would say 'yes' because behavior contracts were brought up at our circle time a couple of weeks ago. So I believe so because it was something we all agreed upon during circle time.

Do you think this shows power?

Well...yes because the person filling it out gets a voice in what they have to do and the other people get to help determine the reward and consequences for the contract. It is also a great piece of evidence for our court cases if someone is trying to prove that another student didn't do what they said they would do.



Questions and description related to photograph #41:

I am talking to a student about something. We are facing each other with my hand on his shoulder. The student is looking up at me with out a smile on his face, but does seem to be listening to what is being said and trying to make sense of it.

What do you see in this picture?

I see the teacher talking to the student and the student appears to be listening. The teacher has his hand on the students shoulder indicating that they have a comfortable relationship and are talking about something about how they interact together. [This photo could also be construed of in a much different way. I don't see the student talking which indicates that one side has more power than the other. As we stand next to each other, my physical size puts me about a foot taller than him. Therefore, he is having to look up at me which could symbolize a recognition of power. Why didn't I give both version of this to the researcher when I was interviewed?]

Do you think it is showing any example of democracy?

It would depend on how the conversation is going. Because they are both standing and the student is looking up at the teacher it appears that teacher is in control and has the power. [Though, one could argue that the student is in control if they got the teacher to react a certain way based on their behaviors or interactions.]

It was now the end of the week and it was finally Chloe's turn to ask me questions during our projective interview. I wasn't sure what to expect from Chloe because he is a very thoughtful individual, but also a difficult person to read. By this, I mean that from one day to the next I am never quite sure which version of Chloe will show up, the

motivated and focused leader or the quiet, shy, introverted loner. I am sure that which ever personality shows up will inevitably determine the types and magnitude of the questions I will have to respond to. The following excerpts from my interview with Chloe were based on photographs 1, 4, 15, and 17:

Questions related to photograph #15:

What is this a picture of?

This is a picture of a tape recorder we have in our room.

Why do you think this picture was taken?

I think it was probably taken to show how we use the tape recorder as a way to reflect on how we have done in our group work. Specifically, I mean three branches. [Have we heard all of the children's voices or are certain voices more dominant than others? The "we" should include myself though when I made that I comment I was referring only to the children. It seems that subconsciously, I am placing responsibility for democratic malfunctions on others.]

Does this show democracy?

Yes, because the kids are responsible for listening to their own discussions and determining uhh...what worked and what didn't work. In other words, they have to decide what are their strengths and weaknesses and how to make things go better next time. [Once again I only mention the kids in my response. I need to be asking them what their opinions are about how my voice is heard and what I can change to assist in improving the activity for the next time.]

How come we didn't use them all the time?

That kind of goes back to what we as a group have talked about in the past, the circles of power. I have to make sure you, I mean, we get certain content covered and if we did the tape recorder all the time we would never get everything in. It is a great tool but takes a lot of time to use it. [Ultimately, the decision about the frequency of use belongs to me. I realize that our democracy is but one microchip in a much vaster computer terminal. However, that doesn't change the fact that I often feel like our class is incorporating a generic brand of democracy instead of the real deal. There are so many variables outside of our control that I often wonder if the kids are getting a realistic illustration of democracy.]



Questions and descriptions related to photograph #17:

The photograph was taken on Valentine's Day during the party. In this photo I see

Three students who didn't meet their goals for the science test were to be sitting out the party. However, during circle time the students raised the issue about the fairness of taking away the party for these individuals. After a very long and lively discussion the group decided to let the individuals determine their consequence, but they would also have to retake the test the following day.

Do you see any new democracy in this one?

I don't know what you mean by new democracy? What do you see? I see kids moving about the room and it looks like it is a valentine's party. [I wasn't real thrilled with this question. Chloe was one of the children who had problems on the test and wasn't supposed to get to participate in the party.]

What do you think you are doing?

I am probably thinking about whether or not the people who had problems on the test should be in here during the party. I just have a conversation with the class about what should be done and they/we decided that the punishments should be decided by the individuals. [I found it kind of interesting that Chloe didn't ask about the kids in the picture, but asked about me when I wasn't even in the photo. I interpreted this to mean that Chloe was trying to find out what my feelings were relative to the kids partaking in the party. I put the "they/we" because I was really torn between doing what I thought was right in my heart verses following the guidelines for a democratic classroom.]

Do you think that would be a democracy?

Yes, but I wouldn't call it one of our better moments of democracy. [This comment hit me as rather egocentric. As if the only good moments could occur if the students had heeded my advice.]

Why do you say that?

I believe that kids were let off easy and if you say something you should stick to it.

Why do you believe they were let off easy?

They obviously wanted the party, but didn't do the work. So I felt that they should realize that with democracy comes a responsibility to always do what you say you will. [This seems to be a continuing problem with our democratic setup. We all want a voice, but don't necessarily want to live up to the values established by the group unless they fit our needs.]

Questions and description related to photograph #4:

In this photo, four students are participating in our economics projects that we do approximately one every three weeks. Two girls behind the counter are in the midst of selling food items to two male customers. They appear to either negotiating a price or calculating the price plus sales tax. They all seem to be very involved in the activity.

What do you think they are doing in this picture?

They are doing our economics game activity.

Do you see any aspects of happiness or sadness or something?

They appear to be happy because they have smiles on their facing and are either buying food or selling it. [It appears to me that Chloe is a little uncomfortable

with the process of asking me questions. I am assuming this by the way he continually is moving in his seat, seems to be looking around a lot, and his difficult with formulating questions.]

Do you see any new democracy?

What do you mean by new democracy? Whatever democracy means to you and that is.... I see kids making choices about where they are going to buy stuff, what type of store they made, and who they worked with. However, I also know that there were certain criteria established by me that they had to have for their stores to open. [I always seem to want to check or bracket my answers. By this I mean, I seem to always want to play devil's advocate by supplying both possible sides to the story. It is, as if, I feel guilty for speaking and contributing to the class. I wonder if I fear that my voice will suffocate or alter the opinions of everyone else in the classroom.]

Questions related to photograph #1:

What do you see in here?

I see a menu from one of our projects about supply and demand.

Do you know why they are doing it?

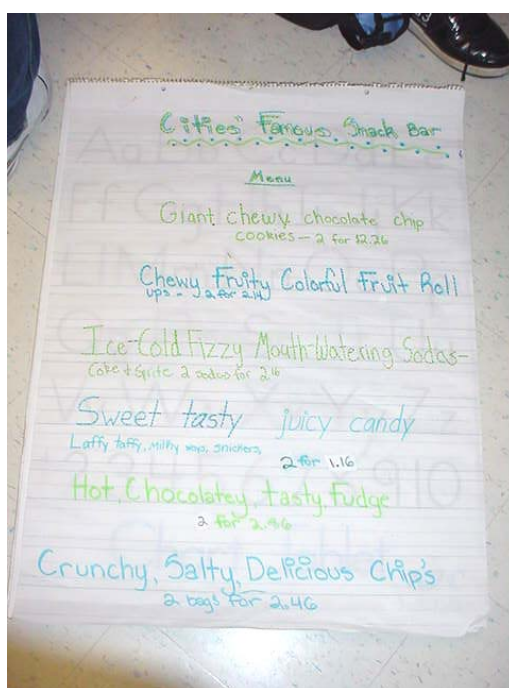
They are doing so that they will understand how our economic system works and also how our voices affect the prices of things. [I wonder if Chloe knows why we do these types of activities. It makes me wonder if some of our activities are too ambiguous for them to truly understand the relationships that are supposedly being demonstrated.

Why do we have to have similes and stuff?

Partly because it is something we have to know for the CRCT {Criterion-Referenced Competency test}(another power circle), but also because how we communicate with others determines whether they take us seriously and want to buy from us or not. [As part of any of our projects, I always give the children a checklist of things that should be included within their projects. Similes and other language oriented stuff are part of our QCC's and have to be covered. I referred to these as an outer power circle.] (QCC's stands for Georgia Quality Core Curriculum)

Do you think they are doing a good job?

Their menu is excellent and communicates exactly what they have and what it is like. [I am trying to get the kids to see themselves as experts who have the ability to assess themselves and others. However, they still think of me as the only one who can really validate their work. The degree of socialization they have undergone at school is astounding.]



My Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom

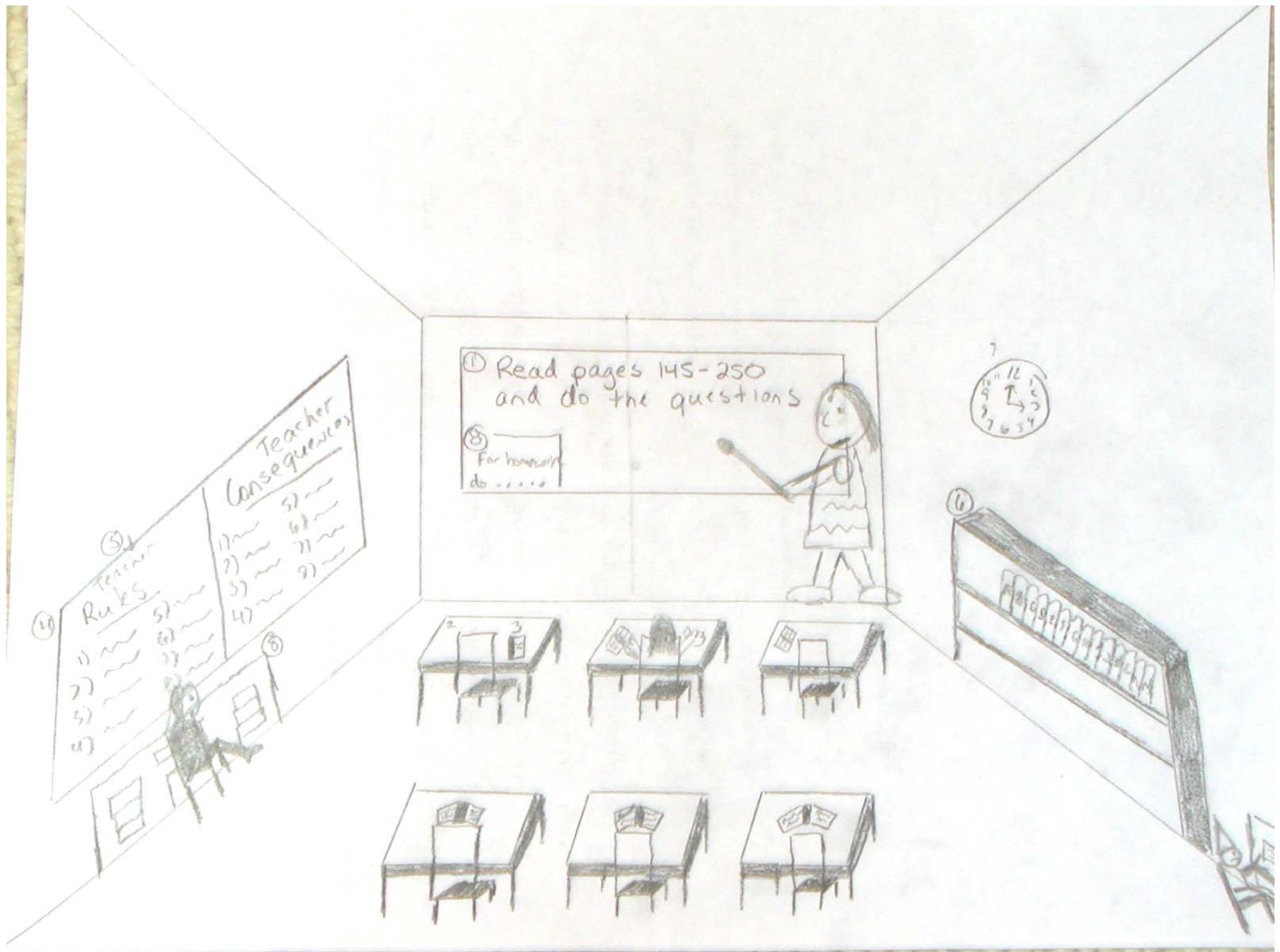
As part of our research, we decided to incorporate our drawings as data about our beliefs relative to classroom interactions, power, and democracy. These drawings were done with the assistance of the art teacher who spent a considerable amount of time educating us on the ways to represent inanimate objects and figures [Unfortunately, these drawings don't do the art teacher justice. As the saying goes, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."] These drawing sessions took place in the art teacher's room during her breaks. As part of the process, we were not only trying to elicit our inner thoughts in our drawings, but also in our "think alouds" as we worked through the process of trying to represent what we had experienced. Below is the first of two kinetic drawings that I did with the other participants. This particular picture represents my version of what a nondemocratic classroom might look like. Along with the picture, I have included some of the thoughts that I had during the process as well as my reflections and interpretations of the signification of the drawing.

The first thing that I noticed when I began scrutinizing the drawing was that the dry-erase board was situated in the very center of the room. This location emphasized the significance of that particular apparatus in the ongoing educational practices of a nondemocratic classroom. On the board were the directions (Read pages 145-250 and do all the questions) [The page numbers were so exaggerated that I must have been emphasizing the redundancy of the work children are often exposed to in a nondemocratic classroom.] for the class that suggested that the student's learning was primarily passive, oriented towards memorization and regurgitation, and textbook-driven.

In this classroom, the teacher was the wielder of an indisputable amount of power. First, there was a student in back wearing what presumably was a dunce cap. The student was most likely placed there for not adhering to the guidelines stipulated by the teacher. Second, the bulletin board was the second largest object in this picture. It contained a set of “teacher” rules and guidelines. Notice that it never mentioned that these rules had any association with the class, only the teacher. Third, the clock read three o’clock, even though the school day usually ended at 2:20. It was as if the teacher had decided that everyone would stay since she hadn’t completed her lesson, yet. Fourth, the physical presence of the teacher tended to dwarf all of the other inhabitants of the classroom. It was as if she were daring any of them to try and usurp her absolute authority. And fifth, the teacher dispersed the students throughout the periphery of the classroom to effectively limit communication, to nullify the potential for student coalitions, and to encourage conformity.

While the former aspects were all visible reminders of the power differential in a nondemocratic classroom, there were also some key elements of a conventional classroom that were conspicuously absent from the illustration. For instance, there weren’t any entrances, exits, coat holders, or any other apparatus indicative of the transient nature of the student population. One could conclude from these abnormalities that the educational setting was designed and constructed to deter students from departing and also to hinder any correspondence between the outside world and the student population. This forced isolation was further supported by the absence of any technological tools (computers, TV, VCR, stereo) that might have facilitated communications between the students and the outside world or visa versa. Finally, there

weren't any pencils, pens, sharpies, or any other kind writing implements within the picture. Because the students weren't making any attempts to record the information that they had been inundated with, it would be reasonable to presume that they had made a conscious choice to disregard the 'official knowledge of the classroom'.



Projective Interview of Nondemocratic Classroom Drawing

Why is this little kid back there with a hat on his head? (Zoey)

That was to symbolize the old fashion dunce cap for the child who can never behave. [In retrospect, I may have been consciously trying to prove a point by putting the dunce cap in the picture. I don't think I would normally have done that since I have never actually seen or experienced what I drew. However, at the time, it was important for me to be as unambiguous about my beliefs concerning nondemocratic teaching as possible. Therefore, I believe a portion (the dunce cap) of the drawing was constructed specifically for the audience, but the rest was as accurate and candid a depiction of my conscious and subconscious beliefs as possible.]

Why is there no door? (Chloe)

Because in the traditional classroom you want to escape but there is no way out. [My coresearchers' included doors in all of their drawings, while I didn't include one in either of my pictures. I'm not sure what the significance of this might be other than to interpret it literally as an avenue for leaving and entering the room. The door may have had significance to the students because it provided them with an escape route from the mundaneness of textbook teaching or it could have been included because all rooms have doors. The more significant point seems to be that I either consciously or subconsciously excluded it from both drawings. It was possible that this occurred because I envisioned the classroom as a self-sustaining entity that didn't need the eyes and ears of the outside world venturing in to our

domain (Other people have always had their own critiques of our type of learning).]

Why are there more desks than there are children? (Joey)

(Zoey whispered, “Because he doesn’t know how to draw that many people.”)

Because I was trying to show that the classroom had rows that were in some sort of order and that kids had to sit there everyday. [They seemed to focus on what was missing more than what was there. For instance, there wasn’t any mention of the teacher rules and consequences on the bulletin board. Evidently, there experiences precluded them from thinking that this and other signs were unique or extraordinary from a nondemocratic perspective. It seemed that we were all selectively perceiving the things that contradicted the essences of our learning and educational schematas.]

Why are the desks really big and the chairs really small? (Zoey)

Because I have no idea.

What is that down there? (Zoey)

(pointing to the desk in the lower left hand corner)

That is the teacher’s desk.

Why is there a kid sitting at it? (Joey)

Because they have been removed from the activity because of behavior issues and the dunce desk was already taken. [Joey’s question was phrased in a manner that suggested that the peculiarity of the situation wasn’t that the kid was at the desk, but that the teacher wasn’t there.]

Why aren't there any kids at there original desks? (Joey)

I think there is one at there original desk. [Joey believed that all of the kids should be at their desk. It didn't bother him that they were there in straight lines facing a board that contained busy work. His primary concern was that the students were to have been occupying the desk, not because they were commanded to, but because it was the natural (extreme socialization that occurs in children over their years as clients in our community) thing to do.]

Why did you put the person at the desk a girl? (Chloe)

Probably because girls tend to cause less issues than boys in a nondemocratic classroom because boys need to move around more. [I remember thinking that this was the perfect opportunity to integrate the concept of active learning within our classroom discussions.]

Why aren't there any lights or windows? (Joey & Chloe)

Because the experience is very dark and gloomy in nondemocratic classroom and would tend to make you want to go to sleep. [Lights and windows were symbolic of the formulation and generation of ideas. In a nondemocratic classroom, innovative student ideas were met with teacher resistance and were often suppressed by the other students' beliefs about what constituted acceptable learning.]

Why are there books on the tables when there are no kids there? (Zoey)

To symbolize that the way they learn is by the textbook and it doesn't really matter who the kid is because everybody is taught the same way. [She seemed to be establishing a connection between textbooks and children, as if you couldn't

have one without the other. The insinuation was that every child's learning experiences commenced with the child's placement or grounding in a desk.]

Why don't they have a fire alarm? (Joey)

No idea.

A Reversal of Roles, Part 2

It was now time for me to be interviewed during our second projective interview. At this point in our research endeavor, my interviewers, Zoey, Joey, and Chloe, had all participated in two projective interviews, completed their first kinetic drawing, and commenced work on their reflective photographic narratives. Therefore, I had high expectations for our subsequent interviews even though the initial interviews hadn't been as well-received or as productive as I had envisioned. Joey was the interviewer and I was the interviewee during the following interview:

Descriptions, questions, and responses for photograph #31:

In this photograph, the class was sitting together on the floor participating in circle time. It appears that the teacher was voicing his opinions about an issue that arose during the discussions. Everyone else in the group was quietly listening to what was being conveyed to them by the teacher.

What do I see in this picture?

I see me sitting in circle time talking to the class about something. [The first person I noticed was myself which points to an egocentric view point. It would have been just as easy to have responded by indicating that I saw the class in circle time, but I chose to reference myself first.]

What do you think you are trying to tell them?

Well, usually if we want something in circle time we have to justify why we want it that way. So I would assume that is what I am doing. [My response does seem to indicate that I believe that all members of the group need to follow the established norms of our democracy, including myself.]

How is it showing democracy?

Well, everyone is respecting my voice by listening and other people would then get a chance to respond to what I had said.

And why do we need this?

Need what? [I thought I knew what he wanted, but had learned that asking for further proof was always a good idea when dealing with kids. It always amazes me how often I am incorrect in my interpretations of their thoughts and beliefs.]

Circle time?

It was the best we could come up with for everyone to help to decide on the issues of the day. [I used the word “we”, but in reality I was the one who suggested the idea. I was constantly agonizing over how much of a voice I should have in our classroom. Unfortunately, sometimes the students don’t have the prerequisite knowledge and information to come up with the solutions on their own. I had to be cognizant of how often and loudly my voice was heard.]

Do you think this would happen in democratic classroom or a nondemocratic classroom?

I guess that would depend on your definition of what a democratic and nondemocratic classroom looked like. [Once again, I had to be very careful about

how I responded because the kids often came at me with general questions and answers that could have been construed in multiple way.]

A democratic classroom is where we get to choose how we run the classroom and a nondemocratic classroom is where the teacher decides. Do you think this would happen in democratic classroom or a nondemocratic classroom?

Based on your definition I would say it was a democratic classroom. [I said “your” as if it wasn’t my definition. As if I didn’t want any ownership or responsibility for the definition. However, Joey’s definition indicated to me that I haven’t been as successful in elucidating some of the possible meanings of democracy. So, I should have said “our” since it was partly a result of my influence.]

Do you think this was good for our classroom?

I think it depends on who you have in your class before you can determine if it is good or not. I think that most of the students in our class like it and feel like their voices have been heard. [His question referred to “our classroom” whereas I responded that “most of the students”. He may have a better understanding of democracy than me because he was interested in a favorable outcome for the entire class, but I was willing except a majority.]

Questions and responses for photograph #51:

What do you see in this picture?

I see purple gooky stuff that I wouldn’t want to handle.

Was this one of our projects?

Yes. It looks like it was related to our chemistry of the body unit.

Why do you think the person took this picture?

Probably because it was a fun activity and they think of democracy when they think of fun. [I probably shouldn't have said this. I was keenly aware of my co-researchers description of a democratic classroom as being fun. I was hoping that it would evoke a response that suggested that there was more to it than just being fun.]

How is this showing democracy?

I am not sure that it is.

Is it our choice in this project?

Well we decided at the beginning of the day to do an experiment, but I was the one who came up with the actual details of the experiment. [One of our units was on chemistry and I don't believe that it was developmentally appropriate. These kinds of academic issues forced me to play a more vocal role in the classroom decision making process than I would have wanted too.]



Description, questions, and responses for photograph #45:

This was a picture of the class working at their tables on something while a substitute was in the room. They appear to be utilizing their textbooks to answer some questions. A few of the students were looking around the room or out of their seat by the computer.

What do you see in this picture?

I see a group of boys working on something and a substitute teacher in the room.

Why do you think they took this picture?

I would presume that they took it because it either showed an example of democracy or an example of it not being a democracy. [It obviously didn't show democracy, but I was trying not influence Joey's ideas about democracy. In retrospect, that was absurd to think that I wouldn't have already had an impact on Joey's beliefs about democracy since I was his teacher. I am also worried that I am not living up to my end of the co-researcher agreement by not responding immediately to his questions in as candid a manner as possible.]

Do you think it shows democracy?

It is hard to tell because I don't know how the activity started, who made the decisions, and if there was any type of compromise in the process.

Do you think the substitute is helping them with the work?

No, it appears that she is just sitting there monitoring the class to make sure that they are doing what they are supposed to do. [I have always had issues with

teachers who sit at their desks instead of meandering around the room assisting the kids. I know that I overemphasized the words “no” and “monitoring”.]

So based on your answer of a democratic classroom before, would this be showing a democracy?

No because I would expect to see a lot of movement among the kids and a teacher who is engaged in what everyone is doing. [My response contained two of the five categories of democratic learning, *Active Problem Centered Learning* and *Collaboration Between Teacher and Students*. Because they were the two that I immediately responded with I would assume that they were the ones that I probably emphasized the most in our (changed the ‘my’ to ‘our’ here) classroom interactions.]

So do you think whenever we have a substitute it will be a nondemocratic classroom?

Most likely. [I got the impression that Joey was hoping that I would respond differently. Historically, on days when I am out of the building, the kids spend most their day seated doing bookwork. They have reiterated to me numerous occasions how much they detest those kinds of days. Unfortunately, I was told my administrator that I am to write them that way because of previous incidents with substitutes.]

Description, questions, and responses for photograph #1:

This is a photograph of the dry-erase board that has the chemical formulas for caffeine, salt, sugar, and carbon dioxide. Two girls are using some different items

brought in by the class to make replicas of what these chemical formulas would look like.

What do you see in this picture?

I see chemical formulas on the dry erase board.

Why do you think someone took this picture?

To show how there are things outside our classroom that often determine what we do in the classroom. [That would be the reason why I took this picture, but I am not sure that the kids would have taken for that reason. They don't seem to associate the subject matter with democracy, only the peripheral matters like recess, etc.]

How would it show that?

Because this was a topic that the kids didn't originally want to learn about and also wasn't directly tied to their own life experiences. Therefore, they wouldn't have ever brought it up in circle time. [While I was able to spin chemistry in a way that intrigued most of the students, it wasn't something that they were initially interested in and there were way to many terms that had to be memorized even though they didn't enhance the overall understandings of the kids.]

Would you have done this if it was your choice?

No, that is how it shows that other things often determine what we are able to do as a democracy.

Is that democratic?

Is what democratic?

You teaching us the chemical formulas?

Absolutely not.

Why would we need to do this?

We need this because it is part of the curriculum that was decided by the state of Georgia.

Why do they want us to have that?

Do you mean to learn that stuff? *Yes.*

Because they must think that it will make the students more successful in life. I think? [I used the word “they” which alienated myself from decision makers as if this would absolve me from partial responsibility for the content being taught. I also abhor the thought that I wasn’t able to provide my students with a justification for what was taught. After all, one of the benchmarks of our democratic process was founded on Habermas’ Communitative Action. How could they understand my own point of view when I hadn’t been able to reconcile my own concerns with it?]

The following dialogues were taken from Zoey’s second time interviewing me:

Questions and responses to photograph #30-11:

Tell me what you see in this picture?

I see someone working on a science experiment related to chemistry.

Do you think this right now is a democracy?

Yes, because they chose to do the experiment during circle time and then they figured out on their own the amount of each ingredient they needed to make the outcome they wanted. [I have to be careful because I am also using “choice” in

my own responses. I need to be cognizant of the modeling effect that is probably going on when I choose the attributes mentioned during our discussions. While it is a fundamental component of a democratic classroom, it isn't the only aspect we should be mentioning.]

Do you think they liked this experiment?

Since they voted for it I would hope so, but I can't see any of their faces so I can't be sure. [I have had some doubts if all of the students are expressing their opinions during circle time, but I don't know how to get them to value their own views enough to express them. One of the dilemmas of a democracy seems to be that in order to have it perform optimally all members of the community must be willing to express their thoughts. However, this rarely happens and we often hear from the most extroverted people; the same one's would normally hear from anyway.]

What is the person in the background doing?

Which person? (points to the one in the orange) Looks like he/she is mixing the ingredients together to make soda I think.



Questions and responses to photograph #24:

What is this a picture of?

It is a picture of classroom contract that the kids and I use.

Why do we use it?

We use it help everyone do their best in our activities by making sure that they know what is expected of them.

Why would somebody need this?

They would either need it because someone else in the classroom isn't living up to values of our group or because they aren't living up to the values of the group, themselves.

How did we determine the values of the group?

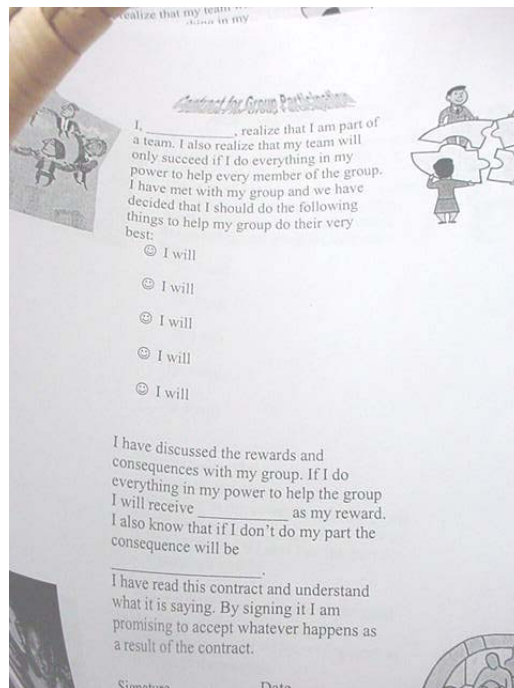
Remember, at the beginning of our democracy, we each wrote down what was important for all of us to do for things to work out the best they could.

