

HARNESSING THE POWER OF STUDENTS' OUT-OF-SCHOOL INTERESTS AND
KNOWLEDGE: INTEGRATING POPULAR CULTURE
IN A 6TH GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative action research, case study was to understand literacy practices connected to popular culture of sixth grade students and to explore what happened when a teacher and students integrated students' popular culture interests into an English Language Arts curriculum.

Sociocultural theories, constructivism, popular culture theories, and 21st Century literacy theories framed this study. This research represented a single-case action research study of two sixth grade classes. There were a total of 40 students participating in the study, ranging from ages 10 to 11. Data were collected from a variety of sources over an extended period of time in order to help create a complete picture of the impacts of popular culture integrated into language arts curriculum. These sources included: a researcher's journal, student questionnaires and interest surveys, focus group interviews, individual interviews, student work samples, and Hawai'i State Assessment data. Upon analysis, nine big ideas emerged from the data. The results showed there to be positive social-emotional classroom environment, one in which students felt empowered and demonstrated critical thinking in all aspects of the formal curriculum. In exploring students' popular culture interests and connections to schooling, there were some differences noted between gender and it was also observed that students faced influences from both parents and peers in their interests and pleasures in popular culture. Finally, the impact on me, the teacher researcher was a transformation of practice and subsequent empowerment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BYI - Beginning of Year Interview

CCSS - Common Core State Standards

EYI - End-of-Year Interview

FE - Final Evaluation

FGI - Focus Group Interview

HCPS III - Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards III

HSA - Hawai'i State Assessment

IS - Interest Survey

MYI - Mid-Year Interview

NCTE - National Council of Teachers of English

NCLB - No Child Left Behind

QE - Quarterly Evaluation

RJ – Researcher's Journal

SAA - Self and Activity Assessment

ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Browsing through a stack of professional publications, I came across an article titled “Good Teaching: The Top Ten Requirements” (Leblanc, 1998). The name of the article automatically caught my attention and the contents of it resonated with me. The author stated that teaching is about passion; it is about bridging the gap between theory and practice; it is about being flexible and responsive; it is about humor and having style; it is about being caring and having fun; and most importantly, good teaching is about a teacher’s vision being reflected in what is said, and more so by what is done. This research aims to explain how I see theory and practice merging. It is about vision being reflected in my actions- it’s about how I see the use of popular culture in the classroom justified and situated in relevant sociocultural theories.

When I first began the journey of researching this topic, I sat with one of my professors who asked me to reflect upon why I chose to investigate the incorporation of popular culture into the school curriculum. Answering this question brought me back to my own memories of school and childhood. I do not remember any specific lessons my teacher taught but I do remember the day-to-day incidents in school. I remember playing with friends at recess, or talking with them at lunch about popular songs, movies, and video games (e.g. *Super Mario Brothers* and *Duck Hunt* by Nintendo). I remember how important it was to fit in by wearing the popular fashion trends such as ripped jeans, Keds sneakers, or jelly bracelets. I also remember my teachers’ names and associate each one with either being “good” or “bad” based on how they made me feel when I was in their class. Then I began to ask myself a question: if these were my memories from school,

what memories did my former students take with them from my class? As a new teacher, I thought that the content I taught was what made a lasting impression on my students. I thought they would remember all the things I taught them so that their next teacher would know how hard I worked to cover content. Luckily, I've come to a point in my professional journey where I have finally realized that it was the relationship my students had with me and the way they felt when they left my room everyday that they would remember me by—more so than the lessons I taught them. However, just as any teacher hopes to make an impact on their students lives, I also wanted students to leave my classroom better able to problem solve and think critically about what is put before them. I believe that validating and incorporating students' out of school knowledge, interests, and experiences is an avenue to do so; and that is why I chose the topic of popular culture.

This research represents my growth as a teacher and the growth of my students. It is about how popular culture can be used as a tool to motivate students and more importantly how it can become a catalyst for promoting critical thinking. It is about transcending boundaries between home and school practices and it is about teaching in a true constructivist approach. This study explored the notion of popular culture in relation to language arts content and pedagogy and examined its use in the school curriculum to meet the needs of 21st Century learners.

The Problem

Curriculum, according to Franklin Bobbitt (1918), is the knowledge that children and youth must learn and experience in order to become adults and function in an adult society. In contrast to Bobbitt's views of curriculum, John Dewey's (1938; 1998) beliefs

about curriculum came from a more child-centered, developmentalist point of view. He viewed curriculum as being focused on the individual learner, with motivation, interests, and developmental stages of students being at the heart (deMarrais & Lecomple, 1998). In other words, a child's natural development should be the basis for determining what is taught. It is with Dewey's view that I build my beliefs about curriculum and the theoretical framework for this study (presented in Chapter 2).

Bobbitt's definition of curriculum represents a product-based curriculum, which is currently the prominent view of the United States Department of Education. With its standards-based reform initiatives, curriculum in the U.S. has been based on the product of learning. In a products-based model, the focus is on setting objectives and organizing curriculum around such objectives. A positive outcome of a product view of curriculum is that it is an organized and systemic way of approaching curriculum. The behavioral objectives, outcomes, or more recently the standards and benchmarks, provide a clear idea of what learning is intended so that content can be organized around such outcomes. However, it should be noted if behavior objectives are to be considered "measurable" they need to be broken down into small parts. This breakdown has been problematic because it has led to a "parts rather than whole" look at the content to be learned, equating learning to a checklist of objectives to be met (Smith, 1996 & 2000). One of the biggest disadvantages of curriculum views that are product based is that such views take away relevant learning opportunities from the learners because curriculum is based upon concepts and skills on mandated tests. Product based learning also has a negative impact on teachers because educators and schools are judged by whether or not "pre-specified" changes have occurred in keeping with behavior objectives (Smith, 1996 & 2000).

Instead of judging the value of the assessments, the focus has been on judging teachers' effectiveness in promoting students' performance on those assessments. In the current study, these pre-specified curriculum outcomes for students were measured on the state standardized test, the Hawai'i State Assessment (HSA).

No Child Left Behind Law (2002, January 8) has had the biggest impact on education for as long as I have been in the profession. This legislation has promoted the idea that curriculum is a product. Students must pass state tests based on national or state benchmarks in order for schools to avoid sanctions. As originally written, schools need to have 100% of their population meeting proficiency on tests in reading and math by the year 2014. However, in the past year there has been an overhaul of the law to allow states to petition for waivers as long as progress is being made. In its original writing, its purpose was to set up an accountability system and to promote equitable education for each child, however the realities are that schools that do not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) indicators face sanctions. In approaching this research, I bring a perspective of concern to many dimensions of NCLB, which, I fear has promoted a hidden curriculum that teaches students to fear risk taking and teachers to adopt a narrow view of learning. My concern is that the current dominant ideology of efficiency seems to represent an over emphasis on pre-specified, product-based benchmarks unrelated to children's lives and developmental needs.