What were some of the values?

Respect for each other, respect for ourselves, honesty, selflessness, and cooperation.

Has the class been doing this?

Well, just like in anything, there are exceptions, but as a whole most of us have been trying to do them and that is the important thing. There will always be times that will stress us at and make things harder on us, but overall "yes".



Descriptions, questions, and responses to photograph #10-11:

In this photograph I was having a conversation with a student about something. It appears that I was assisting him/her in discovering the meanings of whatever topic we were involved in at the time.

What does it look like the teacher is doing?

I think I am probably talking to someone about whatever they are working on. It looks like I am probably asking them a question to get them to understand what is going on. [I automatically assumed that the question was referred to me as if I am the only one with the knowledge in the room. It was plausible that I was asking the student a question about something that I didn't know. I find that I am continuously wrestling my own subconscious beliefs about teaching. It's as if there two sides to me that are constantly debating over the virtues of one approach over another.]

Why do you have a marker in your hand?

I like using the dry erase markers because they aren't permanent therefore we can work on something and realize that there are many answers or many ways to go about doing something. So if we want we can try one way then another and so on. [This was a point that I was continually addressing in our classroom. We all seem to believe in these "false dichotomies". In order for something to be right something must be wrong.]

Why would we want to try different things?

Because we are all different so we have different ways of looking at things and different ways of interpreting what we see and feel. [I sensed that Zoey was looking to see how I would respond. Almost, as if, she was setting a trap to see how I would respond. Evidently I replied correctly (false dichotomy!!!!!!!) because she smiled and nodded her head.]

If we all see things differently then how do we agree on something?

As you have seen during circle time, it's hard. Democracy is very messy, but just because something isn't easy doesn't mean we shouldn't give it a shot.

Description, questions, and response to photograph #11:

In this photograph the students are each choosing a way to demonstrate that they are ready for the next part of an activity that we were working on. Some have their heads down, others are looking at the board, and some have pencils in their hands and notebooks open.

What do you think is going on in this classroom?

I imagine everyone is trying to show that they are ready for the next step in what we were doing or they are finished with their activity.

Why are they all doing it differently?

It is because they know that it doesn't really matter which way they do it as long as it is recognizable by others that they are done and ready to precede with the next step. [The key point was that we clearly communicated our message to others so that there weren't any misunderstandings. Also, if there were many variations of possible symbols, then all of the members of the community had to be able recognize and understand different perspectives.]

Why doesn't it matter how they do it?

Because if it did matter than I would be saying that there was only one right way to do it and that I was the person who knew the right way. That would also mean that if you weren't doing it my way you were wrong. [I assumed that if there was one way it had to be coming from me. This was a very egocentric traditional teacher stance. All of these verbal slips continually reminded me that our democracy had a long way to go and that my own beliefs needed to be constantly reflected on.]

My Drawing of a Democratic Classroom

I must admit that as we sat down to begin drawing I was a bit overwhelmed by the task at hand. I had sat in on a few of the art lessons, but honestly, didn't have enough available time during the school day to really master the art of representation. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on who you are, it appeared that my fellow

researchers had learned their lessons well as they feverishly began drawing their versions of the classroom interactions. I wasn't as competent nor as expeditious as they were. It took me quite a while to decide on what I wanted to include in the drawing. Part of my personal dilemma was the fact that I had read some of the literature on drawing and knew what the supposed cues were to the artist's inner thoughts. I was in conflict with my own inner thoughts and personal interests as I attempted to synthesize all of my beliefs into one symbolic picture of a democratic classroom.

This drawing depicts a collaborative activity between three members of a group and me. The student at the table is compiling the information that has been found on to a large sheet of butcher paper while another member is searching the internet for more relevant tidbits of information. The third member of the group is leading me over to the window to demonstrate how they utilized their own experiences in the learning process.

As I studied what I had drawn, I became particular fascinated, not by what I had included in the drawing, but by what I had excluded from the picture. Among the things that I noticed were conspicuously absent from the picture were the following: a clock, desks, a door to enter and leave the room, a flag, and decorations on the wall.

- I. The clock represents a standard beginning and an end; a certain amount of time in which things have to be completed; and a routinized unwavering schedule or format. From a democratic standpoint, the group decision-making process is time consuming, unpredictable, and above all else, messy. Therefore, clocks and time are discarded because they tend to shackle and constrain the democratic initiative. They force society into

making uninformed impulsive decisions that often exclude or stifle the voices of the powerless.

- II. Desks have always epitomized the traditional “sage on the stage” classroom. They tend to create individual spaces, somewhat like a wolf or bears territory, that evoke very defensive and often destructive responses from the owners. Therefore, the absence of desks in the classroom wasn’t astonishing or unforeseeable.
- III. However, the nonexistence of an entrance/exit is somewhat puzzling. The only possible explanation was that this absence negated any possible intrusions the outside world might have on our microculture. Most of today’s educational settings aren’t ready to recognize the viability of the democratic way. They perceive democratic classrooms as chaotic environments controlled by the student anarchists. They often question whether learning has occurred and are threatened by the contradictions that exist between their form of instructing and that of the democratic teacher.
- IV. When I first notice that the flag was missing from the classroom I was troubled by this. I believe that I am a patriotic person who loves his country, but there had to be a reason for its exclusion from the picture. After much soul searching, I concluded that the flag not only represents our country, but also our way of governing. This is when I became more cognizant of my own misgivings about the democratic ideal propagated by our government. From a critical theory standpoint, I see how inequitable

our system is and how many voices go unheard and unrepresented in our government each and every day. Therefore, by excluding the flag from my drawing, I am voicing my own displeasure about the direction our country's democracy is headed.

- V. The absence of decorations on the wall is easily explained. Decorations are a lot like make-up, it is something you put on to please others, yet it often misrepresents the essence of the person or object. Decorations emphasize the "end", when we, as educators, should be striving for and applauding the "process."
- VI. The final omission related to the gender of the teacher. In the nondemocratic classroom, the teacher was of the feminine persuasion whereas in the democratic depiction the teacher was of the masculine persuasion. While this wasn't an intentional modification, it was explainable by my own childhood experiences with educators who were predominantly nondemocratic and female (Most of my childhood was spent in parochial schools with Nuns as my teachers).

Of course, there were other things that were of interest to me as I was studying my kinetic drawing. First, I put the teacher in the center of the room. That struck me as odd because I am usually very aware of my voice in the classroom. As an advocate of student voice, I often deviate from the traditional approaches just so that the students will be more of the focal point of the educational process. Conversely, the locale of the teacher suggests that my outward self and inner self are in conflict. It appears that my subconscious self believes that I should be the central figure in a democratic classroom.

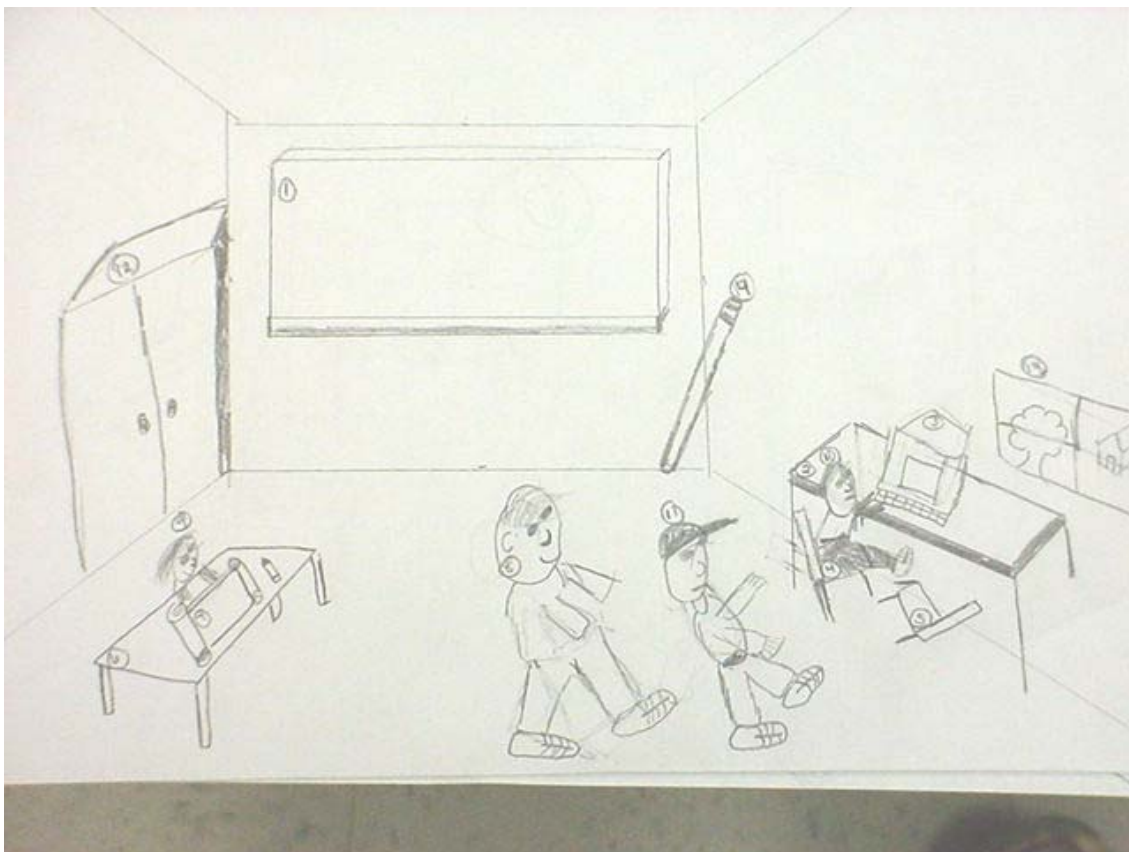
This would explain why the students tend to still focus on me when deciding on classroom issues or when trying to determine if the decisions they are making are correct and justifiable.

Second, as I numbered each of the components of my picture, I realized that I had drawn myself prior to constructing the pictures of the children. Once again, this could point an egocentric view that I may subconsciously hold about my place and position in the classroom. The sequence of the picture does tend to validate the previous conjectures relative to who I believe should be the nucleus of the democratic classroom.

Third, it appears that the children who were sitting and passive were of a less significant stature than those of us who were moving about the room. This is evidenced by the relative sizes of the child at the computer table and the child at the table with the scroll. One possible interpretation is that I value active movement oriented learning over the more passive and traditional approach to teaching. Therefore, their existences would be highlighted because of their congruence with my own beliefs while those from a more conventional vantage point would seem almost insignificant and trivial in comparison.

Finally, I question the sequence of the drawings I made for this picture. It appears that I drew all of the furniture first, then injected the human elements into the equation, and finally added the window and the closet. Since I drew the furniture first, am I to assume that as the “clothes make the man”, the furniture makes the democratic classroom. While I know that the setting greatly enhances or inhibits the growth and well-being of a community, I still would have thought because a democracy is premised on the rights of the people, the characters would have been the initial features on my drawing. The last piece of this pictorial puzzle was the window overlooking the world.

By having it drawn last (thirteenth), I wondered if the connection of the classroom to the real world was merely a masquerade or afterthought in schools, instead of the essential element and primary ingredient to academic and social successes. If this message had been socialized into my psyche, then depicting the world through a more standardized and regimented program seems logically consistent with the expectation of the culture around them.



Projective Drawing: What I Thought They Said, Part 2

As we concluded our drawings, it was time for the final projective interviews. The primary focus of these interviews was our democratic and nondemocratic depictions of the classroom plot. As with all of the other interviews, the initial questions were driven by the projective responses the interviewers had during their encounters with the cueing

items. The following questions and responses correspond with my coresearchers queries of my version of a democratic classroom:

What is that? (Joey)

(pointing to the object next to the board)

Our voice stick. [It was interesting that they all mentioned the stick in our previous interviews, but didn't come to realize that the object might be the stick. If it was as truly significant as they espoused it to be, then it wouldn't seem overly presumptuous to expect them to recognize what the object in question was. Consequently, the absence of recognition raises issues about the candidness of the coresearchers' responses to the interviewer questions.]

Why doesn't the teacher have any hands? (Zoey)

I don't know if I just forgot to put them in their or to show that the teacher doesn't always have to have their hands on everything for learning to go on. [I really hadn't notice that the teacher's hands were missing until Zoey pointed this out to me. However, it seemed logically that I would exclude them if I was trying to illustrate the diminishing degree of control exerted by teachers in democratic classrooms.]

Why isn't there a TV? (Joey)

Tv's represent videos to me which is the lazy way to teach.

Why is the dry erase board in 3d? (Zoey)

Because I was showing off my wonderful artistic abilities. [I was being a bit sarcastic in a friendly way because my coresearchers have been really ribbing me about my artistic abilities.]

Why are there still no lights? (Joey)

I don't know. [There weren't any lights in the nondemocratic classroom either. I am not sure why I excluded them. It maybe that I just didn't consider them to be an important feature of any learning situation or there was a deeper subliminal meaning that I haven't grasped as of yet.]

If you don't want a TV in your classroom why did you put a computer? (Chloe)

Computers offer the kids a resource to find information and help them become more active and involved learners instead of relying on the textbooks. [It was interesting how Chloe associated the TV with the computer as if their features were indistinguishable from one another. I would have thought that he could delineate the differences between the two because of how we have integrated each of these in our classroom. However, his response suggests that there are some discrepancies between my perceptions of things and his own. It also helped me to understand why he didn't consider our learning to be active problem centered (based on his perceived/preferred scale replies) given his beliefs about the similar functionalities of computers and TVs.]

How are your two people interacting? (Joey)

Which two?

The two people so called walking? (Chloe)

The one student got me to show me something that he found with his partner on the computer. [Evidently, Joey didn't perceive of an interaction occurring until I expounded on my rationale for what was going on. This suggested that Joey had specific ideas of what interacting would look like relative to learning. I wonder if

he would have been able to discern an interaction if we had been sitting down at a table or reading a book together. Did he need certain types of passive educational prompts to be present for him to equate a learning interaction?]

So the person sitting at the desk is not the teacher? (Chloe)

No I don't spend much time at a desk so I wouldn't draw a teacher there. [Even though Chloe knew that this was a nontraditional classroom, he still assumed that the teacher would be sitting at a desk. I was mortified by the degree of socialization that Chloe had been subjected too. It was also apparent (face became wrinkled as his eyebrows rose and his mouth curved downward) that Chloe comprehended the distortions that existed in the question he had posed to me.]

Where is the clock? (Joey)

We don't have one because time is never an issue. We stay with what we are doing until everyone is ready to move on. No schedule. [It was interesting that Joey noticed the absence of a clock since he, as well as Zoey and Chloe, had excluded it from their own democratic drawings. It was almost as if he knew what should be there based on his previous experiences, so he was willing to discard everything he had encountered in a democratic classroom because it didn't correspond with his entrenched beliefs.]

What about lunch and specials? How do we know when anything is happening?

(Zoey & Joey)

Well, the absence of a clock was meant to be symbolic of the fact that we don't usually stick to anyone schedule. We are able to pick and choose what we want to do and how long we do it. [They were still mesmerized by the illusionary appeal

of a structured sequentially oriented schooling experience. It was as if they couldn't exist and function without some sort of chronological guidelines to help them navigate through the complexities of a day. Time seemed to cultivate the security of a false dichotomy; a right and wrong time for everything as if learning could be prescribed to a portion of a clock/day.]

Why isn't there a door? (Chloe)

Because the kids have no need to leave. They want to stay unless they need to go teetee. [The teetee comment was added because I foresaw what Chloe's next questions would most likely be.]

Why aren't there any books? (Joey)

Books are associated with texts which mean sitting at a desk and kids who are bored. [The fact that Joey would notice the dearth of books provided insights into what his expectations were relative to any learning experience.]

Why don't you have any legos or anything on the floor to play with? (Zoey)

Because I didn't think to draw that because most of our projects are decided by all of us together so I wouldn't know what to put out. [I am assuming that the reason for this question was to reinforce the belief that democratic learning was fun and enjoyable irregardless of the content covered or the amount of learning that occurred.]

Is that a picture or the window by the computer? (Chloe)

Window.

Why is that girl back by the table so tiny and stuff? (Zoey)

I guess because we are walking away from her so she is in the background. [When Zoey asked me that question, I immediately became cognizant of the characters placements in the drawing. Everyone in the picture was in the background except for me. Had I subconsciously concluded that my role would always be in the foreground while the remaining members would be obscured by my shadow (representative of my power over them)? This was definitely not the message I was trying to convey to everyone in our class.]

CHAPTER 5: JOEY'S STORY

I first got to know Joey when he was in third grade because he participated with me in a website design contest that I was involved with. From the outset, I was struck by his uniqueness. By this, I mean that he always had a very interesting and often divergent perspective on things related to school. This type of thinking often left me curious about how he processed information and what experiences led him to think the way he did. He reminded me that educators are often guilty of generalizing about the student population, as if everyone came from the same experiential and contextual molds. Joey's physical and emotional presence, to this day, continues to remind me of the diversity that exists in the classrooms. Consequently, I was quite pleased when I realized that he was going to be one of my fellow researchers because I knew his perspectives would widen my conceptual horizons about students' beliefs about learning.

Joey's easy going personality and academic prowess were attractive traits that made him a very charismatic leader within our class. While this was a role that he accepted, it appeared that he wasn't always comfortable being the center of attention. However, as the year progressed and our democratic society flourished, Joey's presence and impact became more and more apparent. For instance, while participating in our class government, as a member of the House of Representatives, he was often a very vocal advocate of establishing a set of class guidelines that delineated exactly what a good citizen should act like. One bill that he helped initiate was about standing up for and protecting others when they were being unjustly accused or were being persecuted by others because of their differences.

From an academic standpoint, Joey excelled in the classroom and regularly made A's in almost all of his studies. While he always did extremely well in school, his performances were more the consequence of his diligence, perseverance, and desire to succeed, than some genetic or god given cognitive gift. Consequently, he understood how others could be struggling emotionally and academically in school making him an extremely empathetic mentor and peer tutor.

How Joey Became a Research Participant

As previously mentioned, Joey often has very unique and fascinating perspectives on what he encounters in his daily interactions with teachers and fellow students. So I was very interested in finding out what his responses would be to the "perceived" and "preferred" scales of democracy in the classroom (His overall score was seventeen. Consequently, his score represented the median score for the group).

During group work, each student brings a special talent or skill that improves the groups' chances of learning and success.

This was one of the two attribute that seemed to arouse the largest degree of variation in Joey's responses on the two scales. On the preferred scale, he indicated that he *strongly agreed* with the statement, but on the perceived scale he checked *disagree*. The variation may be due to the role that Joey often plays in classrooms. As one of the brighter and more dependable students teachers may overburden him with responsibilities [including assisting other less motivated or academically gifted students] that weigh upon his ability to succeed in the group. Thus he feels he must do a disproportionate amount of the work in order for the group to acquire the grades he desires. Consequently, he either is unaware

of or doesn't offer the other participants the opportunity to demonstrate any special skills or attributes that they might bring to the group.

In the classroom, students are encouraged to listen and respect different ideas even if they don't agree with them.

This was the other attribute that caused the most contradictory responses from Joey. On the preferred scale he checked that he *strongly agreed* with the assertion, whereas on the perceived scaled he indicated that he *disagreed*. One possible rationale for this response could be that students who exhibit maladjusted behaviors often evoke more attention and responsiveness from their peers and teachers who are attempting to control or negate the disruptions. While Joey, being a more conscientious student, tends to exhibit affirmative prosocial behaviors which may actually be a hindrance to his voice being heard.

Consequently, he responded accordingly because he often feels that his voice isn't recognized or responded to any overt manner by his fellow students and teachers.

Disagreements in the classroom are usually resolved through compromise.

This attribute was the only attribute that Joey marked *don't know* on both scales. As previously stated in the scale directions, this either means that he hasn't seen it in his class experiences or he doesn't understand the meaning of the statement. Prior to filling out the scales, I asked the other participants if they had any confusion about the scale attributes or the directions. They all responded negatively to these initial inquiries.

Therefore, the only viable assumptions would be that either Joey hasn't seen conflicts between classmates or he has seen disputes occur, but they weren't resolved through compromise.

The most troublesome component of the scales seemed to be the category of 'Respect for Others'. The variability in Joey's responses [checked disagree, neither disagree of agree, and agree] on the perceived scale suggests an internal turmoil over the actuality of collaborative learning in his experiences, as well as the viability of compromises as a resolution strategy. Lastly, his statements on the preferred scale [marked strongly agree on two of three indicators] demonstrate Joey's positive stance on cooperative learning in education.

Students have the opportunity to work with others on projects, if they want to.

When participating in our learning activities students usually do them in pairs or groups.

These were the only two attributes where Joey indicated a *strong agreement* on both scales. Both of these attributes were contained within the collaboration category which suggests that Joey's responses are truthful due to the redundancy in responses. It also intimates that most of Joey's previous academic experiences were collaborative resulting in a favorable attitude towards all cooperative learning activities.

The differences in scores on each of eighteen descriptors were tabulated and combined to give a raw score. Joey's raw score of seventeen represented the median score for the entire classroom. His score was included in the research to provide a reference point or ground zero when making comparisons about deviation levels between the other two extreme cases. As evidenced by the preferred scale responses, Joey's beliefs appeared to be in flux as substantiated by the disparity of replies within each of the categories of a democratic classroom. For example, with the exception of the collaborative category, Joey's responses fluctuated between *Strongly Agree*, to *Neither*

Agree or Disagree, to *Disagree* on the three to four attributes comprised within each of the categories. These fluctuations suggested that Joey's beliefs and understandings of democratic learning were in turmoil as he attempted to assimilate democratic principles within his educational schemata. His perceived responses were also in conflict as evidenced by the contradictory replies to attributes within a category. It appears that Joey's uncertainties transcend both the realities of his educational experiences and the idealities of his desires.

Joey's Initial Thoughts about Democracy

After being informed that he had been selected as one of the three participant researchers, he was asked to respond to a set of questions. The purpose of these queries was to initiate a dialogue between all the researchers on the meaning of a democratic classroom. The following questions and responses were utilized to assess Joey's 'ground zero' of understanding relative to democratic learning:

What does democracy mean to you?

It's our decision to do what we do and how we do it. [What does he mean by "our"? Am I to assume that the teacher has no involvement in the learning. I see the what and how, but do not see the "why" we do it. There is no indication in his response that he has a justification for doing it this way. He seems to be just following some abstract protocol that we all know is right because everyone says so.]

What would a democratic classroom look like?

The kids would be sitting anywhere they want. They would be deciding the schedule of our day and the rewards for the day. [Conspicuously absent from the

definition is any mention of choosing the content for the day, the way it is learned, or how it will be assessed. So this raises questions about Joey's understanding of what democracy really entails.]

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

Because we want to have fun but we have to learn to get us prepared for middle school. [It seems that Joey associated democracy with playing, but then chose to separate the two clauses in the sentence with "but" which is a word indicative of contradictions. Therefore, while democratic principles are suppose to empower the students in all facets of their academic experiences, Joey seems to associate these ideals only with areas unrelated to learning. Learning, according to his response, is still the dominion of the teacher.]

Are there thing in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

The amount of work we do and when we do it. The changes would be good because we would have more choices and the principles give us more of a say in things about recess and homework and where we sit.. [Once again there is the mention of the amount of work, but doesn't seem to mention having any influence in the type of learning or the content of what is learned.]

What types of decisions should be made by the teacher?

The teacher should decide what we have to do to get ready for the CRCT.

[It is interesting that he should mention the CRCT by name. He seems to be aware

his academic performances for the year are assessed by the state mandated test. He also seems to believe that the teacher is the only one who has access to official knowledge necessary for him to succeed. He seems to be devaluing the student's contributions in the process of preparing for the test.]

What types of decisions should be made by the students?

The students should decide what things we want to do today! [He mentions that students have the right to decide things for the current day, but I wonder if that means that students don't have the forethought to make informed decisions about things in their future. Is he handing over jurisdiction of his future to teachers and other adults whom he hasn't even become acquainted with yet.]

Joey's First Projective Interview

After completing the preferred/perceived scales and providing answers to the initial foundation questions about democracy, each research participant was to begin documenting their experiences and observations of our classroom life. In particular, each researcher was to take digital photographs of exemplars of classroom interactions that either epitomized or contradicted the researcher's beliefs about democracy. At the conclusion of week three, each researcher participated in the first of three projective interviews. Listed below are Joey's responses to the questions from the initial interview:

Questions and description related to photograph #10:

The students are busy taking what appears to be some sort of paper/pencil assessment. It appears that this is an individual activity because no one is conversing or moving about the room.

Tell me what you see in this photograph.

Most of the class is hard working and staying on the subject.

What does that mean?

Pretty much we don't goof off and the smart kids stay on subject and they don't (trying to think of this one word) they are real focused on it.

So do you see democracy in this picture?

Sometimes we can talk and help others.

What do you mean by sometimes? Like just during quizzes relatively hard some people can help us by giving us examples.

Who determines when you get do this?

You do.

How do you feel about that?

(long pause) Are we allowed to change anything we say.....okay than instead of you do we do to determine who we help needs help....[Throughout this dialogue, Joey appears to be trying to say what he thinks I want to hear. For instance, "Okay instead of you do we do." This is rather strange because Joey is usually a very straightforward to the point type of person. I can surmise from his quiet and reserved demeanor and lack of brevity (Joey hasn't exhibited either of these characteristics this year) that Joey is a bit taken back by the interview process.]

Questions and description for photograph #1:

In this photograph, everyone is sitting on the floor in a circle looking at two individuals who have the voice stick. (The voice stick is a symbol we use to

represent a time when everyone needs to stop what they are doing and listen to the person or people wielding the stick.)

Tell me about this photograph?

I see that pretty much that they are determining how what we get to do in the classroom and everyone's voice is being heard. [He made a point of emphasizing the word everyone and then looked at me as if to say, "I did good." Once again Joey seems to be searching for the perfect response.]

How do you know that?

Cause a couple of people are raising their hand and because I think of circle time.

What does circle time mean to you?

A time where you can learn what you can do better with the classroom and everyone's voice can be heard the way they want to. [This was the first time that Joey seemed to demonstrate the beginnings of an understanding of what a democratic classroom should be like. While answering this question, Joey kept his eyes peeled on the photograph instead of on me. He appeared to understand that the answers he was searching for weren't within me, but within the experiences he has lived over the past three weeks. He also demonstrated an understanding that circle time wasn't just about being able to voice your own opinions, but also a time to listen to and actually hear other people's thoughts ("a time where you can learn what you can do better")]

Questions related to photograph #33.

Tell me what you see in this photograph?

It is a rubric umm.... With the rubric we can determine the grade for our projects

and how you can assess it in a way. [Says “we” can determine our grade, but indicated “you” (teacher) would assess it. These are two different words that have one primary function; determination of the worthiness of the outcomes of learning. We both can’t do the same things unless we are working in collaboration. According to his statement we aren’t working in unison, so whose task is more important. Joey’s sequence of actions suggests that the final ‘say-so’ belongs to the teacher. At this point, Joey seems to be wrestling with his ideas about democracy, but his mechanistic responses point to his entrenchment in the traditional teacher/student dichotomy.]

How do you feel about having to make your own rubrics?

It is pretty good because we share all our knowledge and share of what we know.

You mentioned all of your knowledge, why is this important? Umm. Sometimes you would give us a project and we wouldn’t have any idea how to organize it or find it but because we can make our own rubrics we could get a grade and have fun with it. [Focus still seems to be on getting a grade. When he mentioned this part, he was looking at me just like he was in some of his previous responses. As previously mentioned, this type of overt eye contact seems to be taking place when he mentions words (grades, assess, CRCT) that traditionally symbolize teachers.]

So who determines your grade?

We do. [Even though his affirmative response indicates an understanding of democracy, his physical cues suggest that he may be playing the part in order to appease me.]

What is the teacher's role in this?

You can determine on what level you want to grade us at. [Once again he mentioned "you grade us at" instead of "we."]

What do you mean level?

Like maybe our rubric could be kind of easy for example sequencing of information you said the people have to know exactly what is coming next.

So, is the teacher's role to make sure they understand what they are saying?

That is how you would grade but we choose on what we do and on our skills and weaknesses but you determine the hardness of it. So we are still having fun and doing what we want to do but we are learning it in a way that can give us the amount of knowledge we need. [Joey begins to use a plural pronoun "we" in his reply to the previous question. His comments suggest that he is beginning to understand the collaborative nature of democratic education. It is troublesome, however, that he includes "you determine the hardness" and "amount of knowledge we need." Both of these indicate that some external source determines the utility of the knowledge they acquire in schools, instead of it being situated within the student's own experiences, aptitudes, and interests.]

Year 6/6/6: Puppet Show - Hunter's and Joey's World of examination
<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?user=ConstanceTregroup>

RubiStar
 Rubric Made Using
 Rubistar (http://rubistar.4teachers.org)

Puppet Show - Hunter's and Joey's world of examination

Teacher Name: Dr. Neay

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
costumes	Puppets were original, creative, and constructed well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were original and constructed well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were constructed fairly well. No pieces fell off during the performance.	Puppets were not constructed well. Pieces fell off during the performance.
play writing	Play was creative and really held the audience's interest.	Play was creative and usually held the audience's interest.	Play had several creative elements, but often did not hold the audience's interest.	Play needed more creative elements.
accuracy of story	All important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Almost all important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Quite a few important parts of story were included and were accurate.	Much of the story was left out or was inaccurate.
Scenery	Scenery was creative, added interest to the play, and did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery was creative and did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery did not get in the way of the puppets.	Scenery got in the way of the puppets OR distracted the audience.
character	Puppeteers stayed in character throughout the performance.	Puppeteers stayed in character through almost all of the performance.	Puppeteers tried to stay in character through some of the performance.	Puppeteers acted silly or showed off.

Date Created: Jan 18, 2008 12:13 pm (CET)

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Joey's Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom

During week four Joey began constructing his first of two images of classrooms. In the first kinetic drawing, he drew a depiction of what a traditional classroom looked like to him. Within the picture, Joey was to include the teacher, a couple of other students, and himself, as they were interacting in some way in the classroom. Lastly, Joey was to number each aspect of the drawing as he completed them so that, if an apparent sequence or causal relationship existed, it could be noted.

Joey's picture contained multiple cues that signified the relative importance of the teacher within the traditional classroom setting. First, the teacher was positioned in the center of the drawing near the dry-erase board. This was probably done to illustrate that the teacher was seen as the focal point of all learning and interactions while in the classroom. Second, the teacher has been given unusually long legs in proportion to the

rest of her body. This tended to overemphasize the physical differences that existed between the teacher and students thus creating a visible hierarchy between its constituents. Third, the students own personas were inextricably linked to the teacher's beliefs about them as members of the classroom. For instance, one student was reaching for the "boy's and girl's bathroom pass" while another group of two was sitting on the floor between desks reading a book. The intriguing factor was that the only student who had a face was the one who appeared to be adhering to the rules of the teacher. The other two children were turned away [may be symbolic of their refusal to recognize the authority of the teacher] from the teacher and had the numbers seven and eight in place of faces. Therefore, one could presume that these children weren't recognized as contributing or even existent members of the class community because they didn't abide by the teacher's beliefs.

Another interesting aspect of Joey's drawing was the disproportionality that frequented many of the objects within the traditional classroom. For instance, the door to the classroom was substantially larger than any other parts of Joey's drawings. This suggested that the door played an important role in the traditional classroom. The door was also labeled with the number two (within a sequence of thirteen objects) indicative of its significance in Joey's depiction. One possible interpretation proposed that the inhabitants of traditional classroom subconsciously seek ways to escape their learning experiences.

Other objects that were also conspicuously large were the student desks and the clock on the wall. The students' desks were so oversized that an observer's initial glances may lead him/her to believe that they were tables, but this wasn't the case. In actuality,

the desks size was symbolic of the relative importance they played in the learning experiences of students in the traditional classroom. They may have represented the physical locale where the majority of Joey's instruction and learning occurred. Finally, the enormous dimensions of the clock denoted that time and possibly time-management have had a substantial impact on Joey's classroom learning and interactions.



Joey's Second Projective Interview

After approximately four weeks of democratic education, it appears that Joey is beginning to struggle with his ideas about what a student and teacher's role should be in the classroom. While he appears to be aware of the differences that exist between the traditional and democratic classroom, his socialized experiences continue to emerge in our discussions of the photographs. In particular, the focal points of his interpretations suggest that his previous experiences still leave an imprint on his beliefs about schooling experiences.

The following quotations came from the second interview which occurred roughly three weeks after (between week seven and eight) the conclusion of the first interview. During that time, Joey had been busily digitally documenting his experiences and beliefs about democratic education, commenced composing his reflective photo narrative, participated in numerous "Games for Actors and Non-Actors" activities, and continued interviewing me. Consequently, one would expect that if a change were to have occurred in his beliefs, it would have been more observable during the second interview as he progressed in his understandings of the democratic process. Therefore, comparisons were made between the two sets of responses to illustrate deviations, if any, had occurred in Joey's beliefs between the first and second interview.

Description, questions, and responses about photograph #14:

Photograph #14 depicts an award's assembly that our school has every nine weeks. In particular, it focusing on five members of our class who have received all A's on their report card for the grading period. Each student is going up to receive their certificate and a small gift in recognition of their achievements.

Tell me what you see in this picture?

People in our class being rewarded for stuff that they did.

What kind of stuff do you think they did to get rewarded?

They probably got rewarded for doing work that they wanted to do and they learned it by your teachings. [Joey made two interesting points here. One, he indicated that “doing work they wanted to do.” So far throughout all of Joey’s interview responses, he tends to associate choice with democracy. However, this is a very limited understanding of the principles of democratic education. His focus on choice may be attributed to the fact that in previous classes he was never given the opportunity to choose which would make “choice” a very visible component of democratic education. The other intriguing point was “they learned it by your teachings.” “Your” suggests that I am in control and that all learning begins with me. In the previous interview, Joey said that “you determine the grade.....the hardness....the knowledge that we need” when referring to a rubric generated by the students. A reoccurring pattern is to separate the students and myself with pronouns indicative of a dichotomy. In a democratic classroom, the objective should be to blur the lines between constituents so that all voices have an equally chance of being recognized and valued.]

So I am responsible for them getting a reward?

Yes, (shakes his head vigorously) because you taught us a lot of strategies and we learned a lot because we had fun while we did it. [This initially presented itself to me as brown nosing because his observable actions (smiling, as if to say I did good; eye contact while saying it) suggested that he was looking for affirmation

that what he said was the correct answer. However, after looking back at his previous responses, this seems unlikely. Once again, he seems to associate the words “fun” and “choice” with democratic education. While these may occur, it would seem rather naïve to assume that by having a voice in things, one will always have fun. It appears that Joey’s understandings haven’t evolved beyond a superficial level in the past three weeks.]

Is anybody else responsible for them getting rewards?

Yes the students because they want to learn it at their rate and that is a good example of democracy in our class.

What do you mean by their rate?

They had a choice on what subject they wanted to do and...that’s it. [He paused here for about a minute while he appeared to be grappling with his thoughts.]

Anything else you want to say?

It is a good thing that they got to choose because at their own rate they were able to learn enough stuff that they were able to get a reward. [Throughout the first two interviews Joey continually utilized overly general and ambiguous terms “learn stuff”, “how what we get to do”, “use our voice in things”, and “doing what they wanted to do.” This symbolized a lack of clarity on Joey’s part on his own position about democratic education as well as the purpose of it.]

What did they get to choose?

What subject they were able to do. [While I often times wanted to continue questioning Joey’s responses, his facial expressions and overall behavior intimated that we were approaching Joey’s frustration level.]

Questions and responses related to photograph # 19:

Tell me what you see in this photo?

I see the voice stick.

What is a voice stick?

Its uh...a stick where you can hold it in front of the class and talk and everyone respects your voice. {With a pencil in his hand, he models how to wield the voice stick.}[He put a particular emphasis on the word “respect.”]

How do they respect your voice?

Because you are in the one in front of the class and usually one person sees you and they tell everyone to be quiet because someone has the voice stick.

[Interestingly, he says “one person” without any indication that it was the teacher.

This was the first time that Joey seemed to be aware of the potential equality of all voices in a democratic classroom. In most of his previous responses about control, he specifically mentions words like “you tell us”, “you taught us”, and “you determine what level.”]

Why did someone take this picture?

To show that we have a voice and say in something and what our opinion is about something.

Can you give me an example of something?

If we want extra recess today because we have been good. [I thought Joey had made the transition from “choice” to “democracy”, but then he gave the example of “recess if we have been good.” He implied that if they were good they could have extra recess. The insinuation is that they have to act a certain way in order to

get what they want or to be heard. That suggests that someone or something exerts power over them.]

Anything else?

Whenever someone has the voice stick they have total power over the class and everyone has to respect him or her. [“Everyone has to respect him or her” reeks of coercive inequitable practices. In a democratic classroom, would everyone have to respect each others’ voices or would they want too because they value their opinions? The presence of the notion of some “total power” speaks to the traditional notions of teacher, as lecturer, student as blank slate mentality.]

How did this stick get this power?

(Long silence while thinking) uhh...I don’t really know how you just said this is the voice stick and you can say whatever you think of the class when you hold it in front of the class. [Once again, Joey’s response belies the fundamental principles of a democracy. The only way I could give the power to the stick was if the power originated with me. Initially, I was looking to see if Joey recognized that the stick’s power came from the students’ acceptance or rejection of it, not from me. However, when he said, “I don’t really know how”; he confirmed his beliefs about the origination point of all classroom power.]

So I gave the stick the power?

No, you just said we will use this as power in the classroom.

Did anything else have to happen for the stick to have this power?

Long silence.

Did the students have to do anything for this stick to have power?

Not that I can think of. [The previous couple of questions were asked to make sure that I hadn't misinterpreted Joey's beliefs about power in the classroom.

According to his redundant replies, it is safe to postulate that Joey's beliefs about learning continue to favor the more traditional, teacher-centered views of education.]



Descriptions, questions, and responses related to photograph #22:

Photograph #22 was a picture of one of the school tape recorders. It is a standard old-fashioned black tape recorder with the built in microphone and a counter so that the listener knew where they were on the cassette.

Tell me about this photograph?

This photo shows a tape recorder that we use during three branches.

Why do you use a tape recorder during three branches?

Because we need to play it back and listen to it and see what stuff we need to improve on like if we talked too much. [One thing I wished I had asked him about was related to the idea of talking too much. I wondered if this was a learned response relative to the rules of previous classrooms or was he referring to the equitability of opportunities for all group members' voices to be heard.]

What are some things you improved on from listening to the tape?

Our talking. We learned that we talked when someone else talked and we needed to respect their voice. [This provides some evidence of an understanding of the ideals of a democratic classroom. Joey shows that he remembers the characteristics of a citizen that we, as a group, discussed, debated over, and ultimately agreed upon.]

Anything else you learned?

That it's a good thing to use if you want to take someone to court while you were taping.

How could you use the tape to take someone to court?

It could be evidence you could play for the jury to show that they didn't do what they are suppose to do. [The former statements refer to respecting each person's individual voice. Whereas, this comment speaks of the rules or values that were established by the group and guided us through our classroom interactions. This

seems to indicate that Joey recognizes that a democratic classroom has both an individual and group component.]

You mentioned a court, what is that all about?

Taking students who didn't do what they were suppose to or did something bad in our classroom or in the hallways or at lunch to court where they will proven guilty or innocent.

Who decides if they are proven guilty or innocent?

The jury.

Who is the jury?

Like they are people on the sidelines who watch the court case and decide if they are innocent or guilty.

Who are these people in our classroom?

People who weren't witnesses, defense or prosecutors or the judge.

If they are found guilty what happens?

Jury decides a punishment for them.

Why do they get to do decide the punishment?

Prosecutors can't because obviously they are trying to prove why guilty and the defense definitely doesn't want to because they are trying to protect him from getting a punishment. [Throughout the previous four questions, I was trying to elicit some type of response from Joey about who had the power to decide innocence or guilt and how they came to acquire that power. Unfortunately, Joey seemed to interpret these queries on a literal level and continually gave examples of who couldn't be on the jury. I don't know if Joey was unaware of the intentions

of the questions or if he knew the values of democratic classroom, but wasn't able to see their applicability in a real classroom situation.]

What role does the teacher play in this process?

Usually the judge because he is the highest rank in the class unless three branches is going on than the chief justice is. [Interesting that Joey refers to the judge and teacher, simultaneously, as the highest ranking member of the court. It was never explicitly stated in the classroom that the judge was the highest rank. In fact, the emphasis was always placed on the power of the jury, made up of their peers, to decide innocence or guilt. This comment suggests that Joey continues to see the classroom as a hierarchy with the teacher and students occupying differing levels of power. However, Joey also provides me with a sliver of hope when he suggests that the chief justice, a student in the class, has ultimate authority while three branches is going on. In a traditional teacher-centered classroom, one wouldn't expect this to be a viable option.]

So there are times when the teacher/judge doesn't have the highest rank?

Yes.

How do you feel about having a fellow student having the most power during a classroom activity?

Uhhh..well, I think it is good because sometimes the teacher doesn't see things the way we do and doesn't understand us. So the teacher might act a certain way because they don't understand, but a student...a student might act differently. [His comments are very significant because he indicated that there are multiple perspectives on things in the classroom and that the teacher's view isn't always

right or even the best option. He also suggested that it was plausible that a student's views could trump the teacher's views, if a justification could be provided that the audience understood and accepted. Essentially, anyone's voice could determine the actions of the classroom as long as they provided a rationale that convinced others of its legitimacy.]

Joey's Drawing of a Democratic Classroom

At the conclusion of the second interview (week 7-8), Joey was headed back to the art room to draw his second portrait of the classroom. However, the primary difference between the first and second depiction had to do with the traditional versus democratic classroom structure. As previously mentioned, Joey was to draw a kinetic drawing that illustrated an interaction between the teacher, two other students, and himself while in a democratic classroom.

In this picture, the first noticeable difference was the location of the teacher. In the traditional classroom, the teacher was located in the front of the room next to a dry-erase board. In the democratic classroom, the teacher was situated on a couch near the window. In conjunction with this change, Joey also relocated one of the students from a more peripheral position in the traditional classroom to a more pronounced central placement sitting adjacent the teacher on a couch. These concurrent repositionings suggested that the focal point had been altered and redistributed among more of the stakeholders during the transition from classroom to classroom. The teacher was no longer the primary and exclusive agent of the learning, but was now a collaborator with the students in a more equitably aligned educational experience.

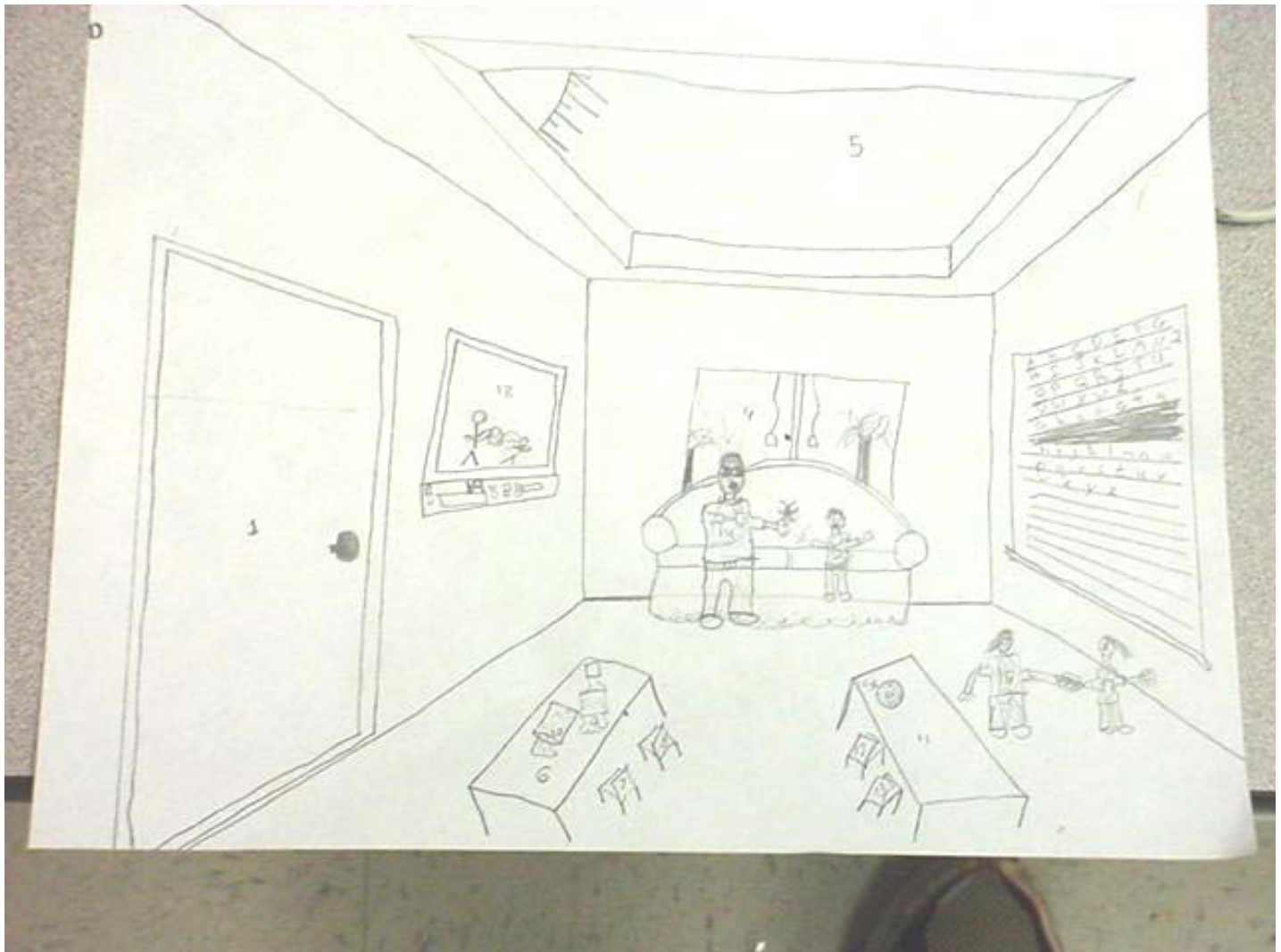
Conspicuously absent from the traditional classroom were student faces (on two of the three students) while in the democratic setting, the numbers had been replaced by facial expressions. The first possible explanation for the absence of the faces could be that Joey didn't have an adequate amount of time to complete the task. Though, this seems unlikely since there weren't any time constraints established prior to commencing with the drawing. In fact, all of the research participants agreed that they would continue to work and progress on their pictures at their own pace. A more plausible rationale suggests that Joey's persona was represented by a number because his traditional experiences didn't cultivate and nurture opportunities for him to express who he was and what he thought. Accordingly, if Joey wanted to receive recognition and be transformed from a numerical symbol into a human being, then he would have to comply with the preemptive norms and beliefs of the teacher. This was corroborated by the inclusion of a facial expression on the student who was grasping for the "boys or girls bathroom passes". He/she was complying with the teacher's rules. Therefore, his/her identity had been established and given credence.

Other fascinating differences existed between Joey's two depictions of his classroom experiences. First, there was a disproportionately large clock included in the traditional classroom, but in the democratic setting one didn't exist. Evidently, Joey's experiences in a democratic setting weren't subjugated to the constraints of time, whereas in the traditional classroom, time was a mitigating factor in the learning process.

Second, dry-erase boards were included in both drawings, but the size and placement deviated from one classroom to the next. In the democratic classroom, the board was located on a side wall, whereas in the traditional classroom it was located in

front of the room in the center of the picture. The placement of the boards suggests that the traditional classroom utilizes the board more often than the democratic classroom. This was further exemplified by the proximity of the teacher to the boards. In the traditional classroom, the teacher was standing in front of the board, but in the democratic classroom the teacher was positioned on the couch.

Finally, the democratic classroom contained a window and a sunroof providing access to the outside world, while the traditional classroom was as closed and confining as dark unlit closet [Joey emphasized this point when he drew a very detailed black and white tiled ceiling]. Joey's drawing may be trying to elaborate on his perceptions of the warmth and openness of the democratic classroom verses the traditional classroom. It is also plausible that the window and sunroof were symbolic of the connections that existed between his learning in a democratic classroom and his lived experiences out in the real world. The only way that an association could exist between his learning and his experiences (each child's experiences are unique) is if his voice had contributed to the determination of what was worthwhile knowledge.



Joey's Projective Interview of his Democratic Classroom Drawing

Tell me what you see in this picture?

I see a classroom with nice accessories and a teacher talking to a student and two other people shaking hands. [I was trying to get an idea about what were the most important features in the classroom, but his response (nice accessories) was so general that it was difficult to surmise each element's significance. However, when he referred to the characters, he began by commenting on the teacher first,

even though there was a three to one ratio of students to the teacher. This suggested that a hierarchy existed within the classroom and that the primary possessor of power, from Joey's perspective, was the teacher.]

Why are the two people shaking hands?

Cause they are just meeting.

About what?

Just two people shaking hands and meeting.

So they are shaking hands because they are greeting each other?

Yes. [I had originally assumed that the hand shake was representative of some sort of collaborative effort. However, Joey's comment indicated that Joey and I had alternative views on what transpired in the picture. I began to wonder if my initial reflections were skewed because of my own researcher bias. Was I guided by my desire for the truth or by my desire to right?]

What is the teacher doing with the student?

Talking to them explaining stuff. I drew this based on the first day of school for kids.

Why the first day of school?

That seemed better because it would be cooler if the teacher was explaining stuff and the students and the people were greeting each other.

So what would this teacher be explaining to the student?

How his classroom runs.[Interesting that Joey utilized a possessive pronoun when referring to the ownership of the classroom. He also stated that the functionality of the educational experiences was dependent on an understanding of "his" rules.

These comments were definitely suggestive of preexisting power differential in Joey's democratic classroom.]

So is this an example of a democratic or nondemocratic classroom?

Example of a democratic because there is food on the table and usually nondemocratic classroom don't allow food and the TV is on and the kids are out of their seats. [He mentions food, a TV, and kids moving around the room as the principal justifications for the classroom being labeled a democratic setting. Yet, he never mentions having access to the decision making process or the influential roles students might have in determination of the content objectives.]

So in a democratic classroom, kids move around, watch TV, and eat food?

Some times yeah.

What about the rest of the time?

They are probably getting a feel for what the classroom is like and how the teacher teaches. [Joey continued to refer to the teacher as the designator of what was would be taught, how it was taught, and the outcomes of the learning. He mentions "getting a feel", as if the students needed to be sensitive the teacher's style without the benefit of a reciprocal occurrence.]

Why do the students need to get a feel for what the classroom is like?

Because they need to know what the teacher wants so they can show they can have more say in things in the classroom. [It appeared that Joey was stating that the relationship was built on a give and take system. If the students conformed to the teacher's rules then the teacher would probably relinquish some of the power so the students had a more vocal position in future learning endeavors.]

So, if they do what the teacher wants they will get more of a say. What does that mean?

It means, we uh..have to show that we deserve rights before get them. You know show that we can handle making decisions and keep track of behaviors.

[The coresearchers continued to mention behaviors and fun, but didn't seem to be cognizant of academic component of a democratic classroom.]

What did you mean by accessories?

Like in a democratic classroom there were be more stuff cause you would do lot more things. [I don't know if Joey was having difficulty verbalizing his beliefs or if he was conflicted by the contradictions that existed between his cognitions and his learning experiences. However, it seemed improbable that these queries caught him off guard given the nature, the duration, and the role Joey played in our research endeavor.]

What do you mean by stuff?

Like things that a nondemocratic wouldn't have like a TV, wouldn't be learning by TV, but sometimes a democratic class might.

What are some things you want me to pay particular attention to in your drawing?

I would like you to see how much fun we have in a democratic classroom.

Why do you have so much fun?

Cause we have choices and we get to help decide the day and exercise outside and decide if we have been good or not for things like lazy day. [Joey mentions having choices, but limits their scope to behavioral and recreational concerns. At

this point, it seemed that Joey had a superficial understanding (fueled by his physiological, instead of his cognitive requirements) of the principle features of a democratic classroom.]

Is there anything else you would like to say about your democratic classroom?

Not really.

Joey's Reflective Photographic Narrative

Once upon a time there was a group of chipmunks that were leaded by the great king nut. They were a group that had better choices than all the other Chipmunks. (The photograph was of our class during circle time. I am listening to a student's justification for why they believe we should do something a certain way. While this was going on Joey had his hand up waiting to be nominated by another students so that he could speak.) [Joey continued to mention the word "choices" when defining the principle characteristics of a democratic classroom. However, the essential difference between the previous occurrence and this one was that he provided evidence of the relative significance "choice" had in his beliefs about classroom democracies based on its inclusion as first slide in his reflective photographic narrative. He also continued to put the teacher at the forefront of classroom interactions as evidenced by "there was a group of chipmunks that were lead by the great king nut."]

We do lots of fun chipmunk activities but we Have to earn it cause we have a privilege for It. (A photo of the kids outside when they were circuit training to get ready for the 5k.) If we be bad we have to face the consequences. We have to sign nutty contracts! (A photograph of the class contracts designed by us for use in situations where we wanted to make sure everyone was clear about their responsibilities to their group and

to themselves.) [Joey seemed to realize that a democracy wasn't an innate right of all people, but a privilege that could only be earned by being faithful and responsible to others, as well as themselves. He also stipulated that faithfulness could only occur if individuals were given clear unambiguous guidelines delineating the expectations for people involved. This was done through the inclusion of "nutty contracts" (class contracts) that emphasized the group and individual accountability in a democratic society.]

We have a wide open space where we can play and meet with Our fellow chipmunks. But they feared to go outside a lot because of the evil beaver... (Photograph showed us training outside on perimeter of the school grounds.) Renee, The mighty beaver girl!!! (A photograph of one of our students during one of our economics games days as she looked through a large hole in a decorated piece of cardboard.) [Joey mentioned "wide open spaces" which suggested that a democratic classroom offered the students the freedom to determine the direction and scope of their learning. He also spoke of meeting with "his fellow chipmunks" which was suggestive of an environment where kids could and did collaborate on their learning. Lastly, the evil beaver may have represented the temptations that often coincide with the characteristic freedom of a democratic classroom.]

So we have to work together to apprehend Renee (A photograph of a group of boys who worked together to create a model out of popsicle sticks), The mighty beaver! But sometimes we don't get along and we have to use the Golden Acorn stick To settle the problems! (A photograph of the voice stick that we used when we wanted to have our voice heard and respected by the entire class.) And if someone is really bad they will turn

into....COW HEARTS! (A photograph of a cow heart that we dissected during one of our science projects.) [Joey seemed to be referring to instances during group work when individuals acted in incongruent ways that tended to provoke disunity and turmoil among its members. When this occurred, each child had the freedom to express their opinions as well as their justifications for why they felt that way; often times utilizing the voice stick. However, in certain situations, some individuals chose to ignore or disrespect their counterparts resulting in an intervention by the group, the teacher, and sometimes the class. This demonstrated an understanding of group accountability and the need for each person to be responsible not only for themselves, but also the other members of their cohort. When this occurred, inevitably a consequence would follow.]

So Alvin and his band of chipmunks Went after Renee, the mighty beaver
But Alvin got his head slapped off by The beaver's tail. (A photograph of our vice-president who tried to keep the president from getting impeached. Renee was the prosecutor for the legislative branch who tried to get him impeached.) [In our democratic classroom, the students were willing to subject their thoughts and opinions to the scrutiny of the larger group realizing that their ideas wouldn't always be welcomed or even accepted. However, they knew that they would be heard, their opinions valued, and, if possible, their ideas utilized.]

So the great king nut and the chipmunks were Constructing a plan on how the day should go and What we should do to get ready for the beaver. They were ready for anything! (A photograph of me talking to the entire class as they were working on their stores for the economics game.) [Prior to the start of any day, the class would always meet for circle time. During these sessions, we would decide what we wanted to

accomplish, how we would go about doing it, and determine any possible rewards and consequences for the day's activities. Joey also utilized the word "constructing" indicative of two things: one, an action that embodies an environment conducive to being an active participant; and two, the idea of building an educational plan instead of merely adding on to a prefabricated one created by someone other than the students.]