The hidden curriculum of school has been defined as the "transmission of unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded and transmitted to students through rules, structure, and social relationships in school" (Giroux & Purpel, 1983, p. 47). These can manifest into positive outcomes or negative ones. For example, the hidden curriculum has

transmitted an emphasis on grades. This emphasis has taught many students to fear risk taking in their learning because taking risks can lead to mistakes and mistakes can lead to failure (Strong, 2003).

Philip Jackson's (1968) definition of the hidden curriculum refers to the nature of teacher-student relationships; the way classes are organized; and other social relationships of the school. He argued that the hidden curriculum prepares students for the work world by teaching them of the demands of institutional conformity. Kelly (1988) added that it is *the way* in which things are taught that helps to create the hidden curriculum. Dewey (1938) touched upon a concept related to a hidden curriculum as well when he discussed "collateral learning." Collateral learning is what the students learned that was not the actual content of the lesson. It is considered by Dewey to be more important than the actual lesson being taught because collateral learning often reflects what really counts in children's lives and what they will remember in the future.

The hidden curriculum and dominant ideologies that have been perpetuated with a product-based curriculum have best served students who perform well in testing situations or who easily conform to the ways of school. However, the hidden curriculum that is present in today's schools has failed to recognize students' background knowledge, experiences, and interests as a key part of learning. At the same time it has privileged a body of core, standardized knowledge. It is for reasons like these that the current study is needed – to demonstrate that students can still be held to high expectations for learning even when student interests and experiences are integrated into the curriculum, i.e. even when it is student centered.

Rogers (1983) has described a participatory mode of decision-making in which students become excited in intellectual discoveries as an attribute of education that is student centered. Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) has found that teachers who plan student-centered lessons are more effective at stimulating higher-order thinking than teachers who plan tightly focused lessons around behavioral objectives and coverage of subject related facts. Teachers who teach tightly focused lessons have also been described as less likely to be sensitive to students' ideas and actions or to adjust their teaching strategies in response to student cues. In contrast, effective teachers emphasize students' prior experiences, motivation, and interests as critical aspects to learning, rather than delivering instruction (Darling-Hammond).

When learners construct knowledge, it is more likely to be internalized than knowledge that is transmitted to them. Thus, building a curriculum around students' interests, experiences, and prior knowledge is one way for teachers to co-construct new knowledge with students by building upon the foundational literacies students bring to school. When teachers or schools fail to recognize students' out of school literacies, effects of the hidden curriculum began to occur. Hidden messages are not being mediated through spoken words, but rather teachers' actions.

In efforts to bridge the gap between home and school, the incorporation of technology and the many digital literacies of the 21st Century has been the recent trend in education. Research journals, conferences, and workshops across the country offer advice to teachers on ways they can engage their students with the interactive tools of the 21st Century. It is not uncommon today to hear of schools providing a laptop for each student or utilizing mobile devices for learning. However, it remains to be seen whether their

incorporation is a student-centered innovation or a tool to support traditional, modes of teaching and learning, such as each student working independently to read an online article and answer questions. More valuable from my perspective would be teachers' incorporation of computers and other media in ways that change the face of education by teaching the skills needed in our global society i.e. critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration skills.

Although most students come to school familiar with technology, they still need to be taught the skills to critically analyze any text that is placed before them, both digital and print (including the texts of popular culture such as comics or video games). The texts of popular culture and those related to 21st Century literacy practices go well beyond printed text. They included the movies and television shows that children watch and the music that they listen to. Beyond movies, TV, and music, children also participate in literacy practices when they read comic books, anime and graphic novels, or when they engage in digital literacies, such as email, MySpace, Facebook, blogging, video games, and text messaging. If we begin to accept and broaden our literacy curricula in school to include these new literacies, then it is my contention that teachers and schools can begin to bridge the gap between the home and school.

In the traditional sense of the word, *literacy* is thought of as the processes of reading and writing written text. In a broader sense, *literacy* has been conceived in some school districts as the ability to understand and use language and images to acquire knowledge, communicate, and think critically in all content and contexts (e.g. Hawai'i Department of Education, April 2009). Literacy will be defined in this broader sense in this study unless otherwise noted. More explanation has been presented in the review of

the literature, including the fact that literacy practices related to 21st Century learning have taken on several names (e.g. 21st Century literacy, new literacies, multimodal literacies). This study frequently uses the term *21st Century literacy* synonymously with the other terms listed. For the purposes of this study, 21st Century literacies are defined as “an approach to literacy and language learning that looks at how literacy is used in everyday life,” from events like guided reading at school to reading an iBook on an iPad (Pahl & Roswell, 2005, p.156). Within this definition, I also include the aspects of literacy involved in interpreting popular culture texts such as television, movies, computer and video games, popular music and music videos, instant messaging, and interactive Internet sites.

Being literate implies the ability to use critical thinking skills to evaluate, analyze, and critique information. Students are engaging in some of these literacy activities outside of school and these can be harnessed and utilized to promote critical thinking and authentic literacy activities in school. Without this broader view of 21st Century literacies, only a part of a child’s knowledge and experiences can be recognized, validated and built upon in the classroom. Building upon students’ interests in popular culture and tapping into 21st Century literacies can be a foundation to teach a broad range of skills needed for the workforce of tomorrow. Grace (2007) has argued that popular culture maintains an important role in the lives of youth and has stressed the importance of teaching students “how to use, integrate, evaluate, and interpret various forms of media in school” (p. 22). According to Kress (2003), it is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of changing social, technological, and economic factors in society. Expanding our views of literacy to include the many digital and

popular cultural forms of texts can potentially engage students in school as they are engaged outside of school.