So the acorn team got together and decided how we Can approach Renee but be very sneaky while also trapping her in a net. (A photograph of the legislative branch as they conspired to have the president impeached.) [We learned that there were numerous ways of persuading or dissuading individuals so as to ensure the optimum probability of achieving the individual and group goals. We also learned to respect each other's perspectives and always paraphrase what we thought another person was communicating to us.]

Renee got there but when she did she noticed that Everyone was asleep! So she went away and Hoping that next time they will be awake and ready!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (A photograph with all of the students with their heads down. The only time this was used was occasionally when the class got little to energetic or excited. Definitely nondemocratic.) [One of the hallmarks of our version of democracy was that we didn't let others control how we acted and reacted. We would thoughtfully consider the alternatives and then conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with our democratic values. Therefore, when others tried to influence us through pestering and goading actions, we would either ignore the behavior or react inconsistently with their expectations.]

They all got ready for it and The great king nut Sat down and read to us the objectives and what we Needed to do to take down Allison the mighty beaver! (There

were multiple photographs on this page. Four of the photographs showed the students working together in groups on different things. The fifth was when the students had voted to have me read scary stories to them from R.L. Stine.) [Joey indicated that the teacher could play an integral role in the students attaining their objectives, but that this could only occur if the students recognized the value of what might be conferred to them. Thus, educational objectives have no intrinsic value (just because they come from the teacher) unless it is bestowed upon it by students who recognize its relevance to their own lives.]

So H.B. the idiot, set up motion detectors in the Tree dome So that if she came we would know! (A photograph taken prior to the impeachment case where the legislative branch was doctoring evidence to make it look like the president hadn't been enforcing the laws of the classroom.) [As part of our democratic experiences, the students delved into some aspects of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" activities. These activities put the students in situations where they had a heightened sense of awareness of their mechanized propensities. It also made them more amenable to the multitude of differences that subsist within in our worlds. The motion detectors reflected the new found attentiveness they utilized during interactions in order to facilitate an amicable outcome for all the participants.]

Julie was setting up traps outside so that when Renee The mighty beaver came she would burn herself to death!! (A photograph of a fire extinguisher experiment we did during our body/chemistry unit.) [Joey indicated that the democratic virtues were a necessary component of a successful community. If there were instances when noncompliance occurred, then the consequences needed to be dire enough to evoke an alteration in the person's current behaviors.]

But Kerry wanted to work by herself and she soon Found out that that doesn't work as well as when we work as a Group!! (A photograph of Kerry as she ran by herself during one of our long runs in the gymnasium.) [Kerry's plight suggested that in a democratic classroom, the best way to accomplish one's individual goals was through the group initiatives. The group had access to more personnel and material resources that inevitably made goal attainment less demanding.]

So Renee was too smart and came through the Other way but as she chose that way she got Burned by the trap and we got rid of her!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (A photograph of a student after we had played one of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" games. In this particular photograph the student had chosen his own way and caused his group to plummet into the piranha infested waters.)

So we celebrate a job well done with human candy from The garbage that the great king nut found because he Spends most of his time there. (A photograph of a table full of candy and other sweets during one of our economics games.) [When the group reflects on relevant issues, deliberates before reacting, and accepts alternative possibilities, the collective and personal objectives of one and all are within reach and the treasures innumerable.]

Joey's Responses on the Posttest

The final task of the coresearchers was to retake the "Perceived/Preferred Beliefs about Democratic Learning Scale" so that a comparison could be made between the initial responses prior to the inception of democratic education and the concluding responses at the completion of the research. Joey's original score on the scales was seventeen which suggested that there were some discrepancies between what he preferred

to see happen and what actually occurred during his educational experiences. His posttest score had dropped from seventeen to eight and the total number of characteristics with a zero score differential went from six to thirteen. The combination of these two factors provided substantive proof that the integration of democratic principles in the classroom not only impacted Joey's beliefs, but tended to realign his educational preferences with his actualized experiences.

CHAPTER 6: ZOEY'S STORY

I first got to know Zoey through her brothers. While teaching in fifth-grade I had contact with both brothers during Human Growth and Development (the politically correct name for Sex Education). Parents are given the opportunity to prescreen the materials that would be utilized during the lessons. Zoey's parents decided to take advantage of the prescreening and came in one afternoon to look over the materials and to inquire about how I would present the subject matter. As they entered the room, they were followed by an exuberant bundle of energy with a smile that would melt the polar icecaps. Of course, this was Zoey. While her parents were previewing the materials, I got my first opportunity to interact with Zoey. We hit it off immediately and ended up spending most of our time drawing on the board and playing with some of the art supplies. At the conclusion of the meeting, I thanked Zoey's parents for coming and gave her a hug and a high five. Little did I know, at that moment, that our paths would cross multiple times in the ensuing years.

It turned out that during the subsequent year, Zoey came of age and was placed in one of the kindergarten classes in our school. One of the responsibilities of the upper grades was to assist the primary students with their reading through a program known as Reading Buddies. One day each week, the upper grades were to assemble with their counterparts in the primary grades, pair up, and practice reading. By luck, chance, or design, Zoey's class was chosen as our reading buddies. So, while our friendship started during the initial meeting with her parents, it was cultivated and blossomed during that year we were conjoined as reading buddies. From that point on, whenever we happened

across each other in the halls, the cafeteria, or at some other school function, we would always take a few moments to chat with each other.

While it isn't common knowledge, at the conclusion of each school year, parents often write letters to our administrators making requests about whose classroom their child would be placed in the following year. Because Zoey's mom knew that Zoey and I had had a good relationship since kindergarten, she requested for her to be placed in my classroom. Sometimes these requests are granted and sometimes they aren't. In this particular case, the administrators felt the parent's rationale was reasonable so Zoey was placed on my role.

From day one, Zoey consistently exhibited the maturity, the focus, the drive, and the creativity necessary to achieve in our classroom. She was a very charismatic individual who naturally excelled in athletics and academics. Consequently, Zoey was seen by her peers as a strong supportive goal-oriented leader. She was always one of the most sought after students when we were selecting members for group projects, lawyers for court cases, and leaders for three branches of government. However, while she understood the significance of her role in the classroom, she often spoke of the enormity of the burdens bestowed on her and the desire to be less conspicuous and noticeable.

How Zoey Became a Research Participant

While Zoey completed the preferred and perceived scales, I pondered what her responses might be. At the time I hypothesized that her replies would be indicative of a person who preferred a more traditional teacher-centered approach to learning. I concluded that Zoey's affinity for being chosen as a leader, if not the leader, would most

likely cause her to welcome tactics that refrained from redistributing the powers of the teacher towards the students.

The teacher and students spend a lot of time working together on learning projects.

This was one of three attributes that Zoey had the most significant (difference of three) disagreement between how she responded on the preferred and the perceived beliefs scales of a democratic classroom. On the perceived scale, Zoey indicated that she *disagreed* with the statement, while on the preferred scale she marked that she *strongly agreed* with the attribute. One possible rationale for the polarity of her responses may be that teachers, including myself, often overutilize the most proficient students in tutorial and leadership roles. Teachers perceive of this type of student as a miniature version of themselves, instead of as students. Consequently, Zoey and others like her, are often not given the normal standard amount of attention because of the teachers misguided assumptions about the student's beliefs, understandings, and affective desires. If this presupposition was true, then it would be reasonable and justifiable for this type of student to feel neglected and abandoned.

At the beginning of group work, each student knows exactly what they must do for the group to do well.

Zoey's responses to this attribute were identical to her replies on the preceding attribute. In both cases, she marked *disagreed* on the perceived scale, but *strongly agreed* on the preferred scale. If the previously stated contention has validity, then one could transpose that justification to this situation. It would be reasonable and logical to think that Zoey would believe that it was her responsibility to ensure the success of the group.

Therefore, she would be less inclined to delegate responsibility to others and more prone to completing the task herself. Consequently, the other students wouldn't need to know what they must do for the group to succeed because Zoey and other students like her, were, in essence, the group.

Disagreements in the classroom are usually resolved through compromise.

Once again, Zoey's responses were identical to the previous two attributes. While she indicated a *strong agreement* on the preferred scale for resolving class issues through compromise, she *disagreed* with this attribute on the perceived scale. One justification for her responses could be that the behavioral characteristics of previous classes necessitated a more authoritarian approach to decision-making. Thus, as a socially adept person, Zoey would have inevitably been victimized by the more comprehensive punitive responses previous teachers incorporated within their classrooms. Another possibility is that other classrooms inadvertently alienated Zoey by resolving conflicts through majority rules votes. If she were frequently in the minority, she might feel that her voice wasn't being heard or acknowledged; a dilemma that is easily rectified through compromises.

During group work, the only way the individual can succeed is if the group succeeds.

This was one of two attributes where Zoey's preferred and perceived replies were congruent. On both scales she responded that she *strongly agreed* with aforementioned statement. Her answer to this attribute directly contradicted an earlier response (*disagreed*) she had indicated on the attribute *At the beginning of group work, each student knows exactly what they must do for the group to do well*. Both of these attributes comprised one of the democratic education categories called "Group Accountability and

Responsibility.” It would seem that Zoey believed that individual success was inexplicably intertwined with group achievement, yet if the individual doesn’t have an inkling about the requirements of the group, then how can either succeed. She could have been befuddled by the wording of each attribute, but that seems unlikely because the students were given ample time to ask clarifying questions. Another possible consideration involves the distribution of the workload among the group. Zoey may have reasoned that by doing most, if not all, of the work, she would assure her own success and therefore the success of the group.

Students are usually searching through books, the internet, or other sources for the answers to their questions.

This was the other attribute where the preferred and perceived responses were identical. Zoey indicated on both scales that she *agreed* with the statement. Zoey’s other responses to the attributes within this category, *Active Problem Centered Learning*, suggest that her experiences and preferences were in alignment. However, because Zoey selected *agreed* instead of *strongly agreed* on the scales, it would be reasonable to suggest that this category wasn’t considered by her to be one of the most significant hallmarks of democratic education.

The differences in scores on each of eighteen descriptors were tabulated and combined to give a raw score. Zoey’s had the highest raw score (26) of any of the respondents in the classroom. She was selected because her perceived and preferred responses were indicative of someone whose beliefs about learning were in opposition to actual experiences. Because there were only two congruent responses out of a possible eighteen on the preferred and perceive scales of democracy in the classroom, this seemed

like a logically conclusion. Furthermore, Zoey's responses (She marked every attribute with either *agree* or *strongly agree* without exception) on the preferred scale suggested that she held very strong beliefs about the efficacy of a democratically constructed classroom. However, her replies (Four out of five categories had responses that were with the range of *agree* to *disagree*) to the perceived scales were more variable and inconclusive. It appeared that Zoey had strong convictions about what she wanted in a classroom, but was befuddled by her actual classroom experiences.

Zoey's Initial Beliefs about Democracy

After being informed that she had been selected as one of the three participant researchers, she was asked to respond to a set of questions. The purpose of these queries was to initiate a dialogue between all the researchers on the meaning of a democratic classroom. The following questions and responses were utilized to assess Zoey's 'ground zero' of understanding relative to democratic learning:

What does democracy mean to you?

I get to make decisions. [By using the pronoun "I" she demonstrated an understanding of how a democracy affords the individual more of a voice in determining their own existence. However, the singular first person pronoun also suggests that she might not comprehend the group component of a democracy.]

What would a democratic classroom look like?

The students would get to decide on everything. [First it was an "I", but now it is "students." She mentions that students get to decide on everything so what is the role of the teacher in the process. Does she mean to imply that the power in the classroom must be dichotomous?]

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

Everyone will get to be heard, they will have the right to vote, and the right to voice their opinion. [All three of these comments are echoing the same basic idea; the right of the students to have their thoughts and opinions listened too. By echoing the sentiments repeatedly, Zoey has either consciously or subconsciously alluded to significant belief about democratic principles.]

Are there thing in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

Everything would be decided on like specials, when we have lunch, how much recess we get, and what things we do in a day. If this happened, the class would be out of control so it would be bad. [First, she mentions the types of things that would be decided upon by the kids. Conspicuously absent from her list was anything related to the subject matter. So, does that mean that all nonacademic matters should be decide upon by the students, but curricular issues were to left to the deliberation of the more informed adults? Either she was trivializing the subject matter by relinquishing control to adults or she believed that academic decisions were of such a magnitude that they shouldn't be left to kids. Second, she insinuated that if control were handed over to the children that chaos would ensue because they weren't born with innate ability to control themselves.

Consequently, that was why adults/teachers have the absolute authority within the classroom.]

What types of decisions should be made by the teacher?

Teachers decide what we have to do in a day, how hard projects are, and what projects to do.

What types of decisions should be made by the students?

Kids decide when we have lunch, the order of the day, where we get to sit, who to stand by in line and sit by in the classroom. [All of these decisions relate to logistics, but, as previously mentioned, nothing to do with the primary mission of schools, teaching and learning the content. The redundancy in her messages substantiated my former contention that Zoey believed that the children were lacked the social and cognitive maturation to decide subject related issues.]

Zoey's First Projective Interview

After completing the preferred/perceived scales and providing answers to the initial foundation questions about democracy, each research participant was to begin documenting their experiences and observations of our classroom life. In particular, each researcher was to take digital photographs of exemplars of classroom interactions that either epitomized or contradicted the researcher's beliefs about democracy. At the conclusion of week three, each researcher participated in the first of three projective interviews. Listed below are Zoey's responses to the questions from the initial interview:

Question and responses related to photograph #37:

Tell me what you see in this photograph?

I see three branches of government. [Zoey appears to be a bit nervous. She usually has a smile on her face and is very talkative. Right now she isn't smiling and her answers are very short and abrupt.]

How did you know this was three branches of government?

Because on the piece of paper it has “bill” written by the legislative branch. [I am trying to get her to elaborate, but she seems determined to give as little information as possible. Once again I attribute this to nervousness. I thought we had addressed that issue when we decided to use their photographs as prompts.]

What does a “bill” from the legislative branch do?

A bill made by the legislative branch helps make the laws of the classroom. [She speaks of the laws as if they have a physical boundary that deters others from entering and us from departing. It makes me wonder whether the democratic virtues will transcend physical boundaries or if it will remain here when they leave to go to middle school.]

Can you give me an example of a bill that became a law?

The students have to stand in line in front of each other instead of next to each other. [Interesting that one of their first bills to become law refers to procedural issues. Did they choose this because they have this type of thinking modeled for them by their teachers repeatedly over the past six years.]

How did you come up with that law?

You put the executive branch in charge of the hallways and we needed some laws because the other students were doing anything they wanted to in hallway. [She emphasized the word “you” as if to say that it was your fault that the class was in disarray in the hallways. While they seemed to see me as being responsible for the predicament that they found themselves in; they were also willing to accept

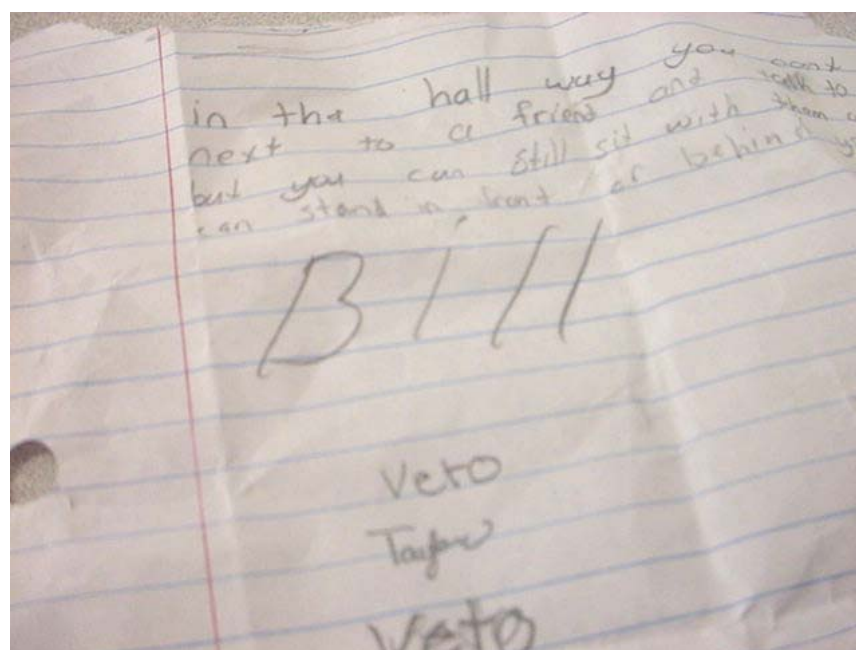
responsibility for their loudness. They were demonstrating one of the fundamental components of democratic learning, group and individual accountability.]

Why do you think this photo was taken?

To show that we have power in our classroom.

How do you have power in your classroom?

We get to make the laws of the classroom, we can veto things we don't like, and we help make the rights and consequences of the classroom. [Zoey utilized the word "help" instead of other choices like "we make." This demonstrates that Zoey is aware of one of the trademarks of democratic learning, collaboration between all constituents (teachers and students).]



Questions and responses for photograph #26:

Tell me about this photograph?

Three branches are fun and we get to make the laws and the rights of the classroom.

How would you define rights?

Rights are how the class is supposed to run.

What would I see if the class is running the way it is suppose too?

Everybody would be doing what the teacher asked them to do, people wouldn't be arguing, and everybody would be paying attention.

Who determines what the rights are?

The students determine the rights. [The previous statement indicated that much of what they did had been based on observations of what the teacher had done. They were, essentially, mimicking the belief system of the teacher. So even though Zoey never mentioned the teacher when discussing rights, it appears that most of the rights were carbon copies of the teacher's belief system.]

What is the teacher's job in three branches of government?

The role of the teacher is to make sure everything is going well and we are learning everything we are supposed to. [Once again she used the words "suppose too" which is indicative of situations where others are in control. This seems to contradict her early statement about the students determining the rights.

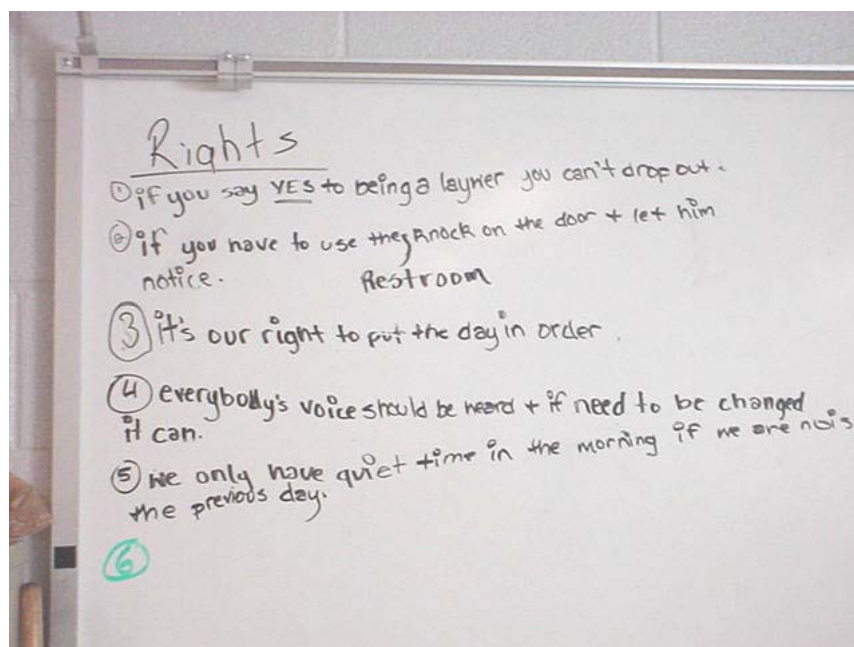
According to this statement, the primary function of teachers is to make sure the rules are followed and the right subject matter is addressed/learned. Then, what exactly is the function of the students in three branches?]

What do you mean by “making sure everything is going well?”

Making sure it doesn't get out of hand and we are goofing off.

So, the primary role of the teacher is to make sure the rules are obeyed?

Yeah, uh..no. The teacher is also there if we need help understanding something or if we aren't sure what to do. [Zoey second guessed herself here. I don't know if I responded in a manner that coerced her into changing her view or if she was just aware that her response probably wasn't the most politically correct (afraid she might hurt my feelings) answer.]



Questions and responses for photograph #50:

Tell me what you see in this photograph?

I see virtual math.

Why did someone take this photograph?

Because they like it. It is a fun way to learn. [The adult reply to this type of question usually involves the utility of something. Will it make me smarter, more productive, or better prepared for something? Whereas the student reply is usually geared towards having fun. The mismatch in rationales, expectations, and educational objectives severely hinders accurate communications between differing generations. Thus, the methodological divergences occur between what adults and children perceive as knowledge.]

Why do you like virtual math?

Because we get to buy houses and cars and act like adults. We also don't have to use the textbook.

Why don't you want to use the textbook?

We don't like to use textbooks because it is boring.

Who decides if you use a textbook or not?

In this classroom we have a democracy so we have a say in everything, but in other classrooms the teacher just decides. [Zoey mentions that they have a say in everything which includes the academic issues. In previous questions and photographs, Zoey repeatedly indicated that the students' voices were most audible in discussion relative to procedural issues, but not academic ones.]

How did you feel when the teacher tells you to take out your textbooks?

Sort of frustrated when the teacher says just take out your books and do the problem set because I don't want to. [She seems to feel disenfranchised as if no

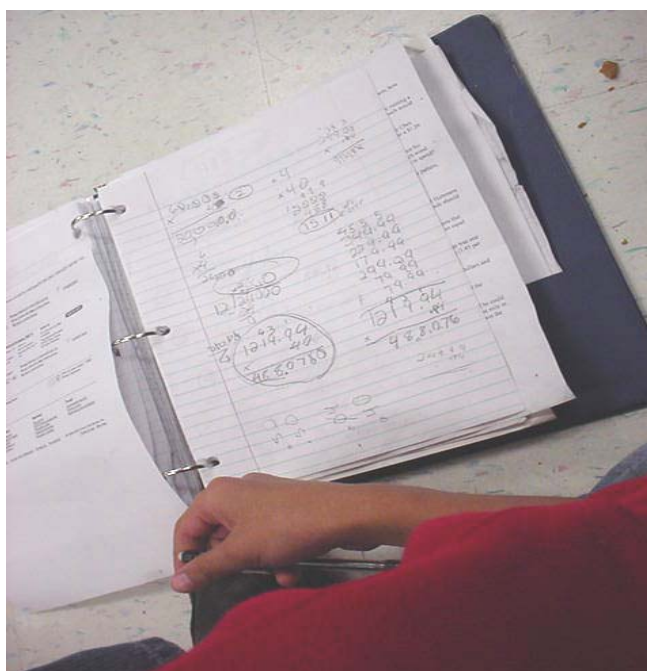
one was available to hear her voice or recognize the value in what she has to contribute to the activity.]

If you didn't take it out what would happen?

I would get in trouble, but not in this class. Here we vote on everything in circle time. [Zoey believes that these types of issues would be addressed by all the participants while in circle time. While there, they can justify their own point of view while also becoming aware of the multitude of differing perspectives and beliefs.]

Was the virtual math a student's idea or the teacher's?

It was the teacher's. We voted on it to decide if we wanted to do it and if we wanted to change some parts of it. [Zoey recognizes that there is value in her own voice, but also in all other members of the group or community. She knows that there are times when each of us have special features that necessitate taking a more active and vocal role in our communities work. This isn't a negative as long as it serves the purpose of the group.]



Description, questions, and responses to photograph #12:

In this photograph, the teacher is discussing something with three boys. The teacher has positioned himself over the other three while talking to them about whatever the issue may have been. It appears to be a one way discussion because the teacher is the only one with his mouth open and making gestures with his hands.

Tell me what you see in this photograph?

You trying to help the group. [Zoey realized that I didn't always have the answers and that there were other resources at her disposal in the classroom.]

Why did someone take this photograph?

To show that you are always there if we need you. [In a nondemocratic classroom, the teacher would always be needed because they would be the only viable source of information. However, when Zoey says, "If we need you", she demonstrated an awareness that they could accomplish the task themselves.]

When would be an example of you needing help?

In math if we need help with a problem. [Many of the mathematical concepts that are taught in schools are often abstract and unrelated to the students' lives.

Because they are mundane and irrelevant to the average student's experiences, they necessitate a coerced reliance on the teacher's knowledge, even in a quasi-democratic classroom.]

Is the teacher the only person who could help you if you don't understand something?

No, if someone knows what we don't know they can help us. [Zoey reiterates her early belief that there were multiple sources of knowledge beyond the teacher.]

Can you give an example of when someone other than the teacher helped others with something?

Like when we took the reading things and Joe already took it so he could help us. [Joe came to our classroom with reading difficulties. He was considered to have a reading disability. However, with time and a collaborative effort from the class, we were able to get Joe reading at just below grade level. Joe and I had spent some time working through the reading passage and he had indicated that he wanted to assist others so we decided that he would be the students' resource during the reading activity. I would be a supplement to him if he requested assistance.]

After approximately four weeks of democratic education, Zoey's began to exhibit changes in her working definition of a democratic classroom. Her initial responses suggested that the primary functions of a teacher in a democratic classroom were to ensure compliance with the rules, to teach the content, and to assign projects and grades. As the weeks progressed, Zoey's responses changed as she began to include dialogues (instead of monologues) between teachers and students. She began to recognize the value of multiple perspectives and voices when confronting physical, emotional, or academic dilemmas. She also realized that the artificially construed dichotomous teacher/student

relationship is a societal construct that facilitated divergence and individuality, instead of teamwork and cohesion.

Zoey's Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom

During week four Zoey began constructing her first of two images of classrooms. In the first kinetic drawing, she drew a depiction of what a traditional classroom looked like to her. Within the picture, Zoey was to include the teacher, a couple of other students, and herself, as they were interacting in some way in the classroom. Lastly, Zoey was to number each aspect of the drawing as she completed them so that, if an apparent sequence or causal relationship existed, it could be noted.

In Zoey's depiction of a nondemocratic classroom, the first two features she drew were the dry-erase board and the teacher. By selecting these two details first, she was either consciously or subconsciously eluding to their relative influence in defining the culture and outcomes of the nondemocratic classroom. Zoey reiterated these beliefs by positioning these two elements at the crux of the drawing thus further emphasizing their significance within the educational context. She also constructed the classroom from a three dimensional perspective which tended to exaggerate the height differential that existed between the characters in the classroom. Therefore, the children's physical presence in the foreground trivialized their roles in the classroom while simultaneously magnifying the stature and magnitude of the teacher's role and influence.