Ralph Tyler has said, “education is the process of changing the behavior patterns of people” (1949, p. 53). In the spirit of this statement, I propose that a shift in mindset needs to occur and that the change in behavior patterns needs to come from educators as well as students. What if educators looked at students’ out-of-school knowledge as a foundation to build upon? For far too long, there has been a gap between the types of literacies kids are engaged in out of school and those forced upon them in schools. There is a need for change in each educator’s mindset in order to broaden our idea of literacy. The following statement succinctly captures the importance of recognizing and incorporating students’ outside interests in the classroom:

What if instead of assuming that our students are not engaging with literacy outside of school, we bring our students’ literacy practices into the classroom?... By letting in our students’ literacy practices in the classroom, we let in identities. (Pahl & Roswell, 2005, p. 2)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research case study was to investigate what would happen when students’ interests in popular culture and 21st Century Literacy practices were integrated into a traditional English Language Arts curriculum. It is the belief of this researcher that the knowledge students bring to school provides a powerful schema that not only can engage students but also can serve to validate them. Teachers need only to integrate students’ knowledge and interests into the school curriculum. This action research study describes one teacher’s effort at integrating students’ knowledge

and interests in two language arts classes. Methods of data collection included a researcher's journal, student surveys and questionnaires, interviews, and student work samples.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

The following question and related sub-questions were explored:

What happens when students' interests and experiences with popular cultural are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?

- a. What are 6th grade students' experiences and interests with popular culture?
What defines these interests?
- b. Does study of popular culture within a standards-based language arts curriculum impact student motivation and learning?
- c. What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?

Significance of this Study

The students of today are more literate than ever- just in different ways than are often recognized or acknowledged in school. I have learned through my teaching that students are very digitally literate - they can text message, join chat groups, look up directions to video games on line, and some may even read books electronically. All these activities may be foreign to some educators. As teachers often privilege their own views and values – they may be unintentionally neglecting to bring students' interests and experiences into the curriculum. However, teachers are often teaching what may be a narrow and test-based curriculum imposed upon them by school, state, and/or federal

mandates. In any case, change is needed if schools are to teach a flexible curriculum that meets the ever-changing needs of our society. A key challenge is to bring out-of-school literacies into schools. Currently, this means to use more technology in the classroom such as iPods, email, web cams, etc., and to incorporate popular culture, though in 1990 it meant something different. Ten years in the future it will mean something different again. What makes bringing out of school literacies into school relevant across time is that there will always be new developments in technology, and popular culture will always exist. A considerable research base has been established to suggest that schools should take advantage of interests students have outside of school (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham, 1998; Dyson, 1997; Fiske, 1989; Gee, 2003; Giroux, Simon, & Contributors, 1989; Grace, 2002; Owston, 2009).

Learners of the 21st Century are like no others. Never before in the history of education has the incorporation of technology and multimodal literacies been so critical as it is today. As our educational system is striving to demonstrate student proficiency in reading and math, educators are also preparing future generations for jobs that demand 21st Century literacies. When the students of today become members of the workforce, they will hold jobs that may not yet exist. The current study is needed because students need a change. They can identify with the school curriculum if they have a voice and they need new tools and literacies to advance themselves in an ever-changing society. In particular, they need to learn the skills of critical thinking and collaboration.

This study will contribute to the field of literature on the use of popular culture in a school curriculum. Few studies focus on the incorporation of varied texts of popular culture. Much of the literature that will be presented in the upcoming review of literature

focused solely on just one form of popular culture (e.g. the use of popular music in school). Because this study focused on a curriculum co-constructed by both the teacher and students, it addressed the broader popular culture interests, experiences, and background knowledge of students as well as the curriculum framework provided by the Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards III (abbreviated as HCPS III) (Hawai'i Department of Education, 2011). Students in this study pursued various interests in popular culture during the course of the 2008-2009 school year and all forms of popular culture they proposed were incorporated into the formal curriculum.

Definition of Terms

Critical Literacy

According to Lankshear's (1997) definition of critical literacy, it involves having a critical perspective on literacy itself, on a particular text, and/or on social practices. When used in this paper, the term *critical literacy* will be used in concurrence with Lankshear's definition.

Culture

Culture is an integral part of life. It consists of collective attitudes, and the customs and beliefs that distinguish one group from another. Hernandez (1990 as cited in Au, 1993) defined culture as a "system of values, beliefs, and standards which guide people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior" (p. 4). It is with Hernandez's definition that the term *culture* will be used throughout this paper.

Curriculum

John Dewey (1938, 1998) proposed that students learn best through experience—either by watching someone do something or trying things out themselves. His beliefs about curriculum are based on a child-centered point of view that focus on the individual learner, with motivation, interests, and developmental stages of students being at the heart (deMarrais & Lecomple, 1998). It is with Dewey’s view that I build my definition of curriculum as used in this paper. Here, *curriculum* is defined as what is learned in school – in terms of content, process, and the unspoken norms of the hidden curriculum.

Hidden Curriculum

For the purposes of this paper, the hidden curriculum has been defined as the “transmission of unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded and transmitted to students through rules, structure, and social relationships in school” (Giroux & Purpel, 1983, p. 47).

Literacy

The term literacy is referred to as the ability to understand and use language and images to acquire knowledge, communicate, and think critically in all content and contexts (Hawai‘i Department of Education, April, 2009).

Pedagogy

Lusted (1986), has proposed that pedagogy consists not only of how something is taught, but also what is taught and how one learns. In more simple terms, pedagogy is the process through which knowledge is produced. For the purposes of this paper, *pedagogy*

will be defined as proposed by Lusted. When using the term *critical pedagogy*, there is an additional focus on the development of a critical consciousness by delving beneath the surface (Shore, 1992)

Popular Culture

Popular culture comes from and exists in everyday life. It represents the beliefs and practices shared among groups of people while contributing to the formation of identities and possibilities. More importantly, popular culture tends to be organized around fun and pleasure (Giroux & Simon, 1989). However, it is through this relation to pleasure, that popular culture is often associated with the low status and commercialism.

Reading

The term *reading* is defined as the process of constructing meaning from written texts (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

21st Century Literacy

For the purposes of this paper, *21st Century literacies* are defined by a combination of definitions from Pahl and Roswell and Adler-Kassner. Here, *21st Century literacy* is “an approach to literacy and language learning that looks at how literacy is used in everyday life” (Pahl & Roswell, 2005, p.156). In addition, I would like to add that these “literacy practices can be carried across multiple texts, rather than a set of practices tied to specific texts” (Adler-Kassner, in NCTE, November, 2005). This paper uses the term *21st Century literacy* synonymously with the terms *new literacies* and *multimodal literacies*.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

Learning is a natural human behavior. It is a complex process built upon prior knowledge that occurs when what is learned is meaningful to the learner. Four layers of learning/educational theories frame the current research study. The first layer of constructivist and sociocultural theories provides a general framework regarding how individuals learn. The second layer builds upon this foundation, drawing from professional literature and research on culturally responsive education, funds of knowledge, Discourse, and third space theories. The second layer of educational theories focuses on the importance of creating new learning in a way that both builds upon and validates prior knowledge. The third layer, consisting of theories of popular culture, emphasizes ways of tapping into and validating students' knowledge and interests in popular culture as a way of promoting critical thinking. The final layer, critical literacy and 21st Century literacy theories, promotes a broadened definition of literacy in order to redefine what constitutes "text," i.e., going beyond words printed in a book and including digital, electronic, and multimodal forms of meaning making. Each of the layers are relevant to the current study because a curriculum that integrates students' out of school knowledge and interests in popular culture must be one that is founded in a socio-cultural environment, one in which the underlying reasons for why popular culture should and how it can be effectively integrated must be established, and the understanding that literacy goes beyond the scope of printed words must be confirmed.