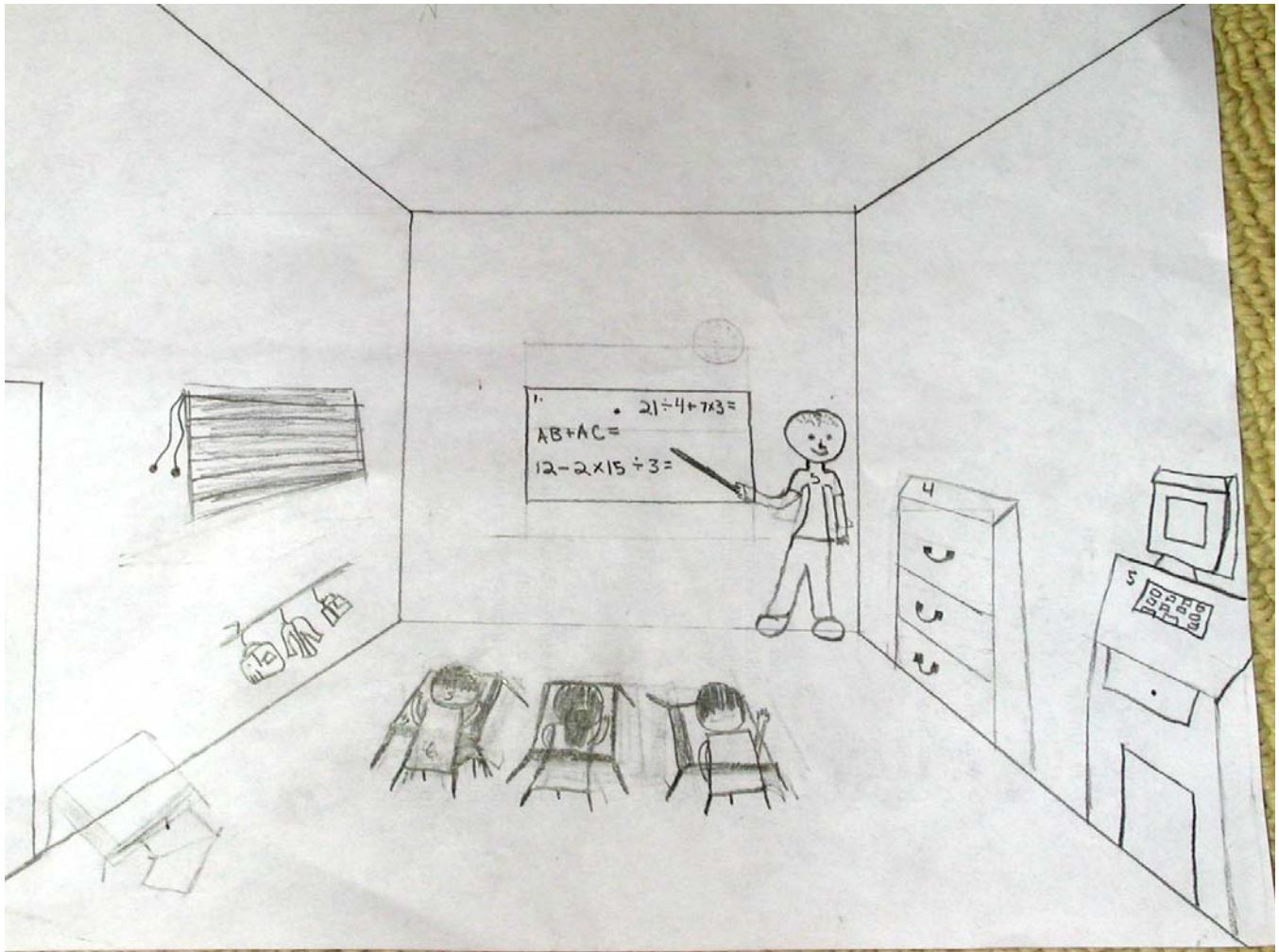
Another interesting aspect of Zoey's artwork related to her depictions of the students' demeanor in the classroom. All the students appeared to be sitting at their desks with their heads down while the seemingly contented (determined from the teacher's facial expression) teacher was at the board teaching a lesson. The actions of the students

appeared to suggest an overall ambivalence towards the subject matter, the educational approach, the teacher, or an amalgamation of all three. The fact that the seemingly pleased teacher was oblivious to the palpable signs of the students' apathy suggested the impotency the students experienced when confronted by nondemocratic education.

Some other intriguing aspects of Zoey's artwork included the following: the proximity of the filing cabinet to the teacher along with the nonexistence of a set of class rules, an oversized computer desk without a chair, the blinds being closed and the door only partially in view, and the elimination of the clock from the wall and the desk from near the door.

- I. Filing cabinets usually contain the records of student behavior and academic achievement. Consequently, the filing cabinets inclusion and proximity to the teacher signified the perceptions Zoey had concerning one form of teacher power. The exclusion of the rules (the most overt symbol of teacher power) emphasized the plurality of methodological choices teachers can utilize to encourage student conformity.
- II. Zoey incorporated an oversized desk and computer in her drawing, but excluded the most obvious complementary furniture, a chair. The artistic choices suggested that technological innovations were available, but not accessible to the students in a nondemocratic classroom. Students accessibility was constrained in a twofold way; one, the enormity of the desk in relation to physical sizes of the students; and, two, by the exclusion of the complementary piece of furniture, a chair.

- III. The partial view of the door and the shut blinds indicated that the students sensed that they were in a confining environment. However, because the door and window weren't excluded (there is still hope) from the picture, an escape or exodus from the nondemocratic notions was conceivable.
- IV. Two items appeared to have been a part of Zoey's original picture, but were later deleted from her final drawing, a clock and a student desk. Clocks are usually symbolic of finite periods or episodes characterized by a beginning and an end. Therefore, the absence of a timepiece would be indicative of the contradictory notion of infinity. From an emotional standpoint, this term would be suggestive of situations (like in a nondemocratic classroom) where individuals (students) feel powerless because they are unable to influence the outcomes of their experiences. The student desk was originally located near the door away from the other desks. In accordance with previous academic experiences, an isolated desk would normally suggest the existence of a noncompliant student. Hence, the removal of this symbol would characterize educational settings where acquiescence through power was the norm.



Zoey's Second Projective Interview

The following quotations came from the second interview which occurred roughly three weeks after the conclusion of the first interview. During that time, Zoey had been busily digitally documenting her experiences and beliefs about democratic education, commenced composing his reflective photo narrative, participated in numerous “Games for Actors and Non-Actors” activities, and continued interviewing me. Consequently, one would expect that if a change were to have occurred in her beliefs, it would have been

more observable during the second interview as she progressed in her understandings of the democratic process. Therefore, comparisons were made between the two sets of responses to illustrate deviations, if any, had occurred in Zoey's beliefs between the first and second interview.

Description, questions, and responses to photograph #20:

Photograph #20 is a picture of a young male student standing in front of the class wielding a long round stick similar to a broom handle. He is holding it up in the air so that everyone can see and appears to be waiting for something to happen.

Tell me about this picture? I see power being taken over by a student. [Zoey uses the word taken which indicates the forceful acquisition of something from someone who doesn't necessarily want to give it away. Her response "being taken over" suggests that if the young male has the power then someone else must give it up. In a democracy power would be distributed equitably among all the members of the group which contradicts the idea of "power being taken over by the student."]

How did he get the power?

By having the stick.

Why does the stick give him power?

Because the class needs to stop and listen to what he had to say.

Why does the class have to stop and listen?

Because he has the stick.

How did the stick get this power?

What do you mean?

Well, you said that everyone stops and listens to whoever has the stick so does every stick have this power?

No.

So why does this stick have that power?

Because you told us that if anyone needed to talk to the class about something then to pick up the stick. [Zoey was getting a little frustrated at this point, but her responses were very cyclical and she tended to retrace her steps back to where she started. As the previous discussion progressed, Zoey began to realize that the stick didn't really have any power on its own. According to Zoey, the power originated in a discussion the teacher had with children about how to get and keep the audience's attention when speaking.]

So I gave it is power?

Yes.

Does anything else have to happen for the stick to have this power?

No.

So, can you ever think of time when the stick didn't have the power to make everyone stop and listen?

When we don't have democracy in the classroom. [She is associating the stick with power. Unfortunately, the stick's credibility and power were directly associated with the perceived power of only one voice, the teacher. In a democracy, the stick would have power only if every voice agreed to recognize it as a source of power.]

Why do we need to have democracy for the stick to have power?

Because then it is our choice to use the stick or not. [Once again, choice and democracy were recognized as interchangeable parts. However, if the choices had parameters or criteria that were predetermined by a more powerful person or group, then the choices aren't democratically based. Because the stick's power was given to it by the teacher, as previously stipulated by Zoey, the choices weren't founded in student action, but in teacher action.]

So who gives the stick its power?

You. [Zoey looked as if she were getting a little annoyed with this line of questioning. When she responded to this question her tone and facial expression gave the impression that the answer was so obvious that I should have known it.]

But I don't ever use it do I?

No.

So then how can I give it its power?

Cause you told us to use it if we need to.

So does the stick have power if it is in the corner?

No.

So the only way it has power is if what ?

A student use it. [The light went on when she said this. All of a sudden she appeared to recognize that the stick was merely a sign of power, but not the source of the power.]

So the stick has power if the student use it?

Yes!

So where does the stick get its power from?

The students. [At this moment, she seemed to put all the pieces together. It was as if she were working on a puzzle, but couldn't fashion all of the individual pieces together so that they were illustrative of something. Then all of a sudden, she found the container that all the pieces came in and frame or picture was revealed so that everything now made sense.]

Description, questions, and responses for photograph #21:

The students are scattered throughout the room in groups of two to three with the teacher in the middle of the room. The teacher has one of his hands up in the air as if he is demonstrating something. The students appear to be looking at the teacher while trying to process what was being explained.

Tell me what you see in this photo?

I see the teacher talking to the class.

Why do you think this picture was taken?

To show the power of the students listening to the teacher. [Zoey was the first student to recognize that the students have the power to listen or not. Her response indicates a keener awareness of the multitude of opportunities for the students and teacher to interact in powerful ways.]

Why is "students listening to the teacher" a power?

Because they have the power to listen or not.

Does the teacher have power in this picture?

Yes. [Zoey believed that both parties in the photograph had power, as opposed to

some of her earlier statements relative to the power of the teacher or the student, but never conjoined.]

What power does he have?

The power to give the class directions.

Would he still have this power if the students were removed from the room?

No, because he wouldn't have anyone to give directions too.

So the teacher only has power if there is someone listening to him in the room?

Yes.

So, in order to have power, in the classroom, what must be true?

You have to have student and a teacher. [The connection was made that power involved two or more things interacting in some manner.]

What is a power the teacher has?

The power to direct the kids. You know make them follow the rules. [Zoey used the word "make" which was indicative of some forced coercive way of getting another to act or respond in an appropriate manner. This statement was indicative of an attribute of a nondemocratic classroom. However, on occasion, we found ourselves (I originally put "I" instead of "We" here) in situations where behavioral disruptions intruded upon our democracy forcing (it felt like we were being forced, but I guess we didn't have to respond to it in an authoritative way) us to halt or at least alter our democracy for awhile until the issue was resolved. I never felt that we had a true democracy because of this. It more akin to a quasi-democracy.]

Why do the students need to be directed?

If not they wouldn't know what to do. [Refers to the idea that children are “blank slate” or “sponges” that must be filled with knowledge from outside sources.]

Why wouldn't they know what to do?

Because if they haven't done it before they would be lost. [This statement was troublesome because it proposed that children lacked the mental acuity to formulate plans on their own about new or unique experiences. This belief places students in a subordinate role in schools because the majority of academic subjects can be framed in manner inconsistent with the student's experiences. Therefore, the students would have to be dependent on the teacher's influence and power in order to succeed.]

So what would be the teacher's role if they had done it before?

To sort of go over it again and make sure they know what to do. [By stating that the teacher's role was to “make sure they know what to do”, Zoey depicted the teacher as the only source of the correct knowledge. In doing so, she was also discounting the cognitive abilities of the students.]

So the teacher's power is to direct and review?

Yes.

Are those the only powers a teacher has?

No.

What are some other powers they have?

The power to punish if something is done wrong. [Interestingly, she identifies the power to punish, but not the power to reward. Her response was consistent with

previous comments that portray the teacher as more of a policeman than an educator.]

Who determines if something is done wrong?

The teacher and the students. [The teacher has the ability to punish, but both groups are capable of determining if something was done wrong? The teacher was presented with the power of the punishment which was the more overt act of power, while the students and teacher shared responsibility for deciding if something was done wrong. Zoey's responses were suggestive of a person whose life had been inundated with unequal interactions with other adults in the school.]

How do they do this?

By deciding if it was the wrong thing to do or not.

How do they go about the process of deciding that?

If the students saw it.

How do we define something as wrong?

By the laws we have.

How did we get the laws?

By the legislative branch.

Why did the legislative branch make the laws?

So we would have something to follow so we wouldn't get out of hand.

[Recognized that every group needs to some sort of acceptable norms to fashion their lives after. However, the use of the word "follow" suggested a hierarchical culture with leaders and followers.]

So it really wouldn't be your power to punish. It would be the students.

Why would it be the students?

Because if the executive branch catches them breaking the laws they can punish them.

So if the teacher doesn't punish them, what role should the teacher play?

To have a voice in the punishment. [Once again Zoey was beginning to demonstrate that she understood that a democratic classroom is founded on a collaborative atmosphere between all of the stakeholders, not just the students or the teacher, but both together. During the first interview, she repeatedly mentioned the students or teacher did this or that, but was hesitant to suggest that it was some combination of voices that made decisions.]

So is the student, the teacher or both that decide on the punishment?

Both.

Can you give me some examples of powers the students have?

The power to say what we are going to do in a day.

What do you mean by the power to say what we can do in a day?

The power to choose what projects we worked on. We would vote on these at circle time. [Circle time seemed to have been a very important indicator of democracy to Zoey and the other students. It was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews. It seemed to be how they felt their voices were being heard.]

Are there any other powers the students have?

Most of the time we decide on things in circle time and if you want us to do something you would tell us and we would vote on it. [Key point was that Zoey

was beginning to recognize that the teacher could have a voice in the issues, but that it didn't necessarily have to happen just because it was the teacher speaking. She begins to see the teacher as another member of the group instead of the head or focal point of the group.]

What happens during the vote?

Everybody who wants to talk does and then we vote. If there isn't agreement keep changing it until there is. [Mentions a need for agreement and how everyone's voice was heard who wanted to be heard. Also, suggested that decisions weren't based on majority rule, but on compromise.]

How do you feel about having to continually change until there is complete agreement?

It is okay. I mean you know everyone's voice will be heard. Sometimes it takes too long, but I know if I don't like something ummm.... I can talk and it will be changed. [She recognized that value in her voice and the utility of a compromise when she said, "I can talk and it will be changed."]

Zoey's Drawing of a Democratic Classroom

The first thing that was noticeable in Zoey's depiction of a democratic classroom was the positioning of each of the characters in the classroom. In the nondemocratic drawing, the teacher was the central figure due to his location (the center of the drawing) relative to all of the other components of the setting [Zoey was most likely the student in the middle desk with the pony tail because one of the characters in the classroom was to have been the co-researcher and she was the only female in the study]. Conversely, in the democratic classroom, Zoey positioned a female student [presumably her] as the focal

point of the classroom. Therefore, it would be reasonable to posit that Zoey's most prominent characters were representative of either the absence (if it was the teacher) or existence (if it was a student) of the student's voice in the classroom learning and interactions.

The other characters placements and facial expressions were also suggestive of the characteristics form of governance infused within the classrooms. For instance, in the nondemocratic classroom all of the participants' faces were concealed from view because of their positions comparative to the teacher/dry-erase board. Their positions seemed to have been predetermined by the arrangement of the primary equipment (student desks and dry-erase board) and principal character (teacher) in the setting. It was as if their own personas were dependent upon the teacher's acknowledgement of their existences. On the contrary, in the democratic classroom the students' placements suggested that there wasn't a focal point to the learning process. Furthermore, Zoey positioned each student's face towards a different peripheral location (the teacher was located in the middle of the group) which was suggestive of the vitality of individual differences and perspectives. Lastly, while two of the three students facial expressions were concealed from view, the one visible emotional cue (a broad smile) indicated student contentment.

Other intriguing aspects of Zoey's drawing included all of the following: the proportionality of the furniture, the details on the dry-erase board, the indecision about placement of students, and the exclusion or inclusion of certain objects within the drawings.

- I. In the nondemocratic classroom, the computer desk was so large that its size became an impediment to student access and use. The size differential

was utilized to establish territorial rights for the privileged (presumably the teacher). While in the democratic classroom, the proportionality of the furniture (bookshelf and computer table) encouraged access and the equitable allocation of resources to all of the constituents of the setting.

- II. The nondemocratic setting's dry-erase board contained a teacher initiated lesson on algebraic and other mathematical symbols. It conveyed a message to the students about whose knowledge and experiences (It would be hard to conceive of any student experiences that would correspond with those mathematical representations) were most valued in the classroom. While in the democratic classroom, the student appeared to have been utilizing the board in a manner contradictory to the established educational practices as predetermined by the teachers. This was done for two possible reasons; one, to provide an overt example of a student's discord about current practices; and, two, to remind educators that because there are multiple viewpoints within a classroom, one mechanized approach to learning won't work.
- III. Upon closer inspection, it was apparent that Zoey had some difficulties deciding where each character should be situated in the drawing. This suggested that there was an ideal or particular point within the classroom that reverberated the essence of Zoey's democratic classroom (or certain locations weren't chosen because she envisioned them as the epitome of a nondemocratic classroom). Initially, she had one of the students located near the book shelf and another sitting in a chair facing the person on the

computer. However, her deletions suggested that she was conflicted over these placements and felt that they were inadequate representations of her version of a democratic classroom. Ultimately, she determined that the students would all be depicted in an active stance (notice the absence of chairs and desks) and positioned so that each of the students was within the proximity of one another, yet was also visually obscured from one another's gazes. This was symbolic of a classroom environment that encouraged social interactions and group cohesiveness while simultaneously appreciated an individual's right to privacy and uniqueness.

- IV. The nondemocratic classroom contained a filing cabinet that could be construed as a symbol of one of the most recognizable facets of teacher power, student grades. This same symbol was conspicuously absent from the democratic classroom because grades would usually entail a collaborative effort between the students and teacher, instead of the unilateral dictate consistent with a nondemocratic environment. In the nondemocratic classroom, coat hooks were observable on the wall closest to the door, but, once again, the same feature was excluded from the democratic classroom. Coat hooks usually are associated with the transience of a group (as they are searching for something better) because people tended to place their coats on the hooks when they arrived and removed them when they departed. However, in the democratic classroom,

students' contentment, as evidenced by facial features, eliminated any need for escape.



Zoey's Projective Interview of Her Democratic Classroom Drawing

Tell me about this picture?

It is my democratic picture.

Why is it democratic?

Cause the kids are doing what they want. [Zoey mentions the kids doing what

they want to do, but doesn't include anything about the teacher. The absence of the teacher may indicate the negative connotation (keeping kids from doing what they want to do) teachers have in her view of education.]

How do you know they are doing what they want to do?

Because one person is drawing on the board and one person is under the table.

[Her description hinged on overt incongruous actions that kids had possibly undertaken in an effort to negate the influence of the teacher in the classroom.

These demonstrable behaviors seemed to occur instantaneously without the forethought or cognitions necessary to indicate anything but an almost instinctual response to teacher authority.]

How does that show democracy?

Cause the kids get to do what they want.

So if kids get to do what they want it is a democracy?

(long pause) yes. [While she responded affirmatively to the query, her bodily gestures (widened eyes, curled brow, small flat close lipped mouth, and tenser posture) were indicative of someone who lacked assuredness and conviction. It was obvious that she was puzzled by the inclusion of "getting what you want" with the term "democracy."]

So, what role does the teacher play in this classroom if the kids get to do what they want to do?

Nothing. [Once again she responded to this query immediately without pausing to think of the implications of her response. However, with in a few seconds of her

answer, it appeared if she suddenly became conscious of the dubiousness of such a reply.]

So you don't really need a teacher in a democratic classroom?

Yes, you do so that things don't get out of hand. [At this point, Zoey was retracing her steps as she became more aware of whom her audience was and the possible ramifications her statements might have on future interactions. In her rebuttal, Zoey was attempting to justify the existence of the teacher in a democratic classroom characterized by unimpeded "wants" of the students.]

How would you know if things got out of hand?

If the classroom was really crazy with kids hanging on the walls and stuff. [She utilized and emphasized the words "really crazy" which suggested that there were differentiated levels of student behaviorism and that, with the exception of the most extreme cases, all other student mannerism were acceptable. Therefore, teachers would only intervene in the most outrageous situations where the kids were acting like wild monkeys ("hanging on the walls on stuff").]

Do you mean like drawing on the board and hanging out under tables?

Yes.

So how does this show a democratic classroom?

Long pause [Zoey seemed to have constructed a dichotomous relationship between a democratic and nondemocratic classroom. Essentially, she attempted to define what a democratic classroom was based solely on what a nondemocratic classroom wasn't. Consequently, most of her retorts were often premised on a

superficial understanding of the most conspicuous features (perceptions of teacher authority through rules and consequences) of a nondemocratic classroom.]

What things in the picture show democracy to you?

The person drawing on the white board and the kid that is reading.

Why did you include the kid that was reading in your drawing?

Because he chose to read. [As of yet, Zoey hadn't indicated what her beliefs were relative to the curricular aspects of a democratic classroom. Therefore, I was indirectly trying to integrate the topic in our discussions.]

Why did you use the word "chose" in your answer?

Because he didn't have to read he wanted to. [Once again she seems to be insinuating that the "have to" corresponds with the presence of a teacher. Consequently, it would make sense for her to remove the teacher from the classroom because of the negative stigma associated with their presence.]

So it seems that kids wanting to do things is important to a democratic classroom. Is that right?

Yes.

How would you compare this picture with a nondemocratic classroom picture?

The kids don't get to choose what they want to. [Zoey continued to have a very simplistic method for differentiating between the two forms of education and governance; the absence or presence of an unfettered choice by the students.]

Anything else?

No.

So if I looked at both of your pictures together they would be the same?

Not exactly.

So what would I see if I looked at both of them?

The classroom would be in line (not goofing off and stuff) and they would be sitting at their desks. They would have work to do. [Once again she appeared to be defining both classrooms based on the most overt exemplars of only the nondemocratic classroom. This seemed to indicate a very superficial understanding of the dissimilarities that existed between these two modes of education.]

So in a democratic classroom the students wouldn't have work to do?

Yes, but the way they choose to do the work.

What would be example from your picture of how they chose to do work?

What do you mean?

You said that kids in a democratic classroom would have work to do, but it would be work they chose to do. What would be an example of a student in your picture doing work they chose to do?

One person chose to read and the teacher is on the computer printing out stuff that the class wanted to do. [Zoey continued to characterize a democratic classroom from an oppositional point of view. For example, in nondemocratic classroom interactions, the student would normally acquiesce to the teacher (follow the rules and do the work), but in the democratic classroom exchanges the teacher (the teacher is on the computer printing out stuff the class wants to do) was subservient to the student.]

Since one of the characters in the picture is supposed to be you, what are you doing that represents work that you chose to do?

(points to girl at the board)

What kind of work are you doing?

Drawing a picture for a project.

A project about what?

How to hypnotize a person (giggle). [From a symbolic point of view, hypnotism may have been incorporated to exemplify the socialized experiences kids were constantly inundated with during their schooling experiences. Therefore, their learning wasn't fashioned to their idiosyncratic interests, experiences, and needs, but was prefabricated to meet the specifications of the 'others' agendas. Of course, it was also possible that Zoey chose hypnotism because it interested her, though that seems improbable since she hasn't ever mentioned at all during any of our interactions.]

And how did you end up with that topic for your project?

Because one of the kids said that it was impossible to hypnotize a person.

So how is this related to school?

Because the kids are learning. [Zoey seemed to recognize that the primary responsibility of schools was to assist students in learning about things that were pertinent to their lives.]

What role would the teacher in this picture play in this learning?

Finding stuff off the internet to help the kids.

So the job of a teacher is to help the kids with learning stuff they want to know?

Yes, in a democratic classroom. [She indicated that the teacher's role included other things beyond establishing and enforcing the guidelines of the classroom. However, she continued to indicate that the teacher was to play a responsive role in student/teacher interactions.]

What would be the role of a teacher in a nondemocratic classroom then?

To find stuff and print it out and give to them so they can find what they need. [Instead of the teacher responding to the students, the students were now responding to the teacher; a continuation of Zoey's binary opposition (One object can only be defined by the existence of another object. They are the antiobjects to one another.)]

How is that different than in a democratic classroom?

I have a different answer for the question before that.

What is it?

She would make them find it on the internet. [The key word was "make" which implied a forced coercion by one person or group over another.]

Why did you use the word "make"?

Because in a nondemocratic classroom the kids don't get to choose what to do.

So in a democratic classroom the kids always get to choose what to do?

In reason.

What do you mean by reason?

Like they just can't play the entire the day they have to do some work so that the teacher's job will be done. [Zoey recognized the following two things: one, that

there were mitigating factors (the administration, the board of education, state agency) that affected the viability of a classroom democracy; and, two, that in order for a democratic classroom to perform optimally, all the voices, not just the students, needed to be heard. This was insinuated by the inclusion of “they have to do some work so that the teacher’s job will be done”.]

Is there anything else you would like to comment on about your picture?

No, not really.

Zoey’s Reflective Photographic Narrative

Once upon a time there was a group of kids who were working very hard for a school science fair. The kids were working as hard as they could to get the project done. But as hard as they tried, Renee goofing off made it hard to work. They found that Renee was making things much harder. SO they went to there teacher for help. (A photograph of four students working together to try to make their own soda during our chemistry/body unit.) [Zoey demonstrated a realization that a democracy only works if all the members of the community accept and personify the group’s norms. Without these unifying principles, collaborative efforts were doomed to failure. In situations where unity was disrupted by anarchy, democracy was invariably supplanted by a more authoritarian for of rule.]

Please help us. Renee is goofing off and is not helping us with the project. Can you help us, please. But the wise teacher, Mr. Rogan said, " If you want her out of your group then all that you have to do is give her a contract and make sure that she knows her rewards and her consequences if she does help or not." Yes we will let her know. (A photograph of me as I am discussing with a group some of the issues that were causing

strife among its members. There was also a photograph of a class contract that we used to make sure everyone was accountable to the group and themselves.) [First, Zoey illustrated how a teacher's voice could play an integral, but not a domineering role in a democratic classroom. Second, that most divisive situations can be diffused or resolved through the clear explicit communication between all members of a group of the expectations.]

Renee can we have a word with you? Yes, I will be right there. Renee you have not been helping us on our science project and we would like you to know that we are going to give you a contract but we need to have your signature. Ok but let me first see the punishments and reward. So we let her come and see the contract and she agreed so she sighed it. [A photograph of the class contract again. Plus a photograph of a student running by themselves during one of our workouts in the gymnasium.]

So then the next day they all brought in the ingredients so that they could try out there project. And got to work. But today Renee did much better on her part of the contract. And so the next day she got a Dr. Pepper. Bye Friday they were about done so they asked there teacher to come see. He came and he said that it was one of the best projects that he had ever seen and that he hoped that we would win the 1st place prize. We felt very confident in our selves and we were very proud. "Only two more days until the science fair," Roberta told them. And everyone was very proud of Renee because she decided to start helping us and look were we are, were done! (A photograph of a bunch of ingredients we used during one our science experiments about density.) [Zoey seemed to be emphasizing the correlation between collaborative efforts, improved performance, and overall achievement of goals. She also indicated that the group decided that Renee had

improved her behavior and should receive a reward because of it. Finally, she was illustrating the effective power a group has over its own members when they choose to voice their opinions, hold each individual accountable, and take the initiative to reward selflessness within the group.]

Saturday morning George and the group woke up and they were all thinking the same thing, today is the big day! They were all meeting at the school so that they could meet up and know that everyone is there. They were all there by 9 o'clock and ready to go. (Four photographs that all had to do with experiments that had no correct procedures only an outcome that they were to try and achieve.) [It wasn't enough that they had all collaborated on the project. It was important that all of the members be present for the recognition because the group recognized the significance of each individual's contribution to the success of the group.]

When they got there they saw all of these science experiments and projects. But then there were ours, we made something that we named slime! We were all excited but then worried at the same time. "The judging will be in one hour," I heard a man say through a microphone. Since we were going to be there a while, we decided that we would use the bathroom and grab something to eat. So we found a little restaurant outside the science building and went to eat. It took a little while till we got our food but the food was worth it. It was so delicious. And after we were done eating we went back to the building to hear the judging. Right on time, they announced the winners of the science fair. And the winners of the 2005 science fair are George, Tricia, Renee, Roberta, and Reba! We were jumping up and down all excited that we won. It felt so good to hear everyone cheering for us and clapping. In the end we decided to let Renee keep the

project. (Once again the same four photographs of experiments that had an outcome but no particular way to get there.) [Zoey continually highlighted the importance of the project and the learning being theirs. They were in complete control of every facet of their learning and had explicit ownership in the outcome. She referred to the project as “ours” and said that “we named” it slime. She then goes on to recount everything they did that day from the standpoint of the team: from eating, to waiting, to listening for the announcement of who the winners were. Finally, they opted to let Renee keep the project which demonstrated an understanding of the value of each member’s contribution to the feats of the group.]