This chapter will present each of the four layers to establish the theoretical framework for the study then provide a review of relevant literature on the topic of bridging home and school literacies, particularly focusing on the integrating popular culture into a formal curriculum.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist learning theories operate on the principle that people come to a learning situation with prior knowledge, and new learning is a process of actively constructing meaning by connecting to this individuals' existing knowledge base. Constructivism has foundations in both psychology and philosophy. Psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) worked in the area known as cognitive constructivism, which is hallmarked for his four stages of development (sensory motor, preoperational, concrete, and formal operations). Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) contributed to the constructivist body of knowledge with focus on social constructivism. The basic assumption here is that learning takes place through social interaction and observation. His ideas are discussed more fully later in this chapter. Educational reformer and philosopher, John Dewey (1859-1952) also played an important role in the development of constructivist theory. His constructivist beliefs about education have been connected with the term progressive education. The constructivist framework for this study pulls from Dewey and Vygotsky's views of teaching and learning.

Dewey's ideas about curriculum broke down the barriers between home and school and the boundaries between traditional school subjects. He believed the heart of the curriculum should be based on "existing social life" (Dewey, 1938) and that it played an important role in social reform. Dewey's concept of progressive education opposed

the traditional, transmission models of learning that viewed students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. In this view, progressive education links a child's experiences with learning and looks to build an education on the foundational knowledge that a child brings to school.

Recognizing and building on a child's prior experience is a main component of Dewey's concept of progressive education. However, new experiences in the educational setting are also equally important. It is the quality of such experiences that are key to the quality of progressive education. The challenge is to present experiences that "live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938; 1998, p.17). Two principles were identified to determine the quality of experience: continuity and interaction. The principle of continuity implies that every experience must prepare the learner for a future experience, and the principle of interaction implies students must interact actively with the subject matter and learn to work together. In Dewey's view isolation does not prepare students for real world experiences.

Education is the process of living, and a child's education should be based on and built upon each child's life. Dewey believed continual observation of childhood's interests is the entryway into the child's life. Then a determination of what the child is ready for, and the materials that should be used for teaching is made (Dewey, 1938; 1998). In other words, Dewey stressed a curriculum that is built upon the child's needs and interests.

Schema theory (Anderson, 1977) is constructivist in nature and aligned with the progressive education stance that curriculum should connect to students' prior experiences and interests. According to this theory, people organize everything they

know into knowledge structures, or schema. For example, people will have schemas for places they have visited (everything they know about the place), family members (everything they know about particular family members), or playing sports (everything they know about a particular sport). With the understanding of how important existing knowledge is in the acquisition of new knowledge, schema theory has become particularly influential in the area of literacy instruction.

Curriculum that is built upon students' schema validates their prior knowledge and experiences that help them connect to what is being taught. This emphasis on active learning was the primary goal of educators like Dewey. Constructivist theory validates the importance of previous experience in constructing new knowledge, and this view holds that much of the new learning an individual experiences takes place through social/cultural situations. Therefore, I now turn to Vygotsky, who brought socio-cultural theory to constructivism.

Sociocultural Theory

According to a sociocultural view of learning, students' higher order thinking functions develop through social interaction. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, applied a sociocultural lens to explain human development. He argued that a child's development could not be understood by a study of the individual; there must also be an examination of the external social and cultural world in which that individual lives. Although his theory was originally developed in the context of human development during infancy, Vygotsky's theories have become a foundation for sociocultural frameworks of learning applied to education at all levels.

Sociocultural theory, according to Vygotsky, is “based on the concept that human activities take place in social contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). These three tenets (social sources of development, semiotic mediation, and genetic analysis) are central to Vygotsky’s explanation of how new knowledge is internalized.

Social sources of development, the first of these tenets, are centered on culture and cultural knowledge. Building on this premise, infants are cultural apprentices who seek the guidance of their elders (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky promoted the idea that a dynamic interdependence exists between social and individual processes. Essentially, he argues that learning is a social process situated in a cultural context. As stated by John-Steiner and Mahn (p. 192), learning, in this sense, is the “transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes,” i.e., from communicative language, to inner speech, to verbal thinking. The new knowledge, thus, becomes internalized into one’s schema through social interaction.

Sociocultural theory is further based on the tenet that human learning is transmitted through semiotic mediation, which is the tool through which one communicates, i.e., language. It could also be thought of as the pathway one takes to new knowledge. When learning takes place in a social/cultural context, knowledge becomes co-constructed, thus all members of the group contribute to a larger understanding. Semiotic mediation helps to connect the external to the internal, and the social to the individual.

Semiotic mediation can be likened to a tool kit that assists in constructing knowledge. In this sense, tools are required to solidify new understandings, just as a hammer and nail can be used to create something new. Examples of psychological tools include speaking, listening, and writing, and number symbol systems (adopted from Wertsch, 1991). Within this theoretical framework, the process of internalization is “transformative rather than transmissive” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p.194). The act of acquiring new knowledge, then, is not simply conveyed from one person to the next or handed down. New knowledge emerges as a result of the active process an individual goes through in communicating with others about a topic.

When it comes to psychological tools, there are two schools of thought. One view places language in the primary position as a psychological tool, and the other side claims a more pluralistic view. The premise behind a pluralistic view is that a variety of psychological tools contribute equally to meaning making alongside language. John-Steiner (1995) coined the term cognitive pluralism for this stance. Cognitive pluralism stands on the notion that meaning is made via a multiplicity of semiotic means that are formed through cultural practices. An example of cognitive pluralism is the “planning notes of experienced thinkers which incorporate words, drawings, musical notes, and scientific diagrams” (John Steiner & Mann, 1996, p. 193). Cognitive pluralism, as an aspect of semiotic mediation, supports the notion that each individual learner makes meaning through a variety of psychological tools and the role of the educator would be to present new information in different formats to reach all learners.

According to Wertsch (1991), the previous two tenets (social sources of development and semiotic mediation) are best examined through genetic, or developmental analysis. Genetic analysis, the third tenet of the sociocultural theory, examines the origins and history of phenomena and focuses on the connections between the two. In describing this approach, Vygotsky (1978, p. 64-65) emphasized the need to concentrate on the process of learning rather than the product of what is being learned. Studying something in the process of change, i.e., all phases of changing development from birth to death, is to examine it historically, thereby discovering its fundamental nature. This historical study of behavior forms the very basis of sociocultural theory. Due to constantly changing historical conditions the socially and culturally shaped contexts of learning are also changing. For this reason, there is no universal schema to adequately represent the relationship between external and internal aspects of development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

The Zone of Proximal Development

At the time Vygotsky developed his theories of learning and cognitive development, the prevailing school of thought was that the two were separate entities. Cognitive development, according to Jean Piaget, comes before learning, thus dichotomizing the two as distinct internal versus external processes (John-Steiner & Mann, 1996). Instead, Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning and cognitive development could be interdependent on the other to show how external knowledge and abilities in children become internalized. He further argued that “learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and

sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

To help explain this relationship between learning and cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) promoted the concept of the zone of proximal development, which he defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In other words, a person’s zone of proximal development lies between his/her actual and potential development.

Full development within the zone of proximal development (referred to as ZPD) depends upon social interaction that comes in the form of a more knowledgeable other (expert) initially guiding a learner (novice) through the new learning. Gradually, the two begin to share the responsibility of learning with the novice taking over the learning and the expert serving as a guide. In the final step, the expert becomes a support and the novice takes control of the learning. The process of interactional support as an individual moves through their zone of proximal development can be explained by the related concept of scaffolding (Bruner, 1978). This concept refers to initial structured support for learning followed by the gradual withdrawal of the expert’s control and support as the novice gains increasing mastery of the given task. In other words, it is providing support to facilitate an individual to move from current to potential development.

A more knowledgeable other (expert) may be a teacher, adult, a child’s peer, yet it may also be a child with more knowledge or experience than an adult. Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, and Campione (1993) as summarized John-Steiner &

Mahn, (1996) added that a more knowledgeable other can also include “artifacts, such as books, videos, wall displays, scientific equipment and a computer environment intended to support learning” (p. 191). This extension of what constitutes a more knowledgeable other to artifacts of various kinds supports the use of tools of popular culture in the classroom, where videos, and computer features can support learning.

Vygotsky’s framework stresses the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. This is evident in the three central tenets to his theory: social sources of development, semiotic mediation, and genetic analysis. All three of these tenets combine to explain the process of learning via the zone of proximal development.

There is no single principle to account for development and learning. As sociocultural theory makes clear, social and cultural contexts plays an important role in the development and learning of a child. As Bakhurst (1995) argued, “an individual’s mental life cannot be understood independently of the culture in which the individual is part” (p. 159). In fact, research findings show that the school performance of children from non-mainstream cultures can increase dramatically when steps are taken to create culturally familiar situations for them (Eisenhart & Cutts-Dougherty, 1991; Heath, 1983). Instruction that is placed in a familiar context is the type of learning environment Vygotsky’s (1978) theory supports. Students need to understand the larger purpose for what they are learning, all the while making connections between new and prior knowledge. It is for this reason, that culturally responsive education was an important component of the framework to guide this study.

Culturally Responsive Education

Sociocultural theorists have stressed the link between children's learning, specifically in literacy, and their participation in cultural or community activities (Dyson, 1997). The process of becoming literate involves learning to deliberately manipulate language – both oral and written– in order to participate in culturally valued literacy events (1997). Both oral and written languages are important to learning because they hold the power to convey cultural values, beliefs, and artifacts. Literacy (and learning) in essence, is a social and cultural construct. However, culture is not static, it is fluid and it is through this fluidity that the act of being literate changes over time, and in relation to place. Therefore, culturally responsive curriculum that changes in relation to time and place is a necessary consideration in teaching and learning.

When there is a mismatch between the cultures of learning at home and at school, this is known as cultural discontinuity, which stands in contrast to culturally responsive teaching. Cultural discontinuity refers to the discrepancy between the invisible cultures of home and the dominant culture of the school and materializes in the way students' varied styles of speaking; behavior, and interaction are privileged or de-valued (Erickson, 1987; Jacob and Jordan, 1987 as summarized in Au 1993). The goal of bridging home and school knowledge can be addressed through culturally responsive teaching.

This mode of teaching is best described with six words: validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Intime, 1999-2002). These six words convey the deep meaning underlying the characteristics of culturally responsive education. Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as an approach that utilizes students' cultural knowledge and prior

experience (their strengths) to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of the students. Gay further maintained that culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of students' cultural background in the context of formal schooling, which helps to validate their prior knowledge and bridge home and school learning. This validation of their prior knowledge is the first of the six characteristics of culturally responsive teaching.

The second characteristic is that culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive. It teaches the whole child. Teachers who develop curriculum and instruction aligned with culturally responsive teaching take into account the intellectual, social, emotional, and political domains of learning by using cultural tools and texts to impart knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Examples of the tools and texts include photographs, music, posters, picture books and primary source materials such as newspapers and flyers. In classrooms where comprehensive culturally responsive teaching is practiced, the importance of maintaining students' cultural identity and heritage is held in balance with the importance of supporting their academic achievement (Gay, 2000).

The third characteristic of culturally responsive teaching is multidimensionality. Multidimensional culturally responsive teaching involves consideration of content, context, instructional techniques, and performance assessments (Au, 1993). Here, teachers from various disciplines may collaborate to teach a concept such as "change." In this example, students may explore the scientific concept of climate change, the social science concept of population change, and the language arts concept of dynamic characters. In order to demonstrate their learning of the relationships between the three concepts, students can analyze the effects Hurricane Katrina on the population of New

Orleans considering the environmental factors that led to the hurricane, and how it changed the lives of individual people. This example would be multidimensional and culturally responsive because it is taking a cross-discipline approach to study the concept of “change” and placing the learning in a real-world context.