So then we went up to center stage so that they could put our medals on us. Still everyone was cheering and clapping. We were all so proud of our selves. Then they told everyone what we made and then they announced the silver medalist and the bronze medalist. They gave us the 500 dollar prize so we all went out for ice cream afterwards to celebrate. When we got back home we sorted the money and we decided to let Renee keep the project. [Once again, she reiterated the selfless generous acts of the group as they realized that without Renee’s acceptance of the group objectives and norms, none of their accomplishments would have been possible.]

One afternoon two men in tux went to Renee's house wondering about the project. He told her that they wanted to manufacture the project and then sell it. She told him that she would get back with him that first she had to talk to her friends. She called them all that night to see what they had to say about it. They all said that they would love to do it. So the next morning Renee called the man back to tell him that they are up for the challenge. [Zoey illustrated the effectiveness a cooperative unified group can have on an

individual's disposition and outlook on life. She continued to reaffirm the importance of heeding each person's voice in any and all decisions pertaining to the group. And finally, she demonstrated how essential trust was in the cultivation and continued prosperity of any viable group.]

The man was so happy to hear from Renee. He told her that he would be there to pick all the kids up on Saturday morning to go over the stuff.

Saturday morning all the kids were there and ready to go. The man picked them up and then they were off. They went to a manufacturing place to show them how the process of manufacturing works. Then they went to a science lab so the kids could show them how to make the slime so that they would know so they could manufacture it. They decided to get a patent on the product so that no one could claim it. It didn't go smoothly but they got the patent. After they were done the kids went back home and they soon became millionaires. [Zoey concluded her story by reminding the reader of two things: one, that group work was never easy because you will always be working with the human variable; and two, that with perseverance, flexibility, and collaboration, a group's final outcome often surpasses any imaginable goals the individuals may have conceived of for themselves.]

Zoey's Responses on the Posttest

The final task of the coresearchers was to retake the "Perceived/Preferred Beliefs about Democratic Learning Scale" so that a comparison could be made between the initial responses prior to the inception of democratic education and the concluding responses at the completion of the research. Zoey's original score on the scales was twenty-six which suggested an extreme variation between her individual learning

preferences and the actualized learning experiences she had encountered. Her posttest score had dropped from twenty-six to seven and the total number of characteristics with a zero score differential went from two to ten. These two factors not only provided substantive proof of the positive impact the integration of democratic principles had on Zoey's educational beliefs, but also illustrated a stronger association between her academic desires and her tangible learning experiences.

CHAPTER 7

CHLOE'S STORY

Chloe was probably the most fascinating student in our classroom. At the conclusion of the previous year, Chloe's parents had requested that he be put in my room. They justified their request by stating that Chloe hadn't fulfilled all the potential that he had and lacked the internal motivation necessary to succeed on his own. They hoped that my open and problem-based teaching approach would entice and motivate Chloe. The administration came to me with the request and asked what my views were about having Chloe on my role the subsequent year. I responded that I would do my best with any and all students who were placed in my classroom. However, I would have to defer to their judgment with reference to student placements because teachers have a responsibility to educate all students, irregardless of personal feelings or issues of compatibility. The administration decided that Chloe would be placed in my room as long as the parents met the following two stipulations: 1) The parents had to meet with me prior to the start of the year to discuss their expectations for the school year; and 2) the parents had to be aware that in order for me to provide Chloe with the most optimum learning environment, they must be willing to give me the autonomy and time necessary to evoke a change in Chloe's attitudes. The parents agreed and Chloe was placed under my guidance and supervision.

Since the first day of school, I have always known that Chloe was different than your prototypical fifth-grader. His outward persona would mislead you into believing that he was just another reserved boy with motivation issues, but that was the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg.' Deep within the recesses of Chloe's concealed self, there existed an

extremely intelligent and insightful person. However, for some reason, unbeknownst to me, Chloe had chosen to mask this from his teachers, peers, and to some extent, even his parents. During the first few weeks of the school year, I was constantly at odds with Chloe over his work, effort, and his attitude towards school and me. For some reason (I still don't know why?), I felt that there was more to Chloe than was being seen. I was sure that the image that I was presented with was merely the one for public consumption. So, I decided that if I was to really get to know him; I would have to remove the audience from the equation. I approached his parents with a plan and on that day we became coconspirators in a plot to release the true Chloe from the physical or mental entity that imprisoned him.

The plan was simple. Chloe was struggling with his math and reading grades so Chloe's parents asked if he could stay after school for some extra tutoring. Because I was privy to the plan, I said 'yes' of course and the initial steps in the unveiling of Chloe occurred. We met twice a week, every week, for the duration of the first and second nine weeks. During this time, we worked on math problems and answered questions to reading passages, but at the end of every session we played a strategic game of chess (Because Chloe was a very insightful and intelligent person I assumed that he would be attracted to a strategic thinking person's game). At first, Chloe resisted my attempts to get him to play, but he soon realized that we could either play chess or continue to work on math and reading. As you might expect of any fifth-grader, he chose to avoid extra work and play a game instead.

Our initial games were a bit lackluster because I would win every time. However, I utilized these opportunities to introduce Chloe to the many nuances of chess. Initially, it

didn't appear that he had the vaguest interest in playing the game, but over time I realized that Chloe had an underlying competitive side that didn't appreciate the weekly trouncing. His chess game was improving and his thoughts and emotions began to unravel like the edges of a pair of cutoff jeans. With each week, our games became more animated, our bonds stronger, and our personas more open. Coincidentally, while this was transpiring, Chloe's grades, attention, and overall attitude towards school also improved. Eventually, our after school chess games (having accomplished what they set out to do) began to occur more sporadically, but our connection with each other remained strong and true.

When I learned that Chloe would be one of the participant/researchers I was delighted, but also a bit apprehensive. I knew from our previous experiences together that Chloe had very strong convictions about teaching and learning. I also knew that he would occasionally digress back to an introvert if he felt socially or cognitively cornered or off balance. Therefore, by including him in the study, I had to concede the possibility of him being unresponsive or exceedingly argumentative. However, if he chose to be a vocal and candid participant, then his responses would provide me with an abundance of useful data. I knew it was a risk that I had to take.

How Chloe Became a Research Participant

Chloe has always been a very insightful and straightforward student. I knew that he would most likely have a very unique take on our version of a democratic classroom and would be more than happy to disclose his thoughts on the topic whenever needed. So, I was very interested in finding out what his responses would be to the "perceived" and "preferred" scales of democracy in the classroom (He had an overall score of nine.

Therefore, he represented the smallest overall difference between preferred and perceived scores).

As would be expected from the lowest overall differential score (9), Chloe consistently tallied differences of zero or one on seventeen of the eighteen attributes. The only attribute that seemed to cause some discord was:

Learning usually involves moving about the room and school searching for the answers.

On the preferred scale Chloe marked “Agree” while on the perceived scale he responded with “disagree.” This attribute was contained within the larger category “*Active Problem Centered Learning*.” Chloe consistently indicated “disagreement” or “neither agree or disagree” on all of the attributes comprised within this category. I found these responses to be particularly disconcerting because I have always considered our classroom to be problem-based, even before the inception of our ideal of democratic education. While it was plausible that he was befuddled by the language that I used, it is improbable that he would have similar confusion on all four of the attributes comprised within this category. Another possible conclusion was that Chloe didn’t consider our projects and activities as problems or dilemmas. If that was how he interpreted it, then it was conceivable that he would respond in such a manner. However, the category “*Active Problem Centered Learning*” was repeatedly checked *agree* or *strongly agree* by twenty-one of the other respondents in the class. Therefore, it seemed illogical that Chloe would interpret the projects and activities in such an atypical manner given the consensus among the rest of the class.

Another interesting element of Chloe's choices was that he continually marked responses that tended towards indifference or a lack of conviction. This was evidenced by the following replies he checked for the eighteen attributes of a democratic classroom: "agreed" on twelve of the eighteen attributes on the preferred scale, "neither agree or disagree" on three of the attributes, and "disagreed" on three of the attributes. Of particular significance was the fact that he was the only student to not mark "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" for any of the eighteen attributes on the preferred scale. Because Chloe was a very thoughtful reflective person, one might conclude that during his previous experiences he wasn't ever asked to muse of such issues. Therefore, he responded in a cautious manner because he hadn't had the opportunity to come to a definitive response. If this was an accurate account of what transpired, then one would expect that Chloe would have more definitive responses to the queries on the posttest scale, especially after participating in the research for a period of three months.

On the perceived scale, Chloe had a greater dispersion of responses ranging from "strongly agree" (once related to collaboration) to "strongly disagree" (once related to active learning). He also tended to mark "neither agree or disagree" (six times) a greater proportion (mean was three for this choice) of the time compared with all of the other respondents in the classroom. Once again, it was plausible that Chloe hadn't been given an adequate amount of time to fully develop his beliefs about the attributes of a democratic classroom. However, if this were truly the case, he wouldn't have had the impetus, or the provocation, to have responded so affirmatively to two of the characteristics with "strongly agree and strongly disagree".

Chloe's Initial Beliefs about Democracy

After being informed that he had been selected as one of the three participant researchers, he was asked to respond to a set of questions. The purpose of these queries was to initiate a dialogue between all the researchers on the meaning of a democratic classroom. The following questions and responses were utilized to assess Joey's 'ground zero' of understanding relative to democratic learning:

What does democracy mean to you?

Freedom. [Chloe hasn't ever been very forthcoming in his feelings so these one word answers were expected. However, I will have to asking him more probing questions to ensure that I get as detailed an answer as possible.]

What would a democratic classroom look like?

It would have people voting and figuring out the solution. [He responded with the politically correct answer, but didn't really give the deeper thicker richer descriptions I was hoping for. The brevity and generalness of his responses concerned me because he seems to be trying to find the correct answer without necessarily understanding the concept.]

What would be some reasons why someone would include democratic principles in the classroom?

Because we need at least a tiny bit of freedom. [This suggested that his educational experiences were void of any individual empowerment. When chose to use the word "need" it reminded me of an organism physiological need for food, water, and shelter. Were his previous experiences so confining that his desire for it was similar to that of animal searching for food?]

Are there things in our current classroom that would change if we became a democratic classroom? If so, what are they and would the changes be good, bad, or unnoticeable?

Yes. The changes would be circle time and decision making.

What types of decisions should be made by the students? By the teacher?

Students would decide what and when we do it. Teachers would decide what the things that are important. [There seemed to be some redundancy in his response.

If the students decide what we do and the teachers decide what things are important, then are these responsibilities identical? Once again Chloe responded with very general answers which was indicative of someone who was performing a role for an audience.]

Chloe's First Projective Interview

Description, questions, and responses for photograph #31:

In this photograph, the class was in the midst of our daily circle time meeting. The class was sitting on the floor in a large circle facing one another. I was also sitting in the circle. It appears that that four people were debating some issues while I was sitting quietly listening to their justifications.

Tell me about this photograph?

I see a lot of democracy in this one because we have you sitting down and we are deciding what we should do and when we should do it. [Chloe utilized the pronoun 'we' when referring to the students in the class, but used the pronoun 'you' when talking about the teacher. In other words, it appeared that Chloe didn't

see the class as one unified whole, but more like two distinct parts that together comprised the whole.]

You mentioned me sitting down why did you include that?

Because when you were sitting down and listening to us decide and letting us have our own freedom. [Speaks as if he believed the students had the freedom to decide, but then included the words ‘letting us’ which suggested that the freedom wasn’t theirs until it had been disseminated to them by me.]

What did you mean when you said, “Letting us have our own freedom?”

Uhh...you are the one who calls circle time every day so if you didn’t call it we couldn’t have freedom. [Seemed to be comparing freedom to a present that can be given or taken away. Once again utilized the pronouns ‘you’ and ‘we’ when referencing the whole class.]

So if I didn’t call circle time we couldn’t have it?

No, we could still have it if we asked for it. [If they have to ask for it, then do they really have the freedom to do what they want to do?]

How could you control whether circle time happened or not?

I don’t understand what you mean?

If you want someone to agree with you, what do you have to include with your question?

Ohhh! The reasons why you think whatever you think. You have to prove your point. [This speaks to Habermas’ belief about “Communitative Action.” That two people can converse over matters that they disagree about as long as each person

is willing to listen to the other's point of view. One of the cornerstones of our democracy was built on the idea of 'justification.']

Description, questions, and responses for photograph #25:

This photograph shows four boys working together at a table on some type of class work. They all appear to be engaged in a dialogue about something related to school. I assume that it involves a project because a copy of a rubric is on the table in front of them.

Tell me about this photograph?

I see four kids working together in one spot.

Why do you think this picture was taken?

Because they were working together.

Why did you mention working together?

Okay [Makes a facial expression that suggested that he was getting frustrated with this line of questions] because they were sometimes people might fight and uhhh.... Over what they should do and but in this picture they weren't fighting they were working together calmly and smoothly.

So... what does this show about a democracy?

It shows in democracy that working together can be a good thing. [Chloe seemed to be indicating that an observable sign of a democracy is the ability of people to work together. He also seemed to be indicating (people might fight) that the functionality of a group was dependent on whether they were a part of a democracy.]

How is working together a good thing?

There isn't any fighting and more things get done and uhh...you know everyone gets a voice in things. [It appeared that a connection was being made between working together/cooperating and having a voice in things. Chloe maybe realizing why people don't get along and how a true democracy might help resolve these issues.]

Why did you include "everyone gets a voice in things" in a question about working together?

Because I get mad when I am with people who don't even hear me so I don't listen to them either. [This statement provided further evidence of what was stated in the previous quotation.]

Description, questions, and responses for photograph #2:

In this photograph a boy was holding the stick while standing in front of the class near the dry-erase board. No one else was in the picture, but because he had the voice stick I would assume that the other students were behind the photographer.

Tell me about this photograph?

In this picture somebody has the stick which shows that he has control at that moment. [Chloe was indicating that the stick had some power to control things. However, it wasn't apparent yet whether he understood where the power was truly coming from.]

So what does the stick symbolize to you?

It symbolizes to me like whenever like the whole class gets in a corruption with each other somebody will go and get the stick this way we can do it in an orderly

fashion... [It was interesting that he used the word “corruption” when referring to the chaos of the room. Corruption usually symbolizes something that has been tainted or morphed into something that was in disequilibrium with the norms or guidelines of the group.]

What do you mean by a corruption?

I mean when everyone is trying to speak but you can't hear anybody....[Chloe indicates that having a voice and having your voice heard on two different things. If we connect “corruption” to “can't hear anybody”, then Chloe may be suggesting that in order for our voices to be heard, social values must be established to protect everyone's right to speak and be heard.]

Do you see anything else?

That one person is out of the circle which means that she will not be counted in the vote..... [According to this response, the shape of the circle was symbolic of the cohesion of the group. Therefore, if you were outside the circle, you weren't an active and recognized member of the group.]

Why did you mention the circle?

Because when we need to vote we go to the circle....

Can you given an example of when you would vote?

When there was a corruption. [Chloe was suggesting that when multiple views were present the only viable way to represent and communicate all of the voices was to vote within the circle.

So... you only vote when there are problems?

No, we vote when we need to make a decision....

About?

Something in the class.

What role does the teacher have in the circle?

Really I don't see the teacher in the circle so why do you ask....

Is the teacher usually in the circle?

Yes.

And what is the role of the teacher?

Um... the role is he plays the one who takes the vote after we have come to a conclusion. [Chloe seems to think that the teacher plays a passive role in the process because he indicates that the teacher "takes the vote after we have come to a conclusion." Therefore, the teacher didn't have any voice in the actual outcome. The teacher's primary role was procedural.]

Chloe's Drawing of a Nondemocratic Classroom

Chloe's views about the democratic vs. nondemocratic debate always seemed rather translucent like a women's silhouette behind her bridal veil. The outline of his beliefs was visible, yet I wasn't able to discern the finer intricacies because his interview responses were often concise, ambiguous, and inconsistent. Therefore, I anxiously awaited the opportunity to study his drawings, hoping that they would elucidate his beliefs about the democratic/nondemocratic dichotomy. I also knew (based on what I had read from the research literature on children's drawings) that while Chloe's verbal aloofness had intentionally or unintentionally concealed his beliefs, his kinetic drawings would hopefully demystify the communication process resulting in a clearer more articulate understanding of his thoughts and beliefs.

The first thing that caught my eye during the initial examination was the size differential that existed between some of the primary elements (teacher, door, dry-erase board, and window) of Chloe's drawing. For instance, the teacher's size overwhelmed and dwarfed all of the other characters to such a degree that it conveyed an obvious discrepancy in power consistent with a more traditional nondemocratic classroom. The dry-erase board's physical presence encompassed the entire front wall of the classroom as if to say, "I am here!" Its size and location were reminiscent of a movie theatre whose soul purpose was to attract, secure, and sustain the audiences' attention. When the former and latter features were viewed as one cohesive image, Chloe was suggesting two things: One, that there was an obvious disparity in power between the stakeholders in the classroom; and, two, that the source of the teacher's authority came from his/her capacity to define the embodiment of meaningful knowledge (seen on the dry-erase board). Finally, the vastness of the door and window signified the existence of an outside, theoretically attainable world, that appeared to be within reach. However, upon closer scrutiny, it was discovered that access had been denied by the lock on the door knob and sets of lines (presumably representative of steel bars) on the windows.

The second thing that I found particularly intriguing was the order in which Chloe chose to draw each of the different aspects of his illustration. For example, he drew the dry-erase board, clock, and desks, prior to any attempts at depicting the primary characters in the classroom. Chloe's sequential choices suggested that those three features were seen as the most influential determinants in his classification of the settings as democratic verses nondemocratic classrooms. If the chronological order determined the significance of each inorganic feature of the classroom, then it would also impact the

significance of each organic feature. Therefore, Chloe's decision to draw the students first and then the teacher, was neither, arbitrary, nor random, but a conscious premeditated choice based on his experiences in the classroom. Thus, from Chloe's perspective, the classroom furnishings and the actions of the students played a much larger role in the type of classroom governance then did the teacher.

The final details that seemed pertinent to deciphering the possible meanings of Chloe's depiction were the facial features and the relative location of each of the characters to one another in the drawing. Three out of the four characters facial features were perceived as being unhappy or discontented because of the flat to downward arching shapes of their mouths. These features taken in conjunction with the students' and teacher's directional position (facing one another like arrows on a compass) and relative proximity to one another suggested that the classroom governance strategies resulted in despondent looks and confrontational interactions.



Chloe's Second Projective Interview

Questions and response for photograph #13:

Tell me about this photograph?

This was after science when we were learning about atoms and elements. You were letting us eat what we would like if we did a good job, I think. [Chloe used the words "letting us" and "if we did a good job." According to these responses, Chloe believed that the control or power was situated in the hands of the teacher.]

What do you mean by "letting us"?

Everyone in the class.

How did you know if you did a good job?

We didn't have to as long as you said we did. ["You said we did" indicated that the evaluation was not within the scope of their responsibilities. "We didn't have to" suggested that Chloe didn't necessarily want to be responsible for evaluating his own performance.]

How do you feel about that?

I feel good because I was probably hungry at that point.

How do you feel about having me determine if you did good?

I feel okay cause you mean if if we haven't done a good job we shouldn't deserve it and usually kids would say yes because we just want to eat. [He seemed to generalize his own beliefs upon the group. He was aware of his own weaknesses and seemed to advocate situations where the control wasn't equally distributed.]

Chloe also indicated that rights were automatically bestowed on students, but earned through their actions (“we shouldn’t deserve it”)]

So are there times when adults should be in charge?

Yes. [Very vehement in his response.]

Can you give me an example?

When it is involving money and a lot of money. Like buying a car.

Can you give me an example of when an adult should be in charge in the classroom?

When a kid’s really acting up. [Chloe continued to echo his earlier response about rights being earned as opposed to hereditary or automatic. He suggested here that a democracy works for each individual as long as they conform to rules. The question was, “Where did these rules originate?”]

So are you saying that an adult should be in charge of behaviors?

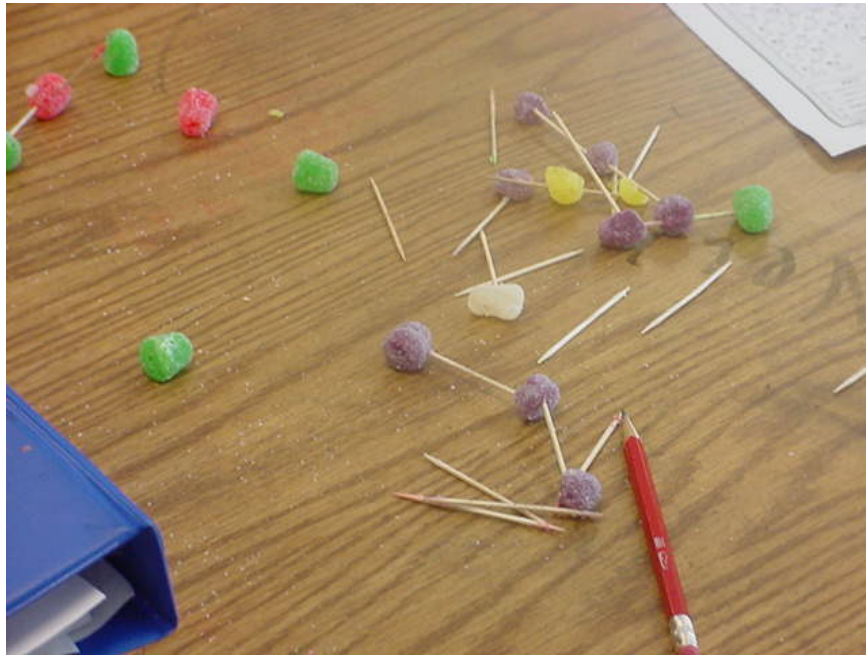
At some points.

Like?

Can I give an example of a time when it is okay for us to decide.

Sure.

Like if two weeks ago we had to pass this test for the Valentine’s Day party but some people had to retake the test and they weren’t supposed to get the party but you let the kids decide if the people got the party. [Once again, Chloe utilized that word “let” which was indicative of someone wielding control over the class. He also utilized the words “we had to pass” suggesting that some external source controlled the results.]



Description, questions, and responses for photograph #16:

Three girls who were a part of the prosecution team were gathering evidence to be used to impeach our class president by interviewing potential witnesses. They were showing the witnesses copies of our Bill of Rights and laws that were established by the class during Three Branches of Government. As they were doing this, it appears that they were taping the responses of each witness.

Tell me about this photograph?

This was the day that we had an important court case for the president being impeached. And in this picture they are getting ready for the court case.

Why was this case important?

Cause the president of the United States of our classroom was getting impeached.

Why was he getting impeached?

For not enforcing the laws.

What laws?

One saying that if someone is being bad in the hallway they should give them a consequence.

Who determines the consequence?

The executive branch which is the branch the president is in.

Where did the law you just told me about come from?

The three branches in class.

What are the three branches about?

They are about making laws stating what we should do.

What is the teacher's role in this?

I don't think he has a role. [Once again, Chloe doesn't seem to recognize the teacher as a contributing member of the group unless the teacher uses his absolute power to enforce the laws or punish the rule breakers.]

So he doesn't need to be in the classroom at all during this time?

Well, I think he does because he would go around and give each branch a page of questions to be answered.

Why did he do this?

So that we could know a little bit that could help us in there.

How did the information help you?

By knowing how to do a court case and what powers the government had.

Who was the government in our classroom?

All three branches.

So who had the power?

The classroom which to me is a democracy. [Chloe seemed hesitant or unsure in his response because he said “to me”. That suggested that he wasn’t sure others would agree with his assessment of the classroom situation.]

Why is it a democracy to you?

Because we have the power to choose.

The power to choose what?

What some of our rules are. [He stated that the students had the power to choose “some of our rules.” Then one questions who chose the rest of the rules. Someone other than the students was also a decision maker in the process. The only other viable option was the teacher, but Chloe seemed to be unable to verbally commit to the duality of power that existed in the classroom.]

You mentioned “some of the rules”, who chooses the rest of the rules?

The teacher does.

Which rules are ones the students decide on and which rules do the teachers decide on?

Students decide on rules about how to act in the hallway or maybe at recess or the classroom if you are in the hallway talking to someone...you know like the principal. Teachers decide on rules about test and group work and in the computer lab. [According to Chloe, the students decide on the rules related to behavior when we aren’t doing school work or when I have left the room for a second to do something. It was also worth noting that the first issue Chloe mentioned relative to teacher power was tests; one of the most recognizable symbols of a

nondemocratic classroom. One of the commonalities that existed between all three types of decisions that principals make was that they were all predominantly academic in nature.]

You mentioned that students control the rules for the hallway, recess, and the classroom when I am out of the room. So why don't they get to make decisions about the subjects their learning?

They don't know what they need to know. Teachers tell us what we need to know...because we don't know a lot of that stuff, you know like weathering and plate tectonics. [Chloe's thoughtful analytical side helped him recognize the obvious contradictions that existed between what we would prefer to know based on our experiential needs and what was deemed significant (as determined by "others" like the state) enough for us to know.]

Anything else?

Nope.

Chloe's Drawing of a Democratic Classroom

As I commenced studying Chloe's depiction of a democratic classroom, I was astonished at the number of differences that existed between his two kinetic drawings. The most obvious divergence from the first drawing was the location of the characters. In the nondemocratic classroom, the teacher was positioned so that he/she was the central and most significant component of the drawing. However, in the democratic drawing, two girls were situated in the center of the drawing. This deviation from the initial drawing symbolized the proverbial 'changing of the guard' as the students began to exert

more influence in the governance and decision-making *modus operandi* within the classroom.

Another discrepancy that existed between the two drawings concerned the location of the dry-erase board. In the nondemocratic drawing, the dry-erase board was positioned in the front of the room next to the teacher. This particular configuration emphasized the synchronization that existed between the teacher and the dry-erase board. Essentially, these two features were synthesized into one unified symbolic depiction that illustrated the influential role the teacher played in classroom learning and interactions. However, in the democratic classroom, the dry-erase board was moved to a more peripheral locale deemphasizing its relevance and importance in the learning experiences. Accordingly, the teacher's authority, influence, and discretionary powers were also diminished.