With a focus on empowerment, the fourth characteristic of culturally responsive teaching, Shor (1992) has discussed culturally responsive teaching as a critical democratic pedagogy for social change and student empowerment. Empowerment can be thought of in terms of academic competence, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), and initiative. If groups commonly thought of as marginalized are empowered through education, Gay (2000) described this as transformative, the fifth characteristic of culturally responsive teaching. Education is transformative, when it produces students that can think critically in social contexts and can make and implement reflective decisions in personal, social, political, and economic spheres.

The sixth characteristic of culturally responsive teaching is that it holds the power to be emancipatory. Teaching that does not follow mainstream ways of knowing can guide students in understanding that there is no single version of “truth.” This is accomplished when students are exposed to authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups. Gay (2000) has argued that the “validation, information, and pride this knowledge generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating” (p. 35). The emancipatory power of such instructional techniques has improved students’ concentration on academic learning tasks, clear and insightful thinking, and acceptance of differences (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Moje and Hinchman (2004) noted that instruction needs to be culturally responsive in order to be considered best practice. Culturally responsive teachers make connections with their students as individuals while understanding the sociocultural contexts that influence their interactions (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

Culturally responsive instruction respects, values and builds upon students' cultures. It takes into account students' interests and cultural background while also tapping into their out-of-school-knowledge to create optimal learning environments (Hinchman, Sheridan-Thomas, 2008). Students' out-of-school knowledge, or "funds of knowledge," as explicated by Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005), is further described in the next section. The underlying theory of culturally responsive education is important to frame this study because it takes into account the importance of validating and building upon the various cultures in which students belong. In this particular study, students' popular culture experiences were examined and integrated into the formal school curriculum.

Funds of Knowledge, Discourse, and Third Space Theories

Funds of Knowledge

Much of the research on home-school literacy points to a belief that it is in the home where children learn most of their literacy skills. Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) coined the phrase "funds of knowledge" to describe the cultural heritage and concepts parents bring to their children's literacies. These "funds of knowledge" refer to those accumulated strategies (e.g., skills, abilities, ideas, and practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being. They are the inherent cultural resources found in communities and homes.

Stemming from Moll and Greenberg's (1990) work with Mexican-American families, it was found that there are two aspects of these household funds of knowledge that merit emphasis. The first aspect is that family networks are flexible, "thick," and "multi-stranded." Within thick and multi-stranded family networks children may have multi-faceted relationships with the same person, which allows the adults to know the whole child. This contrasts with the typical teacher-student relationship, which is thin and single-stranded. Teachers tend to know students primarily by their performance based on limited classroom experience.

The second key aspect of the concept of funds of knowledge is the idea of reciprocity. Reciprocity establishes obligations based on the assumption of mutual trust that leads to the development of long-term relationships. The exchanges that a child has with relatives and community members provide a constant context for learning to occur while in the company of those the child trusts (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

In a home or community setting, children are "active participants in a broad range of activities which are mediated by their social relationships" (Moll et al, 1992, p. 134). Much of the teaching and learning in this setting is based on the child's interests and questions. In contrast to school, this knowledge is obtained by the children and not imposed by adults, curriculum guides, or federal mandates, which is common in many classrooms (Moll et al, 1992). The funds of knowledge children bring to school consist of all of these learning experiences. The theory of funds of knowledge is relevant to this study because it helps to explain the importance of incorporating students out-of-school knowledge and interests with popular culture into the formal school curriculum.

Discourse Theory

If funds of knowledge at home are different from those at school, then students are being socialized to contextualize knowledge based on where the learning took place. For example, learning to play video games is part of students' home experiences, and learning to read a book is a school activity. Contextualizing or categorizing information in this manner is reminiscent of Alex Gee's (1990) theories on Discourse. In Gee's theory of Discourse, language is socially situated. Gee, a linguist, argues that in order to appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus not on language, but on "Discourses." He uses the term Discourse (with a capital "D") to describe social practices that reflect individuals' ways of being in the world; such as teacher, feminist, Catholic, etc. as well as the language one uses when belonging to a particular group. The language aspect of a Discourse, according to Gee, is referred to as discourse (with lowercase "d") (Gee, 1996a & 1996b).

An example of discourse used within a Discourse would be when a student in Hawai'i uses Hawai'i Pidgin English when speaking to peers on the playground, but when in the classroom, speaks in "Standard" English. The theory of Discourses can also be exemplified when students learn to contextualize video games as home knowledge and reading a book as school knowledge. Here, one would belong to a Discourse community related to video gaming while operating within a different Discourse when reading a particular text in school.

It is through Discourses that individuals are identified as members of social groups; and within this Discourse group identities can evolve. Discourses account for the language, objects, tools, technologies, sites, and institutions through which meaning is

mediated (Gee, 1990). The funds of knowledge a student brings into a school setting come about from operating within varying Discourses not associated with school. As Gee's theory on Discourse explains, students belong to various Discourse groups and it is the goal of this study to bridge students' Discourse in popular culture to the Discourse of their formal school curriculum. This bridge of the two Discourses is explained next as the "third space."

Third Space Theory

The merging of experiences from students' formal (school) and informal (home) Discourse communities is referred to as the "third space." As discussed in a previous section, culturally responsive pedagogy can create a third space in which students can explore and question the relationship between their everyday funds of knowledge, Discourses, and academic learning (Hinchman et al, 2008). The idea behind this merger is that students' funds of knowledge represent the "first space," the Discourses they encounter are the "second space," and the integration of the two constructs the "third space" (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). According to Moje et al (2004) what constitutes "first" or "second" space is arbitrary. What is important, however, is "that these spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative space of knowledge and Discourses" (p. 41).

According to Moje et al (2004), the different funds of knowledge a student possesses shape the oral and written texts they produce and make meaning from as they move between different settings [such as school and home or between classes in school]. In turn, these funds shape ways of knowing, reading, writing, and talking [Discourses] as students use them to learn in school. The third space is a place where students draw on

different Discourses that are in-between other domains. The theory of the third space allows us to think about how children's meaning making often lies disjointedly between school and home.

When applied with an educational perspective, the third space is seen as a bridge between home and school funds of knowledge and Discourses (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Tejada, & Rivera, 1999 as cited in Moje et al, 2004). Here, the many different Discourses are viewed as resources for helping students connect to new knowledge and the "third space" is a scaffold used to move students through zones of proximal development.