While the characters' locations had a substantial impact on how the drawings would be interpreted, other features also played a noteworthy role in the messages that were communicated to the audience. First, in the democratic illustration, the focal point was a vacant isolated desk standing adjacent to the back wall. This unoccupied desk represented the students' contemptuous response to the nondemocratic textbook/worksheet oriented types of instruction. Second, whereas both pictures contained windows, the democratic version positioned the open window so that it bordered and essentially negated the conforming connotation of the desk. In the nondemocratic classroom, the window was drawn above the teacher's desk and appeared to have some sort of bars or other confining apparatus that denied access to the external world. Third, the contents on the dry-erase boards suggested the existence of differential

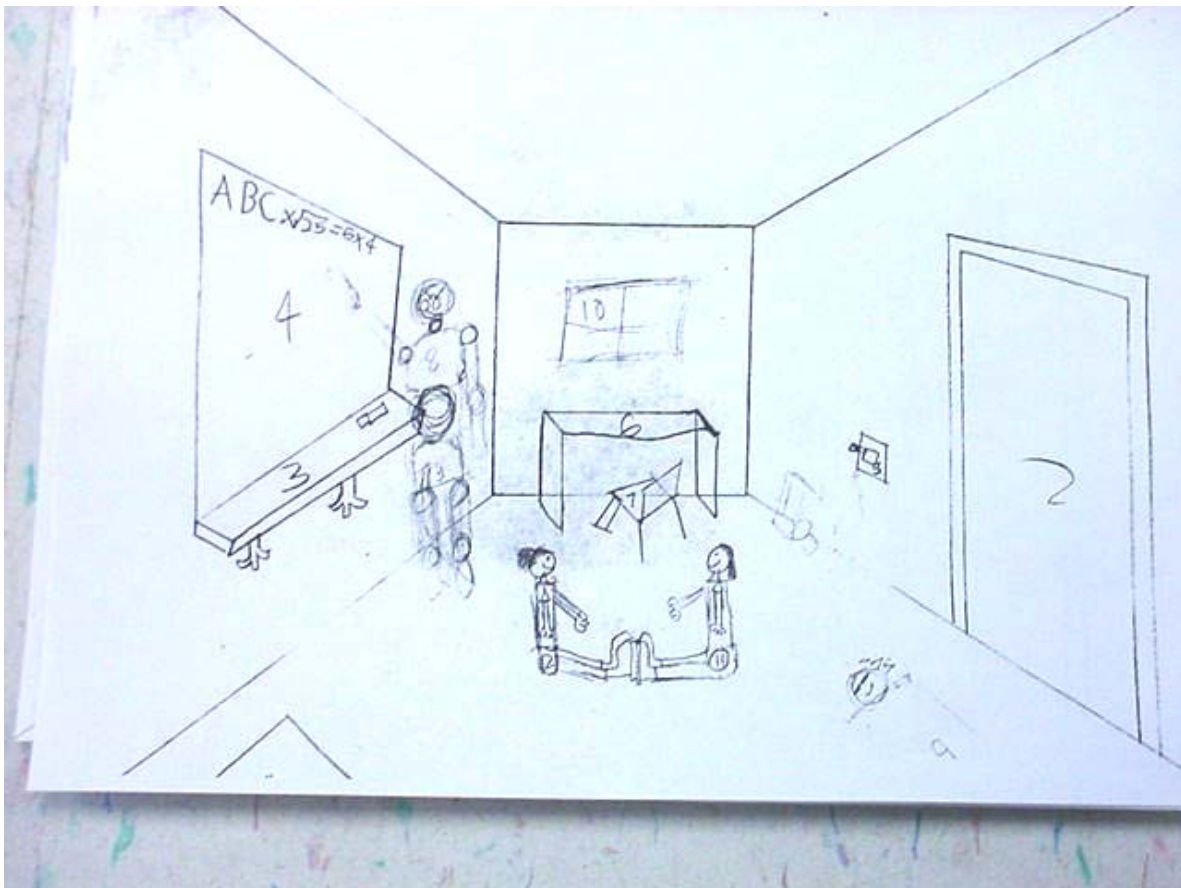
learning expectations for the children in the democratic versus the nondemocratic classroom. For instance, in the democratic classroom, an algebraic problem (conspicuously absent was the answer to the problem) was inscribed on the board, but in the nondemocratic classroom the contents on the board consisted of queries as well as the corresponding answers. Each of these exemplars suggested something about the teacher's expectations of what the students were capable of and their achievement levels.

Finally, there were some elements of Chloe's nondemocratic classroom that were conspicuously absent from his democratic version. These elements included a door knob, a clock, a teacher's desk, and textbooks. The door knob was significant because it provided the students with an accessible escape route to the external world. However, in the democratic classroom, this accessibility was denied due to the absence of a doorknob. Chloe may have omitted this feature because he concluded that the students wouldn't want to flee the classroom since their voices were being heard and their ideas were materializing within their everyday experiences.

The clock was another feature that seemed to have been deleted from Chloe's original nondemocratic classroom. While a clock performs a legitimate and valuable mission (sequencing of events and setting of time constraints for activities) for a nondemocratic classroom, democratic classrooms often aren't characterized by rigidity and consistency. Therefore, a clock wouldn't be considered as an indispensable tool for classroom learning and may actually be perceived as a hindrance to their goal achievement (time is often a confining factor that limits the students' creativity and ability to work and progress at their own pace).

The teacher's desk was usually considered as a requisite element of any

educational environment, yet Chloe chose to exclude it from his democratic drawing. Two possible explanations come to mind. First, in a democratic classroom, learning would be characterized by the active engagement of one's life experiences in classroom learning. Consequently, all learning endeavors would be heterogeneous necessitating a more vigorous and dynamic approach to the student's cognitions. Therefore, the teacher would spend most of his or her day ambling throughout the room trying to assist each individual in the attainment of his or her learning goals (thus eliminating the need for the teacher's desk as the epicenter of learning). Second, that a teacher's desk often symbolized the traditional teaching approaches that were often emphasized in nondemocratic classrooms. Therefore, the exclusion of the teacher's desk effectively denied the existence of classrooms that epitomized the "sage on the stage" mentality.



Chloe's Projective Interview of His Democratic Classroom Drawing

Tell me about your drawing.

My drawing is about democracy.

How does it show democracy?

By where the teacher lets us express to other students while we are learning.

[Chloe used the word "lets" which indicates that the teacher had control over where the students could express themselves to one another or not.]

What do you express to other students?

Expressing the like expressing what we are learning about. [This was one of the few times that learning was mentioned in the same thought with democracy.

Chloe chose to talk about how the students were expressing their learning with each other as opposed to just having fun or voicing their opinions about other noneducational matters.]

Can you give me an example of a time when you expressed what you were learning about?

Well, we were learning about the mathematical process between multiples and we had to share our problems on a piece of paper that was connected to the math we were learning about. [Chloe chose math, even though math was probably the least democratic subject we encountered. He also utilized the words "had to" which was indicative of a situation where he wasn't empowered to make the decision on his own.]

So what word in your previous description would be the best characteristic of democracy?

Ummm....share.

Why is sharing a characteristic of a democracy?

Because it lets us express our feelings to each other. [Chloe tended to be very cyclical. If he wasn't sure how to respond to something he tended to repeat his words from previous statements. However, in this particular case he did alter one word from the previous comments, feelings. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Chloe changed "learning" to "feelings" his latter remarks. This was probably because most of the words that the coresearchers incorporated in their discussions of democracy were directly linked to the affective domain.]

Is there an example of this in your picture?

Yup...the two girls shaking hands.

If you could put words to go with the shaking of the hands, what would the girls be saying?

(smiling) Ummm....they would be saying what they feel about school and what they are learning. [Once again referred to "what they feel" as opposed to the what they have learned.]

So based on your picture how do they feel about school and their learning?

They feel pretty good because they obviously have some democracy in their class. [Chloe responded with the word "obviously" as if the democracy in his picture was self-evident. However, when he was interviewed he had a difficult time converting his thoughts into verbal expressions that communicated his beliefs.]

What did you mean by "some democracy"?

Some classes you can't have all democracy because you need to learn something. [He initially mentioned the students' ability to express their learning to one another as the hallmark of a democratic classroom. Yet, in this response, he seemed to be indicating that you can't have democracy if you were actually trying to learn something. These two statements contradicted each other and provided further evidence that Chloe was still working through his own beliefs about what a democratic classroom would be like.]

So you don't learn during times when you are in a democracy?

You do but don't learn as much. [His face got a small smirk on it as if he had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. It looked as if he realized the inconsistencies in his statements, but wasn't willing to recognize the infallibility of his own beliefs (In doing so, he would have had to abdicated his own individual beliefs to the teacher's view). That would explain why he rescinded a portion of his declaration, but not the whole thing.]

So if you don't learn as much why would you try to have a democratic classroom?

Because it is a better classroom. [He incorporated numerous general ideas like "better" that further validated the contention that Chloe didn't fully comprehend the tenets of a democratic classroom.]

Why is it better?

It is better to us because it is more fun to us and we do not like when we do worksheet after worksheet after worksheet. [Chloe tended to define a democratic

classroom by utilizing binary opposition. In essence, he would point to what a democratic classroom was by illustrating what it was not. He also suggested that his views weren't necessarily shared by everyone in the academic community when he employed the words "to us" in his comments.]

So you are in a democracy when you do worksheets?

Pretty much no.

So if you learn more when you aren't in a democracy then does that mean you learn more doing worksheets since worksheets aren't a democracy?

Sometimes if like you would be doing the worksheets but you could not be learning anything because it doesn't really teach you anything. [He knows that worksheets were often a symbol of a nondemocratic classroom so he tried to delete them from his working definition of a democratic classroom. However, while he was quite successful in eliminating many of the most visible attributes of a nondemocratic classroom, his replies often contain other substantive proof that was incongruent with the democratic ideal. For instance, Chloe included "teach you" in his previous reaction to the interview questions. This indicated that some outside source was in possession of the facts and that it was the students' responsibility to seek out, question, and learn from the external source.]

When you look at your drawing what are some things you want to make sure I notice?

The two girls learning together.

Anything you see in the room that would show democracy?

Only one desk.

How come only one desk?

Because we have the freedom to sit where ever we want. [Chloe was suggesting that the desk signified the absence of freedom. Therefore if the desks were confiscated, then the students would automatically have more freedom.

Unfortunately, these comments suggested that he had reverted back to his early thoughts which focused predominantly on the peripheral matters (nonsubject specific matters) of education.]

Looking at your picture, is there anything missing from your picture?

What do you mean by missing?

Well, remember when you interviewed me and you asked why I didn't have certain things in my drawing. They were missing. Do you have any examples of this in your drawing?

Like the detention desk where you go if you are bad.

Why would you need a detention desk?

Well the reason I didn't include the desk is because the kids should be good so that they can have the democracy the whole day. [Chloe's comment hinted about a set of agreed upon group standards that predetermined how we interacted with each other. He also suggested that a democracy was a viable alternative only if all of the members of the group adhered to the established norms of the community.]

So whose responsibility is it to determine whether we have a democracy or not?

The teacher. [He gave a very clear emphatic response to this question.]

Is it a democracy if the teacher does this by himself?

Uhh..i don't get the question. [He didn't appear to fathom the paradox that existed between having a teacher decide for the students whether a democracy would or wouldn't be integrated in their classroom.]

You said that the responsibility for deciding whether we have a democracy or not is done by the teacher. If it is done by the teacher, then is that a democracy?

No.

Why?

Because the kids didn't do it. [According to Chloe, either the kids implemented the democratic ideals or the teacher did, but it was implausible that they collaborated on it together.]

Then why would the teacher have to make this decision by himself?

It depends if the students are being good or not. [It appeared through his facial features, eyes widen and mouth opens up into an oval, that Chloe suddenly realized that the decision couldn't be a unilateral one. If the students were in discord with the principles, they could demonstrate their displeasure through incomppliance.]

So who helps determine whether we have a democracy or not?

The teacher and the kids. [Chloe finally seemed to have grasped the communal aspect of a democratic classroom. Though, the sequential order (teacher then kids) of the characters continued to suggest the existence of an asymmetrical relationship between the primary groups in the classroom.]

Chloe's Reflective Photographic Narrative

Once upon a time there were kids who ruled the galaxy. In this time there was one king named Alexander, a queen named Brittany Elizabeth, one prince named Gloria, and the royal fool Janie. (A photograph of four kids all working together to create a chemical reaction using different items that they each thought might work.) [Chloe started his story by indicating that the kids had primary control of all interactions in a democratic classroom.]

They were in their castle devising a plan to scare away the evil box dragon, BoBo that was told to come here by the EVIL DR.ROGAN. Then all of a sudden.....
BOOOOOOM!!!!!! FLAMING BALLS OF FURRY STRUCK THE CASTLE!
 Everyone was screaming trying to get out except, the dumb royal fool being sarcastic to the dragon, "you missed me now you got to kiss me!" "Get away from there!" yelled queen Elizabeth. The dragon **BURSTED** with flames out of its mouth, the princess screamed **AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!**" and the dragon flew away as she stopped screaming. And there laid the crisp steamy body of the royal fool. It looked like it had been there for years rotting with extinction. (A photograph of the kids doing their circuit training on some of the playground equipment. The equipment resembles a fort or castle.) [Chloe seemed to indicate that there was an adversarial relationship between the two primary stakeholders of the classroom, the kids and the teacher. He also indicated that compliance was mandated by the teacher or else one would be subjected to harsh punishments.]

The evil DR.ROGAN was telling his minions that we are going to kidnap the princess, Gloria but, little did they know they were being recorded. So everything they

said the king herd. (A photograph of a group of boys working on their virtual math. They were using a tape recorder to tape their session so that they could go back later and reflect on what transpired.) [The students incorporated tape recorders in a lot of the team's work as a way of reflecting on the individual's contributions toward the group's objectives and as an assessment of the group's cohesion and functionality.]

Since the king herd everything that DR. ROGAN was saying about his daughter he knew that he had to kill him So he told them that they had to rip out his heart and cut off his head. (A photograph of one of the cow hearts that we dissected during our chemistry/body systems unit.)

The king was making a deal of a large amount of bankroll with the evil minions so that they can kill him. (A photograph of five boys all looking at some papers related to their systems projects that they were working on.)

King Alexander was hiding in the corner waiting for the right moment. Then evil DR. Rogan turned his back..... "Now", the king shouted the minions sprung on DR. Rogan. They got him down on the ground and king walked near DR.Rogan. He had a machete in his hand "tell me ", he said "what were you going to do with my daughter?" "I was going to give her back if you agreed to let me be best Friends with you." DR.Rogan said the king dropped the machete. O.K we'll be friends..... Just; don't hurt my daughter. (A photograph of the class working on something while I am in the middle of the room demonstrating something to a group of kids sitting on the floor.) [The final paragraph seemed to illustrate two truths that influence the effectiveness and efficiency of any democratic classroom: one, that communications are often misinterpreted leading to

dissent and strife among group members; and two, that all individuals consciously or subconsciously desire camaraderie with their peers.]

Chloe's Responses on the Posttest

The final task of the coresearchers was to retake the "Perceived/Preferred Beliefs about Democratic Learning Scale" so that a comparison could be made between the initial responses prior to the inception of democratic education and the concluding responses at the completion of the research. Chloe's original score on the scales was nine which would usually indicate a relatively strong association between his individual learning preferences and the actualized learning experiences he had encountered. However, in Chloe's case one must keep in mind that he checked "neither agree or disagree" six times on the pretest which gives the reader a false sense of cohesion that ultimately doesn't exist because of Chloe's indecisiveness. His posttest score had dropped from nine to eight and the total number of characteristics with a zero score differential went from nine to ten. While Chloe did have an adjustment (+ 1 or -1) in these two areas, they were so insubstantial that it would be difficult to conclude that the integration of democratic principles had even a negligible impact on his beliefs.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMATION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this qualitative participatory action study, I was pursuing an explanation to the following research question: *How does the implementation of democratic ideals impact the researchers' beliefs about power and democracy in the classroom?* Throughout the remaining pages of this text will be a brief synopsis of the events as they transpired for each of the four researchers; the conclusions associated with sequence of events; the tangible relationships that arose between researchers' beliefs; the limitations of the research; and, finally, the implications for our classroom and recommendations for future research.

Summation and Conclusions on Joey

Joey was initially asked to participate in the study because his aggregate score (17) on the pretest scales represented the median point of all the respondents. While his score was somewhat representative of the average, there were some intriguing aspects of his responses that deserved further scrutiny. For instance, with the exception of the collaborative category, Joey's responses to the attributes in other categorical areas was widely dispersed ranging from *strongly agree* to *disagree*. This seemed rather peculiar since all of the characteristics comprised in a category were basically assessing the same thing. This suggested a lack of conviction and an indecisiveness that would persist throughout most of the study.

During the preliminary phase of our study, Joey had a superficial understanding of the principles of a democratic classroom as evidenced by his answers to a set of introductory questions regarding said beliefs. Indicative of his cursory awareness the

responses would invariably include the following words or phrases: *fun, more choices, and less or easier work*. Essentially, Joey believed that a democratic classroom was characterized by students having choices concerning the peripheral matters (amount of recess time, where to sit in the classroom, types of rewards for good behavior) of a normal school day, while the teacher determined the content, how it was taught, and how it would be assessed.

Approximately three weeks into the study, the second phase, the first of three projective interviews took place. During this phase, Joey's thinking began to evolve as he included additional words and phrases such as *sharing* and *respect for other's voices* in his ideas of a democracy. However, he was still characterizing a democracy as being fun and began utilizing the term "learning" almost exclusively with the word "teacher." Accordingly, Joey believed that teachers should be the primary authorities on content, depth of learning, and grading.

Between the third and fourth week, the students were asked to complete their first of two kinetic drawings. Joey was asked to "think aloud" (protocol analysis) highlighting the mental activities that were reverberating through his brain while completing his version of a nondemocratic classroom. Throughout the entire time we were in the art room, Joey continually lamented on how democratic learning contrasted everything in his drawing. His thoughts almost always included ".....wouldn't happen in a democratic classroom." It struck me later that he was defining a democratic classroom by utilizing binary opposition. According to Tyson (1999) binary opposition is based on the premise that the "human mind perceives difference most readily in terms of opposites which are directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other."

(pg. 202) It appeared that he was still uncertain about what a democratic classroom was so he utilized his cognitions about nondemocratic classrooms to typify what a democratic classroom should look like.

The second projective interview happened during the seventh week of the study. By this point in our research, I assumed that Joey's beliefs about democracy would have undergone a significant change. Some of his responses during the second interview continued to include innuendoes concerning *fun, choices, and unrelated to learning*, but others began to illuminate the beginnings of a profounder awareness of the fundamental ideas of a democratic education. For instance, during our interview, Joey suggested that the tape recorders were incorporated in our daily interactions to ensure that *everyone's voices were heard and respected* and as a form of evidence against individuals who weren't following the class norms (*individual and group accountability*). During this same conversation he suggested that there were times when the locus of control shifted from the teacher to either a student or a group of students highlighting another component of a democratic classroom, *equality of voice or sharing of power*. His newfound understandings were exemplified in the following quote: "Uhhh..well, I think it is good because sometimes the teacher doesn't see things the way we do and doesn't understand us. So the teacher might act a certain way because they don't understand, but a student...a student might act differently."

Once again during the eighth week, Joey and I went to the art room to draw our second kinetic illustration, except this time it was to depict a democratic classroom. The most significant features of his drawing were the sharing of the couch by the student and teacher and the repositioning of the dry erase board (to the perimeter) and one of the

students (to the center with the teacher). Both of these changes were symbolic of Joey's ongoing evolution in his beliefs as he now had identified another significant element of a democratic classroom, *shared governance/equality of voices*.

At the conclusion of the eleventh week of the study, Joey submitted a completed version of his "Once upon a time" reflective photographic narrative. Even though Joey's account was fictitious, Bruner (2002) believed that "We may like to say that literary fiction does not refer to anything in the world but only provides a sense of things. Yet it is the sense of things often derived from narrative that makes later real-life reference possible." (pg. 8) In his fictitious account, Joey's characterizations demonstrated a continuing struggle with the diffusion of power in a democratic classroom. This was evidenced by the following two contradictory exemplars: first, his representation of the teacher as the "king" and the students as "chipmunks that were leaded by the great king nut"; and second, "So the great king nut and the chipmunks were Constructing a plan on how the day should go and What we should do to get ready for the beaver." In the first example, the students are led by the teacher indicating a definitive difference in power between members of the class. While in the second example, *the teacher and students are devising a plan together* (notice the conjunction "and" in between the two primary sets of characters) without any indication of a discrepancy in power.

In the following passage from the narrative, Joey addressed issues pertaining to how items such as the voice stick, student contracts, and the teacher's voice were bestowed with credence and power in a democratic classroom: "They all got ready for it and The great king nut Sat down and read to us the objectives and what we Needed to do to take down Allison the mighty beaver!" The "all" in the quote indicated a group

working in *collaboration* to address the dilemma of Renee. The act of the king sitting down, but not having to beckon the chipmunks over suggests that it was a conscious choice of the students to sit and listen to the teacher. It was within the students' discretion to legitimate (*power originates in all members of a democratic group through their actions and voices*) the teacher's comments or not by the mere act of recognizing the value of what was being conveyed.

As Joey experienced more and more democratic learning, his beliefs about learning slowly evolved and changed. By the conclusion of the research, Joey believed that a democratic classroom was about having fun, making choices, collaborative efforts, being accountable to yourself and others, respecting differences in opinions, and sharing power with those around you on nonacademic matters. However, he still believed that all curricular and instructional decisions were at the teacher's discretion because students weren't equipped with the knowledge or skills necessary to reach a verdict on their own. This was primarily due to his beliefs that educational content was alien to his own experiences and thus required a translator for it to be identifiable and comprehensible. Students like Joey who have been socialized into a passive teacher centered type of learning often "dismiss their own experiences as anecdotal and idiosyncratic. They denigrate their personal experiences in deference to 'book knowledge', which seems codified, legitimated, somehow 'more true' than individual stories." (Brookfield, 1999, pg. Additionally, he continued to allude (his comments didn't appear to be purposeful, but rather unintentional subconscious slips of the tongue) to the existence of a hierarchical structure consistent with a more traditional mode of teaching. While Joey's beliefs had undergone an adjustment, it was apparent that his years of socialized learning

had entrenched certain notions concerning teacher and student roles and responsibilities. However, it is my contention that democratic education is like a fine wine, it takes time and patience to produce something extraordinary. The hope is that Joey hasn't reached his final destination, but is merely disembarking from the boat for a brief interlude. When he rejoins the ship (sixth-grade), another crewperon will come along to assist him with stowing (putting out of his mind) his baggage (traditional beliefs) so that he can get the optimum satisfaction (learning) out of the voyage (democratic education).

Summation and Conclusions about Zoey

Zoey was asked to participate in the study because her aggregate score (26) on the pretest scales was the highest of any of the respondents in the classroom. She was selected because her perceived and preferred responses were indicative of someone whose beliefs about learning were in opposition to actual experiences. This seemed like a logically conclusion because there were only two congruent responses out of a possible eighteen on the preferred and perceive scales of democracy in the classroom. Furthermore, Zoey's responses (She marked every attribute with either *agree* or *strongly agree* without exception) on the preferred scale suggested that she held very strong beliefs about the efficacy of a democratically constructed classroom. However, her replies (Four out of five categories had responses that were with the range of *agree* to *disagree*) to the perceived scales were more variable and inconclusive. It appeared that Zoey had strong convictions about what she wanted in a classroom, but was befuddled by her actual classroom experiences.

During the preliminary phase of our study, Zoey appeared to have a rudimentary understanding of the essence of a democratic classroom as evidenced by her responses to

the introductory set of questions pertaining to said principles. One of the preliminary questions asked her to predict what the foreseeable changes would be if democratic practices were integrated in a classroom. She responded, “Everything would be decided on like specials, when we have lunch, how much recess we get, and what things we do in a day. If this happened, the class would be out of control so it would be bad.” Her response illuminated her fundamental assumptions regarding democratic education as well as her initial thoughts about the viability of democratic education in a standard classroom; *everyone’s voices heard, students’ voices would decide all nonacademic decisions, predominantly teacher voice in learning outcomes and behavioral control.*

Approximately three weeks into the study, the second phase, the first of three projective interviews took place. During this phase, Zoey began to demonstrate a deeper richer awareness of the subtler aspects of a democratic classroom. While referring to the three branches of government (our classroom government) she utilized words like “help” and “we needed” which exhibited recognition of the necessity for *“collaboration between students and teacher”* and for *“individual and group accountability”* regarding their actions and behaviors. She also indicated in the subsequent comments that there were numerous potential sources (*recognition of multiplicity of perspectives*) of worthwhile knowledge in addition to the teacher: “No, if someone knows what we don’t know they can help us.” However, she continued to allude to the teacher’s responsibility for intervening in situations associated with the class rules, student behaviors, and learning outcomes. She also began describing the democratic process and outcomes as “fun” which confirmed the existence of some ambiguous thoughts and beliefs relative to the intentions of democratic education.

Between the third and fourth week, the students were asked to complete their first of two kinetic drawings. Zoey's depiction of a nondemocratic classroom provided further insights into the depth of her beliefs about a democratic classroom because she also utilized binary opposition during her "think aloud" commentaries. Most of her thoughts began with "You wouldn't see....." when she was providing justification for her depictions. This suggested that Zoey continued to have an incomplete and rudimentary understanding of the quintessence of democratic education.

The second projective interview happened during the seventh week of the study. After an extended dialogue about the voice stick, Zoey suddenly recognized that the students' power wasn't an endowment granted to them by some external source, but rather the conscious acceptance or rejection of a person, an idea, or an event by the students, themselves. "Power is not something one can get rid of in the classroom. It is a constant. Power relations are inescapable in pedagogy....it is not exercised exclusively by the teacher upon the students; rather, power is like discourse, requiring ongoing participation and negotiation by all concerned." (Buzzelli, 2002, pg. 55). She understood that in a democratic classroom, *power was shared among all the stakeholders* as substantiated by the following comments: "To show the power of the students listening to the teacher. Because they have the power to listen or not." In the subsequent quote, Zoey emphasized the *role of compromise* in securing the audibility and equality of the multitude of voices/perspectives in a democratic classroom: "It is okay. I mean you know everyone's voice will be heard. Sometimes it takes too long, but I know if I don't like something ummm.... I can talk and it will be changed."

Once again during the eighth week, Zoey and I went to the art room to draw our second kinetic illustration, except this time it was to depict a democratic classroom. From the outset, it was apparent that her beliefs had become more coherent and lucid as she quickly went about the process of drawing her rendition of democracy in the classroom. While she included only one new feature (She positioned a student in the center of the drawing which was suggestive of *student centered learning*) to her drawing that hadn't been previously addressed in early interviews and drawings, her depiction was the most comprehensive and explicit account of democracy that she had offered up for consumption. The characters' positioning and actions delineated democracy as *collaborative, student-centered, empowering, and affable to unique perspectives and voices*. Unfortunately, because she was so enthralled in the construction of her democratic classroom, she didn't really offer any poignant comments during "think aloud".

In the ninth week Zoey and I met for her third projective interview. However, this time the object of our discussion was her drawing of a democratic classroom. While our previous interview had left me feeling very reassured about her beliefs, I was quite befuddled by her unpredictable responses during this interview. Initially, she responded to "Why is it democratic?" by stating, "Cause the kids are doing what they want." Later she responded affirmatively when asked "So if kids do what they want it is a democracy?" At one point, she indicated that the primary duty of a teacher in a democratic classroom was to do "nothing" [apparently this was the only way the kids could have the freedom to do what they wanted to do] so that the kids could be as unruly and outrageous as possible. During the latter stages of our interview, she suggested that it

was impossible for the students to have their needs met and for learning to occur simultaneously because they were mutually exclusive entities. Because her current statements contradicted everything she had previously indicated, I assumed that the methodological choice must have bewildered her resulting in the inconsistent responses.

At the conclusion of the eleventh week of the study, Zoey submitted a completed version of her “Once upon a time” reflective photographic narrative. In her fictitious yarn, she recounted a tale about a group of motivated science students who were trying to create an innovative science fair project that would hopefully win a prize.

Throughout her story, Zoey continually exemplified a complete understanding of every facet of democratic education from collaboration, to recognition of voices, accountability, and even the allocation of power. While it was possible that she could have been regurgitating the information for my benefit, it seemed improbable since she was able to employ these principles correctly in a credible educational experience (corroboration provided by accompanying example). In the following passage, Zoey demonstrated a thorough appreciation of the need for group accountability, effective utilization of one’s voice, and the art of comprising: “Renee you have not been helping us on our science project and we would like you to know that we are going to give you a contract but we need to have your signature.”

Zoey’s initial responses on the scales suggested that her current educational experiences were discordant with her own visions of what learning should resemble. Consequently, she was very receptive to any modifications that might enhance the educational situations she had currently suffered through. This would explain the consistent progression in her beliefs that was documented in her interviews, drawings,

and reflective narrative. Similarly, this would also explain why her responses didn't reverberate with more socialized references to the traditional notions of teaching. The one exception to the socialization factor occurred whenever Zoey was questioned about responsibility for the content/subject matter selection. She frequently implied that the students were responsible for deciding all peripheral issues pertaining to classroom interactions with the exception of learning outcomes. She contended that the teacher was the only person with access to what was deemed the privileged knowledge and as a consequence was the only individual who could dictate what was learned. Newell and Buchen (2004) referred to this privilege knowledge as "the hidden curriculum that taught students they had no control over their own destiny and that they were not to be trusted with decisions about their own education and subsequent lives." (pg. 23) However, this too, was eventually eradicated as evidenced by the subsequent quote: "But then there were ours, we made something that we named slime! We were all excited but then worried at the same time." Conspicuously absent from this passage was any mention of the teacher or teacher input; a content related decision had been made without the direction of the teacher. After collaborating on this research for more than three months, it appeared that Zoey recognized and understood the fundamental components of democratic education. The student has become the master.

Summation and Conclusions about Chloe

Chloe was asked to participate in the study because his aggregate score (9) on the pretest scales was the lowest among all the respondents. He consistently tallied differences of zero or one on seventeen of the eighteen attributes which was indicative of a person whose preferences are in alignment with their experiences. However, since

Chloe never marked “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” on any of the eighteen attributes on the preferred scale, it is also conceivable that Chloe merely lacked the conviction necessary to demonstrate divergence in his beliefs. Buehl (2001) contends that young children’s “individual belief system are often unexplored and haven’t been fully developed which means that they often lack the language to fully articulate their conceptions” (pg. 388) leading to overt indicators of indifference. On the perceived scale his responses were more varied (ranging from “strongly agreed” to “strongly disagree”), but he still tended to respond in a manner suggestive of a person who was ambivalent (marked “neither agree or disagree” for six of the attributes) about democratic education.

During the preliminary phase of our study, Chloe’s responses were usually brief and nondescriptive . Both of these characteristics suggested that Chloe was either anxious about being interviewed or he was portraying an unfamiliar role he thought the audience had come to see. However, since he had a very limited knowledge of democratic education (supported by his continual usage of catch words like “freedom”), the scripts he utilized had to incorporate a very simplistic and general terminology (without accompanying examples or deeper descriptions) that would effectively continue the masquerade. Kinchin (2004) concurs that “students, particularly those with good language skills, may play the game of using appropriate terminology to fill in the blanks as a strategy – to make the appearance of acceptance while remaining avoidant.” (pg. 309) Therefore, I continued to have reservations about the depth and sincerity of Chloe’s knowledge of the essential ingredients of democratic education.

Approximately three weeks into the study, the second phase, the first of three projective interviews took place. While looking at the photographs, Chloe made the

following comments which all intimated that the students and teacher were seen as two distinctive and often oppositional entities (notice the use of different pronouns): “we have **you** sitting down and **we** are deciding what we should do and when we should do it”; “Um... the role is **he** plays the one who takes the vote after **we** have come to a conclusion”; and, “Because when **you** were sitting down and listening to **us** decide and letting us have our own freedom.” Chloe also suggested in the following quote that there was a distinction between having a voice and heeding one’s voice: “Used corruption to refer to everyone speaking at once without hearing anyone.” He also contended that there wasn’t an implicit value in *having a voice* unless the communications were also heard and the *justifications* valued. At this point, Chloe seemed to be associating democratic education with only one attribute, having a voice. This single-mindedness was probably the consequence of educational experiences with unresponsive or demeaning individuals who trivialized and ignored his point of view.

Between the third and fourth week, the students were asked to complete their first of two kinetic drawings. As he went about the process of constructing his version of a nondemocratic classroom I asked Chloe to “think aloud” any relevant thoughts associated with his drawing. While he did occasionally utilize binary opposition as a means for defining a democratic classroom, the majority of his auditory thoughts involved questioning himself about issues related to size, classroom positioning, décor, etc. It was almost as if his subconscious beliefs were in possession of his hands while the cognizant mindful portion of his persona helplessly stared in disbelief. For instance, after completing his depiction of the teacher, Chloe remarked that “She was so big and stiff she looks like Frankenstein.” He also had the following comment about his drawings of

the students: “Oh my god the size of the heads on the students don’t fit the bodies. With heads that size there won’t be no room for brains.” Chloe’s responses reminded me that his answers wouldn’t necessarily entail a conscious element, but may be very undeveloped, instinctual, and literal because of his inability to articulate his subconscious beliefs. Klepsch and Logie (1982) posited that drawings were essential to children’s beliefs because “they dig deeper into whatever aspect is being measured; and they seem to be able to plumb the inner depths of a person and uncover some of the otherwise inaccessible inside information.” (pg. 11)

The second projective interview happened during the seventh week of the study. While one would expect to see an evolution in Chloe’s thinking as he spent additional time in a democratic classroom, this wasn’t the case. He continued to perceive things from a very literal and superficial viewpoint. For instance, Chloe insisted that all content related issues were the responsibility of the teacher because students “don’t know what they need to know. Teachers tell us what we need to know...because we don’t know a lot of that stuff, you know like weathering and plate tectonics.” He defined “power as the ability to choose” [in a democratic classroom the power is innate, but in Chloe’s version the power is conferred upon the students by the teacher] things like rules, but not all rules, only those related to things like the behavior in the hallway, recess, lunch, and other nonessential matters. While pondering the resiliency of some of his beliefs it occurred to me that Newell and Buchen (2004) were correct in their contention that “the past can become so urgent, powerful, and tenacious that it arrogantly displaces or empties the future of its unique content. Or the momentum of continuity is so reassuring that it appears to hide or trivialize new developments.” (pg. 1) This was the only

plausible explanation that could provide an adequate justification his continuing perceptions concerning the differentiation of student and teacher power.

Once again during the eighth week, Chloe and I went to the art room to draw our second kinetic illustration, except this time it was to depict a democratic classroom. It appeared that he had made some real progress (up to this point he had only identified student voice) because his drawing had been infused with multiple exemplars that signified the essential elements of democratic education. This wasn't surprising because I thought that if his beliefs were going to emerge, the vehicle that would most likely allow this to happen would be the drawings (subconscious beliefs tend to emerge in drawings per literature review). In previous experiences, Chloe's beliefs were in a constant state of flux as his subconscious and conscious personas clashed over control of his beliefs. Chloe positioned the students as the focal points in the drawing which was symbolic of a *student-centered classroom* (one would assume that this included learning outcomes) that emphasized the audibility and significance of *student voices*. Chloe also drew the students performing a collective action (students together with hands interlinked) which was suggestive of the emergence of a second fundamental characteristic of democratic education, *collaboration*. Finally, he relocated the dry erase board to a more peripheral site which signified a redistribution of responsibility from a teacher-oriented to a *student-teacher oriented process* of content selection and learning outcomes.

In the ninth week, Chloe and I met for his third projective interview. However, this time the object of our discussion was his drawing of a democratic classroom. Chloe's comments during our interview continued to suggest a very superficial understanding of democratic education. He utilized words like fun, lack of work, choices, and the

distinction between democracy and learning. Simultaneously, he also spoke of how the *students and teacher collaborate together* on decisions relative to the implementation of democratic practices or not. In the subsequent comment, Chloe also suggested that group-derived norms were instrumental to the functionality of democratic education: “Well the reason I didn't include the desk (he referred to this as the detention desk) is because the kids should be good so that they can have the democracy the whole day.” In addition, the previous quote indicated that the *students were empowered* by their actions and interactions with each other and the teacher. Once again the inconsistencies in his responses typified beliefs in a constant state of fluctuation and unrest.

At the conclusion of the eleventh week of the study, Chloe submitted a completed version of his “Once upon a time” reflective photographic narrative. While I would like to comment on Chloe’s story, I really don’t know what to say other than the fact that I am totally bewildered by his tale. I wished that we had the opportunity to discuss his narrative, but the group didn’t want to have to conform to any procedural rules (language oriented guidelines) that usually coincide with the student generated stories. I agreed to with their reasoning because I knew that I would be conflicted over the duality of my roles as a coresearcher and a teacher. Accordingly, my decision was to refrain from commenting because my initial inclination was to manipulate Chloe’s narrative so that it had a favorable slant to it.

From the very beginning when he initially responded to the scales with six “neither agree or disagree” it appeared that Chloe was conflicted about his beliefs regarding schooling and democratic education. While it appeared at times that he was starting to discern the differences between the two forms of classroom learning, these

intermittent epiphanies were interspersed with a continuous flow of nondemocratic symbolization. Chloe's responses were so contradictory that his monologues often resembled animated debates between his inner and out self. The constant variations suggested that he lacked conviction; that his understandings were superficial; and, that his own experiences hadn't fulfilled his educational desires, yet had left an indelible impression that seemed to transcend his democratic experiences. According to Kloosterman (1996), it was still possible to influence Chloe's enduring beliefs if "student beliefs are.... challenged by environmental factors" resulting in "an inconsistent message about learning occurs beliefs can change." (pg. 39) While it was obvious that he had become more cognizant of the politically correct terminology of democratic education during our study (evidenced by his responses during our interviews) and was conscious of the contradictions that emerged during our research, it was improbable that perceptible enduring changes occurred. However, if our research hadn't been limited by the constraints of the academic calendar, a different outcome may have occurred.

Commonalities between the Joey, Zoey, and Chloe

There were numerous commonalities between the participants beyond the contextual and demographic similarities. Among the most prominent similarities that occurred during our research were the following themes:

I. *Similarity of educational experiences*

During the first of two kinetic drawings, the students were asked to draw their likeness of a nondemocratic classroom. In each case, all the participants, including myself, drew the teacher abnormally large relative to the students; a dry-erase board in the center of the room in close

proximity to the teacher; uniform rows of desks; the absence of faces/personas on at least one student; and visible time dimension on the walls. The uniformity of responses is particularly interesting (since I haven't been a student in elementary school for almost twenty years) because the students each drew their depictions without having access to the other participants' voices or drawings. While the parallels between the drawing could be coincidental Malchiodi (1998) suggests that it would be improbable because children's artwork isn't a random haphazard creation, but rather a thoughtful process "that brings together many different experiences to create something new, personal, and unique....requiring the child to choose, translate, and arrange in lines, shapes, and colors to convey a thought, feeling, event, or observation synthesizing numerous components involving content, style, form, and composition." (pg. 19) Therefore, one could assume the existence of a historical uniformity in education that has acculturated society's youth towards a particular worldview of the schooling experience thus explaining Zoey, Joey, and Chloe's commonalities.

II. Initial identifications of democratic educational attributes and characteristics

While Zoey, Joey, and Chloe each came into our classroom with their own distinctive life experiences that were inherently unequal, their initial perspectives on democratic education were essentially equivalent; students having fun, students getting choices about peripheral matters (not content),

and students having less school work. This would seem to be perplexing since one's experiences usually determine the "lens" one looks through. However, if you remember that they were utilizing binary opposition in their depictions of democratic education, then it all becomes transparent and comprehensible. As previously mentioned in the first commonality, each of the students drew illustrations that were remarkably congruent. They were all utilizing the same foundational knowledge as their precursory information in constructing a practical definition of democratic education. For instance, when they were speaking of work, they were really referring to worksheets. Therefore, since democratic education tends to me more active and less worksheet oriented, it would make sense that they would suggest "less work."

III. The conference of power on things

Throughout the entirety of the research process, a continuing theme was the bestowing of power on objects and people from an external source outside their own person. During our projective interviews, the students repeatedly mentioned how the voice stick, circle time, the class contract, and Three Branches of Government symbolized power. However, when asked about the source of the power, the standard response was "you told us....." Buzzelli (2002) would find this problematic because "power is best understood as something that resides neither entirely within an individual (teacher) nor in the group (students), but rather in the complex interplay between them; like language, it is both personal and social." (pg.

50) Zoey, Joey, and Chloe all believed that the power had to originate with the teacher in order for the power to be seen as a viable influence on classroom interactions, behaviors, and outcomes. Shor (1992) suggested that these types of beliefs are naturalized and validated through their normal connections with adults in dominant authoritative positions in schools and society.

Limitations of the Research

Because the research involved my students, we were limited by the duration of the academic school year, the three sessions of state-mandated testing, and the school's placement of teacher planning days and student holidays. Although, these issues may seem trivial upon first glance, as an accumulated whole, they created a multitude of temporal concerns that ultimately determined the timing (February until May of 2005) and duration (lasting approximately three months) of the study. February until May was chosen because it was the only the block of time that was almost completely uninterrupted (Spring Break and the Georgia Criterion Referenced Curriculum Test were during this time, but this was a much smaller block of time compared to in the first semester when Fall Break, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Thanksgiving holidays occurred) by extended school holidays or statewide assessments. This was important because according to Glickman (1998), democratic practices require a slow methodical implementation period that "first meets the comfort level of students for imposed structure and then gradually lessens teacher authority and increases student responsibility, voice, and empowerment." (pg.31) Consequently, any exact quantifiable time standard

for the implementation of democratic practices is both impractical and encumbering, given the multivariate nature of classrooms.

Another limitation of the current research has to do with the climate of accountability that ultimately influenced and supplanted all democratic considerations for classroom learning. Currently, education has been overtaken by mandates and high stakes testing that perpetuate what Apple (1996) would refer to as the “official knowledge”; a knowledge that Beane (1997) refers to as “top-down knowledge”; a knowledge that constrains student voice and empowering practices. As long as curricular decisions are culturally and contextually irrelevant, as long as students’ voices are suffocated by the “In the Know” adults of the political arenas, democratic practices will always hold a very tenuous and fragile position in education. Tests like the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) and the CRCT (Criterion Referenced Curriculum Test) are very time-consuming and often necessitate extended preparatory periods that emphasize a curriculum that alienates the students, coerces educators, and subjects us all to the “drill and kill mentality.”

Consequently, even under the best of circumstances (I was very fortunate to have an extremely open and supportive administration at my school), teachers, myself included, have to deviate from our customary practices because of these tests. This ultimately affects the viability of a democratic climate, as the students come to realize that the valued principles we champion are sporadically incorporated within the learning when we, the educators, in our most hypocritical state, deemed them appropriate. “The idea of democracy, consequently, cannot be disposed of by dealing with it in a separate course and at some fixed point in the curriculum – it must be lived not studied... Schools must be a place where pupils go, not merely to learn, but to carry on a way of life.”

(Goodlad, 2001, pg. 93) Unfortunately, the current climate of accountability has transformed democratic practices (in our classroom and elsewhere, I suspect) into a vacation home where you occasionally visit, but never really reside.

Implications for Future Research

The Methodological Choices Researchers Utilize While Studying Preadolescents

Patton (2002) states that “the task of a qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking...” Unfortunately, an argument could be made in opposition to the primarily language-oriented methodological choices that currently abound in student beliefs research. Buehl and Alexander (2001) find these data collection techniques to be problematic, especially with preadolescent participants because a student’s “individual belief system is often unexplored and hasn’t been fully developed which means that the student often lacks the language to fully articulate his or her conceptions of it (pp. xx).” Kloosterman and Cougan (1994) concur when they postulated that “a number of factors probably affect a child’s ability to verbalize beliefs, one may be the frequency with which students are asked about specific beliefs” and therefore “had not as of yet formed an opinion about them.” Another factor relates to the language of choice of empirical research which is often inundated with verbiage and perspectives that are inconsistent with the thoughts, interests, and cognitive development of the subjects of the inquiry. Therefore, the communication process is furthered hindered by the students’ inability to decipher the language-coded messages and centered on the communicatory preferences of the researcher, instead of the students.

“Meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade in interpretation through many representational and communicative modes not just through language.” (Kress, 2003, pg. 46) Malchiodi (1998) believes that “children do not have adult capabilities to articulate their emotions, perceptions, or beliefs verbally, and often, they prefer to convey ideas in ways other than talking.” (pg. 44) Galles (1994) suggests that some of these nonstandard ways include drawing, singing, spontaneous movements, painting, photography, and even dramatic play.

“Rather than viewing modes of communication other than speech and writing as “add-ons” in theories of learning” (Kress, 2003), they should be recognized for their ability to wrench the study subjects away from the typical researcher-oriented quantitative techniques to a more open-ended child centered approach that embraces and authenticates their beliefs. For instance, the act of “drawing emerges as a powerful medium for discovering and expressing meaning; for the young child, drawing brings ideas to the surface.” (Johnson, 1982) Furth (1988) elaborated on the previous contention when she posited that “the realm of the unconscious, collective or personal, can be represented in art through images and symbols.” (pg. 2) These nontraditional methodological choices were utilized during our research and became essential tools for discovering and communicating the participants’ subconscious beliefs about issues that hadn’t been symbolically represented through codes in their language systems. They also afforded our study with multiple data sources necessary to incorporate triangulation thus limiting what Eco (1979) referred to as “noise on the channel, which is to say any disturbance that could alter the nature of the signals, making them difficult to detect.” (pg. 9)

The Appropriateness of Participatory Action Research with Preadolescence

The second implication of our study entailed the utilization of participatory action research with preadolescent children. Denzin and Shapiro (2000) proposed that there are three fundamental “attributes that are often used to distinguish participatory action research from conventional research: shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action.” It would seem prudent to include the students, irregardless of age, in the research process since they are already stakeholders in their learning, most directly impacted by deficient unexceptional educational approaches, and the most likely candidates for not only experiencing the changes, but also reacting to them.

Depoy (1999) contends that it would be irrational to exclude students in any type of student belief research because “those who experience a phenomenon are the most qualified to investigate it.” Yet, for whatever reason, much of the current student belief research “is generally controlled by researchers not children....the product is data interpreted in terms of adult discourses about children’s development...the research process is weighted towards the researcher as the expert on the children, and on how to study children and what to study about children.” (James, 2000) This seems problematic because “each child’s, each adult’s understanding of culture is partial; how much they share is an open-ended question.” (Corsaro, 1992) If a researcher’s objective is to understand the nature of student beliefs, then they must first acknowledge the existence of a unique knowledge that is the exclusive possession of the students themselves. Therefore, researchers must first give credence to the contributions children can make in

an effort to enrich their own educational experiences before any verifiable conclusions can be realized.

I was fortunate enough to have had three exceptional preadolescents as coresearchers in my study. They constantly reminded me of the numerous barriers I had inadvertently placed in front of them (and others like them) because of the erroneous assumptions (too young, too immature, not thoughtful enough) I had made relative to their competencies. I quickly realized that a person's aptitudes weren't necessarily correlated to a numerical symbol or developmental level. It was more a consequence of a person's perceptions of whether they were in an empowered position conducive to affecting a positive change in their circumstance or not. Zoey, Joey, and Chloe were extraordinary young people who realized they could shape their own educational experiences through our research. Throughout the process, they epitomized the consummate professional often exhibiting responsibility, perseverance, self-reflection, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. I would like to think that these three individuals weren't the exception to the rule, but the rule itself. Others are patiently waiting for their chance to surpass the adult's expectations and my hope is that they will be afforded that opportunity.

The Viability of Democratic Practices in the Today's Classrooms

As I occasionally wander throughout the building searching for this and that, I often hear teachers recounting the following types of incidents: a student's refusal to compromise with others during activities because he/she is always right; a misguided student who just doesn't seem to have empathy for others and is constantly belittling his classmates; students who seem to do whatever one of their peers wants them to do no

matter whether it defies the rules or not; and, finally, those students who never listen, rarely turn in their assignments, and don't seem to care about their grades. As I continue on my way, I often wonder if these are recent developments in academia or have these deviant behaviors been an enduring quandary throughout the centuries. I suspect that what I have witnessed and heard are quite comparable to what generations and generations of previous educators have also confronted on a daily basis. Therefore, it would seem prudent to take a closer look at the system that seems to be cultivating these detrimental behaviors. After all, the students, the teachers, and even the buildings themselves have faded into the horizon, but the system lives on.

The continuing unrest of the student population isn't their problem, but OURS. Shor (1992) believes that maladaptive behaviors such as "getting by and playing dumb express the students' contempt for a learning process which treats them with contempt." (pg. 139) Until the educational system is willing to ask themselves "Whose vision of real life counts?" (Apple, 1996, pg.100) student uprisings and discontentment will continue to spread like the plague throughout the schools of America. But just like any ailment, student dissension can be alleviated, if an appropriate antidote can be concocted and disseminated to the infected public.

Brookfield and Preskill (1999) suggest that many of the symptoms of disgruntlement that pervade schools could be rectified by incorporating the subsequent fundamental assumptions of democratic learning in the classrooms: "tentativeness of all knowledge, the infinite variety of perspectives and understandings that people bring to discussion, the endless nature of enquiry and the refusal to accept a definitive answer, a genuine receptivity to other views, a striving for agreement that may impossible to

achieve, and the patience to hear out all possible opinions.” (pg. 18) Classrooms infused with these fundamental assumptions empower the students so that they can be more reflective active participants in the construction of their lived worlds. (Greene, 1988) In our own experiences with democratic practices (as students became more empowered) we saw a dramatic decline in arguments (there was an increase in debating, however), an increase in empathetic behaviors, a more vigorous and inspired student population (absenteeism dropped dramatically), and an acknowledgment of one’s accountability for his/her own actions. If democratic practices can actually generate any of the previously mentioned outcomes, then one has to ask why these practices haven’t been utilized or even championed by more than just an occasional educator in passing?

It is true that democratic education is often time consuming, messy, and a bit chaotic, but “no new learning takes place without confusion, and that confusion, therefore, can be a sign of progress.” (Starkey, 2005, pg. 303) Goodlad (2001) supplements Starkey’s comments by adding, “living with tensions will never be easy, but the alternatives to democratic education that promise to make us easier people are far worse.” (pg. 217) However, if educators choose to stay with the more comfortable traditional style of teaching please remember that students are not as powerless as we sometimes think. Indeed, they may have the ultimate power, the power to resist, ignore, and defy thus hindering educators from performing their primary function; preparing today’s students to be tomorrow’s leaders. (Hopkins, 1994)

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APPENDIX A

PARENT AND STUDENT CONSENT FORMS

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

I, _____ give my consent for my minor child _____ to participate in the research entitled, "Power and the Audibility of Voices in a Democratic Classroom" part of a study being conducted by Mr. Bob Rogan, a graduate student of the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Georgia. Mr. Bob Rogan will be supervised by Dr. Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett, a faculty member of the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Georgia. Pritchett can be contacted at 706-542-8253.

I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; my child can withdraw consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as my child's, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to document fifth-grade students' beliefs about power in a democratically constructed classroom based on their interactions with peers and the teacher. The benefits that I may expect from the research include a report to be shared with me regarding the outcomes of the study. This research will provide my child's teacher insights into how to better meet the needs of the students during the current academic year, 2004-2005. My child will receive some small tokens of appreciation for participating in the study. These will include the following items each week: one Coke pass, one hour of free computer time, and one lunch pass to eat with teacher. Other tokens will include a twenty-dollar gift certificate for the fall book fair and Papa John's pizza during independent researcher meetings.
2. The procedures are as follows: My child will participate in 11 sessions lasting between 30-60 minutes. My child will participate in these sessions during nonacademic times such as lunch, P.E., Music, or Art. The timing of the sessions will be based on convenience to the child and will in no way impact their academic progress. During these sessions, my child will be engaged in question and answer discussions with the researcher. The questions will be based on my child's beliefs about the classroom and power based on his/her experiences in school, behaviors observed by teacher, responses in journals, and other related artifacts.
3. All data collected on my child will be confidential and no data will ever be reported with my child's name associated with it. My child's teacher is in charge of the research and will have access to all of the accumulated data. My child's participation or nonparticipation will have no impact on their school performance or grades. My child's audiotaped materials will be kept secured in the principal's office under lock and key. Only the people directly involved with the research will have access to my child's tapes during the research. At the conclusion of the study, my child's tapes will be destroyed to ensure my child's confidentiality.
4. Because the students will be participating in the nontraditional form of democratic Learning, there may be the potential for some initial discomfort or stress as they learn how to utilize their voices in learning. If my child feels the need for assistance with these feelings, my child will be referred to the school counselor.
5. No risks are foreseen in this study.
6. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project and can be reached at (770) 725-9672. If I have any concerns, I know that I can call to speak to the researcher at anytime to voice my concerns or address any questions I may have.

DATE: _____

Minor Assent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in my research project entitled, “Power and the Audibility of Voices in a Democratic Classroom.” Through this project you will share your beliefs about how power is used in a classroom where all participants have an equal voice. You will be asked to respond to questions about your beliefs about teacher and student power in the classroom. You will also be asked to keep a journal of your observations of how power is used in the classroom. You may do this by writing, drawing pictures, using a disposable camera (supplied by me), or any other means you choose to. You understand that you will receive some reward for participating that may include passes for the following items each week: Coke, one hour of free computer time, lunch passes. You will also have the opportunity to get a twenty dollar gift certificate to the book fair and three pizzas from Papa John’s to eaten during lunches with researcher.

If you decide to be a part of this, you will allow me to ask you to complete some surveys about your classroom experiences. You will participate in eleven sessions lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. These sessions will be convenient to you and occur during the school day during non-academic times like Music, Art, or P.E. I will not use your name on any of the papers that I write about this project. However, because of your participation you may help me understand the experiences and beliefs of fifth-grade students in today’s classrooms. I hope to learn how to make schooling experiences more beneficial for all students in the future.

If you want to stop participating in this project, you are free to do so at any time. Your choice to participate or not participate will have no effect on your grades at school. You can also choose not to answer any questions that you don’t want to.

If you have any questions or concerns you can always ask me or call me, Bob Rogan, at (770) 725-9672.

Sincerely,

Bob Rogan

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

Signature of the Participant/Date

Signature of the Parent/Guardian and date

TABLE 2: Example of Preferred/Perceived Beliefs Scale

APPENDIX B

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION SCALES AND TABLES

TABLE 1: Attributes and Descriptors for Preferred/Perceived Beliefs Scale

Directions: Read each of the sentences below. Choose the response that most closely fits your beliefs *about democracy in the classroom*. Please check only one response for each statement. Below is the key defining the meanings of each of the possible responses:

SA means that you *strongly agree* with the sentence. You know that this is true. **A** means that you *agree* with it, but there maybe some doubt or it may not be true all the time. **DK** means that you *don't know*.

Either you haven't seen it in your class Experiences or you are unsure about the meaning of the statement.

DA means that you *disagree* with it, but there maybe some doubt or it may be true only some of the time.

SD means that you *strongly disagree* with sentence. You know that this isn't true.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The students and teacher try to understand each others individual differences.					
Learning usually involves moving about the room and school searching for the answers.					
The classroom setting is setup to promote cooperation and group work.					
Students have the opportunity to work with others on projects, if they want to.					
During group work, the only way the individual can succeed is if the group succeeds.					
Students are usually searching through books, the internet, or other sources for the answers to their questions.					
When the classroom is developing projects, the students play an important role in deciding what will be included and how it will be presented.					
The teacher and students spend a lot of time working together on learning projects.					
At the beginning of group work, each student knows exactly what they must do for the group to do well.					
In the classroom, students are encouraged to listen and respect different ideas even if they don't agree with them.					
During learning, students discover the answers to their questions through experimentation and trial and error.					
The teacher asks for student input in what is learned, how it is learned, and how it will be assessed (graded).					
When participating in our learning activities students usually do them in pairs or groups.					
Students are responsible for each others behaviors as well as their own.					
When a student doesn't know the answer, the teacher designs situations that help the student figure out the answer for themselves.					
Disagreements in the classroom are usually resolved through compromise.					
The teacher listens to what students have to say and tries to include their suggestions in the learning.					
During group work, each student brings a special talent or skill that improves the groups' chances of learning and success.					

TABLE 2: Attributes and Characteristics of Democratic Education

Attributes of a Democratic Classroom	Statement exemplifying the attribute.
<i>Student voice</i>	When the classroom is developing projects, the students play an important role in deciding what will be included and how it will be presented.
	The teacher asks for student input in what is learned, how it is learned, and how it will be assessed (graded).
	The teacher listens to what students have to say and tries to include their suggestions in the learning.
<i>Collaboration</i>	Students have the opportunity to work with others on projects, if they want to.
	The teacher and students spend a lot of time working together on learning projects.
	When getting ready for our learning activities students usually do them with others.
	The classroom setting is setup to promote cooperation and group work.
<i>Group Accountability and Responsibility</i>	During group work, the only way the individual can succeed is if the group succeeds.
	At the beginning of group work, each student knows exactly what they must do for the group to do well.
	Students are responsible for each others behaviors as well as their own.
	During group work, each student brings a special talent that improves the groups' chances of learning and success.
<i>Active Problem Centered Learning</i>	Students are usually searching through books, the internet, or other sources for the answers to their questions.
	During learning, students discover the answers to their questions through experimentation and trial and error.
	When a student doesn't know the answer, the teacher designs situations that help the student figure out the answer for themselves.
	Learning usually involves moving about the room and school searching for the answers.
<i>Respect for Differences</i>	In the classroom, students are encouraged to listen and respect different ideas even if they don't agree with them.
	Disagreements in the classroom are usually resolved through compromise.
	The students and teacher try to understand each others individual differences.