By better connecting and building upon in and out-of-school knowledge, a curriculum can provide opportunities for students' multiple identities to surface and be validated in the classroom. For example, reading and writing are primarily schooled literacies; whereas popular culture and multimodal texts such as video games and text messaging are typically out-of-school literacies. The third space would merge the two, and thereby "breath life into literacy practices" (Pahl & Roswell, p. 99, 2005). Teaching that incorporates a third space helps support the flow between meaning making at home and at school. The theories of Funds of Knowledge, Discourse, and Third Space highlight the importance of creating new learning that both builds upon and validates prior knowledge, which is the primary goal of this study. The next section will focus on out of school literacies developed in popular culture, the underlying theories of popular culture, and the connections of popular culture to the classroom.

Defining Culture and Popular Culture

Three perspectives on popular culture are examined in this section: those of Fiske (1989), Giroux (1989; 1997), and Buckingham (1998). Each has contributed to underlying theories on the subject yet each is different. Fiske has proposed an acknowledgement of popular culture and has critiqued the notions of it being merely a commodity. Giroux has compared popular culture to pedagogy in that both are leftovers in their domain, meaning popular culture is leftover after what is considered to be of high-culture and pedagogy is what is left after the content of curriculum is considered. Finally, Buckingham's views on children and the media have opposed the idea that children are duped by messages of the media that serve hegemonic capitalistic interests, and have supported teaching about or using tools of popular culture in an educational setting. Before an exploration of these perspectives of popular culture can be conducted, I must first define the broader term of culture.

Culture is dynamic. It is learned, shared, an adaptation, and continually changing (Au, 1993). Understanding culture requires more, though, than describing its attributes. In order to fully understand culture, one must reflect, relate to, and analyze how culture is an integral part of life. Hernandez (1990 as cited in Au, 1993) defined culture as a "system of values, beliefs, and standards which guide people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior" (p. 4). Culture, then, can be thought of as the collective attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguish one group from another.

People use this ever-changing concept of culture to make sense of their lives and the behavior of other people (Spindler & Spindler, 1990). Gollnick and Chinn (1990)

have contended that people are initiated into culture through the action of others and culture is an adaptation of the natural environment, or political or economic situations.

There are many types of culture, and people can be members of various cultural groups. Basically any group of people that share similarities (ethnic background or religion for example) belong to a culture related to that aspect of their lives. For example, one can belong to a particular ethnic culture, occupational culture, and a religious culture all at the same time without having to choose one over the other. This is referred to as one's cultural identity- a sense of belonging to or being connected with a particular culture or subculture.

Visible cultures (Philips, 1983) are the physical aspects of a culture such as clothing, art, or buildings. In contrast, mental and behavioral aspects of culture, such as religion and personal beliefs, are called invisible cultures. Both visible and invisible cultures are transmitted through language, material objects, rituals, institutions, and art. In the most basic sense, anthropologists have explained that culture is what separates humans from animals (Hirsch, 2002).

Mainstream culture is the culture of the group or groups that hold power and control in society (Au, 1993). This is in contrast to subordinate or subcultures, which are viewed as belonging to those with less power. Participation in a mainstream or subculture means learning that particular culture, rather being born into it. Other terms used to describe differences in culture are high and low culture. High culture is the culture held in high esteem by upper-class society (such as art, drama, and literature), whereas low culture is more of a derogatory term for what is commonly know as popular culture.

Popular Culture

Popular culture comes from and exists in everyday life. It represents the beliefs and practices shared among groups of people while contributing to the formation of identities and possibilities. More importantly, popular culture tends to be organized around fun and pleasure (Giroux & Simon, 1989). However, it is through this relation to pleasure, that popular culture is often associated with the low status and commercialism.

Historically, popular culture has served as a contrast to dominate or high culture, which privileges art, music, and literature. Dyson (1993, p. 14) proposed that popular culture is appealing to the young because it can express an oppositional attitude to the “high culture.” Popular culture’s connection with opposition to dominant culture causes it to be considered the degradation of society. Take for example hip-hop and rap music, violence on television and in video games, and graffiti – to most, they are certainly not viewed as being beneficial to society.

A related perception in our society reduces popular culture to consumerism. Indeed, a highly profitable industry exists that creates popular cultural texts (such as magazines, movies, or websites). However, this industry does not encompass the whole of popular culture – it merely represents a resource of the culture. According to Fiske (1989) the popular text is a representation of the culture, not an object. These texts therefore become a tool of popular culture rather than its definition.

Fiske (1989) has argued that popular culture is made by the people rather than being a product of the culture industry. The notion that popular culture is merely a commodity implies that culture is transmitted to the people rather than created by the people. In order to understand popular culture as being more than related to commerce, a

look at the concepts of using a cultural resource as opposed to being a consumer of a commodity. According to Fiske, the two are “not different activities, but different ways of theorizing, and therefore of understanding, the same activity” (p. 11). For example, when a teen is engaged in reading a tabloid magazine, on one hand she could be viewed as a consumer of the magazine industry that produced it; however, on the other hand she could be viewed as someone using a cultural resource to engage in her popular cultural interests--or perhaps she could be viewed as both. Fiske’s statement enables us to look at the same phenomenon or activity from different points of view.

Although popular culture is often characterized by being associated with commercial products and passed on through mass media, magazines, television, radio and Internet, it does not mean that popular culture *is* merely consumption. Fiske further expanded on his views of popular culture in relation to consumerism by explaining that popular culture is indeed a culture:

It is the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of buying and selling commodities...Culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within, not imposed from above. (p. 24)

Examining popular culture through the eyes of culture, rather than commodity, reverses the notions of popular culture being centralized around consumerism.

Furthermore, one must understand there is a difference between mass culture--the cultural products associated with a capitalist society; and popular culture--the sub-cultural ways in which people use these products to create their own meanings and messages (Fiske, 1989).

Popular culture serves as a place where there is an ideological struggle over what it means to be a consumer of culture and what it means to actually be a member of the culture. It also serves as the terrain in which subordinate and dominant ideologies co-mingle, for example using popular culture (subordinate ideologies) to provide meaning and pleasure to the learning process in the school curriculum (dominant ideologies). Giroux and Simon (1989) have argued that in order for popular culture to be integrated into the school curriculum, consent must be granted. Educators are the ones to grant consent, but this “never truly frees popular culture from the ideologies and practices of pedagogy” (p.19).

In traditional terms, pedagogy is thought of as the methods of transmitting knowledge; however, Giroux and Simon (1989) claim that pedagogy and popular culture share fundamental similarities. Both exist as subordinate discourses due to the fact they are both the “leftovers” in their domain. Pedagogy is thought to be what is left after the curriculum content is determined, and popular culture is thought of as what is left after high culture has been removed from society. In short, dominant ideology devalues pedagogy and looks down upon popular culture.

The notion of a critical pedagogy is relevant in a discussion of popular culture as it connects to school. Lusted (1986), has proposed that pedagogy consists not only of how something is taught, but also what is taught and how one learns. In more simple terms, pedagogy is the process through which knowledge is produced. Moving beyond the thought that pedagogy consists merely of how to teach, critical pedagogy focuses on pedagogy as the development of critical consciousness. Ira Shor has provided a sense of what it means to be critical:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking that go beneath [the] surface...to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (1992, p.129)

In order to achieve these habits of critical consciousness described by Shor (1992) in a classroom setting, the traditional student/teacher relationship needs to be reconfigured to one that is student centered. Here, there is no “one size fits all curriculum;” instead a pedagogy that is grounded in students’ experiences, where student voice is valued and students’ needs and individuality are honored, is the norm. Through critical pedagogy students are taught to be critical thinkers rather than passive learners accepting the status quo. It is this type of democratic education that enables them to become participatory members of society. Societies that they not only belong to, but also create.

When engaged in critical pedagogy, learning is promoted through an understanding of how students’ identities, cultures, and experiences contribute to the process (Giroux & Simon, 1989). When educators ignore the social practices in which students engage outside of school, they are also ignoring how students construct knowledge. Giroux and Simon (1989) have argued that the incorporation of popular culture into school curriculum goes beyond motivating students to learn, instead it allows students to define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture, which ultimately leads to empowerment. Popular culture provides the “opportunity for educators to understand how the politics of pleasure address students in a way that shapes

and sometimes secures the relations they have to both schooling and everyday life” (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 3). In short, popular culture texts motivate students to be engaged in school. However, when students are given opportunities to develop a critical consciousness of them popular culture texts can also teach students to be critical thinkers in other aspects of school and life.

The core of true critical pedagogy comes through the democratic thinking teachers try to instill in their students. This means being clear about the nature of the pedagogy that we pursue (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Any classroom practicing a pedagogy of popular culture must be a place where students and teachers learn from and with one another while engaging in authentic dialogue that is centered on the experiences of popular culture (Morrell, 2002). Popular culture serves to connect marginalized groups to school curriculum and critical pedagogy is situated in the experiences students have with popular culture. Critical pedagogy is responsive to the needs of the learners involved, and learners of the 21st Century are like none before.

However, not everyone shares such positive views of popular culture, nor do they see its value in a classroom setting. Not only is the use of popular culture criticized, but also the idea that it can promote teachers’ use of critical pedagogy and students’ subsequent critical thinking on the subject is questioned. There are many who warn against ruining the pleasures attained from popular culture by asking students to critically engage with it.

Both liberals and conservatives have often looked down upon popular culture, seeing the study of popular culture as a curriculum in which critical thought and action cannot occur. On the liberal side, the overriding opinion has been that popular culture is

equated to mass culture and commodity, where people are dupes of marketing unable to resist or reject the messages of the media. Whereas, on the conservative side, the popular culture is often thought of as a subculture related to resistance. According to many conservative critics, such as Toynbee, Gasset, Pound, and Eliot (for a summary, see Giroux & Simon, 1989), it threatens the existence of civilization and promotes the vulgarization and the corruption of societal values and morals. The problem with the underlying thought of both the liberal and conservative views is that popular culture is equated to something that is transmitted to the people (through commodity forms such as toys, books, movies, etc.), rather than created by the people (such as popular cultural practices which “organize and regulate acceptable styles and images of social activity and individual and collective identity” [Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 18]).

As stated previously, conservatives have criticized popular culture due to the notions that it is subversive or rebellious. The subversive side of popular culture may be a contributing reason why it is viewed as “low” culture. Bakhtin (1968) refers to the subversive aspect of popular culture by explaining his notion of the carnivalesque and accompanying pleasures. Historically, a carnival is a place that defies the values of society, such as the bearded lady, a place where kings become beggars, or slaves become masters (Presdie, 2000, p. 39). For Bakhtin, the carnival represents “a second life of people” where obscenity and degradation are the norm (e.g. burping or other “transgressions of adult codes of behavior”). This “second life” contrasts to a person’s primary life where rules of society are adhered. Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque has been cited numerous times to explain why children and youth are drawn to popular

culture. The popular finds significance in resistance and subversion, and at the same time recognizes the importance of resistance and subversion (Lambirth, 2003).

Related to Bakhtin's concepts of popular culture as carnivalesque are Barthes' (1975) notions of *jouissance* and *plaisir* (bliss and pleasure). *Jouissance* is a heightened state of extreme pleasure, whereas *plaisir* is the enjoyment of social experience that occurs more often and less intensely than *jouissance*. Regarding popular culture, Fiske (1989) provided an example of each. When a person loses himself or herself in rock music that is played so loudly that the experience becomes one of total body involvement, this is *jouissance*; whereas listening at a lower volume level and then telling others the pleasures experienced from the song would be *plaisir*. Fiske has asserted that *jouissance* involves the pleasure of evading and resisting dominant ideology, for instance, with types of video or computer games, music, dance or dress that invite disapproval from adults. Whereas *plaisir* is associated with socially produced pleasures that are related to the dominant ideology, such as enjoyment in playing an educational video game provided at school or watching an educational television show such as *Sesame Street*.

It should be noted, however that pleasures attained from popular culture texts differ from person to person. Often, as adults, we assume that when we present a popular cultural text to a child, that child will automatically be engaged in the text. Students may not always share the same pleasures with popular culture, either. Alvermann, Hagood, and Williams (2001) found that pleasure in popular texts is individually defined. Such discrepancies in preference may present problems in a classroom where popular culture is incorporated, especially when pleasures to some are perceived as offensive to others. However, Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) have argued that these "differences in

pleasures are not always negative and can be used in classroom settings to explore students' multiple readings of popular culture texts" (p. 35). Alvermann's ideas support teaching that promotes seeing multiple perspectives and critical thinking.

The practice of teachers promoting a critical pedagogy through the use of popular culture raises the issue of ruining the pleasures attained. Asking students to critically analyze its content and forms may spoil the popular culture experience. In relation to youth's popular culture, adults appear to rest between a metaphoric rock and hard place. They do not want to run the risk of appearing to know too much and "ruining" the pleasure students obtain from popular culture, or seeming to know too little, hence promoting the notion of a generation gap.

Grace (2002) has warned that deconstructing youth's popular culture can be problematic. The danger exists "that adults will colonize one of the last outposts of children's culture" (p. 79). Once brought into the classroom, students' outside interests are in jeopardy of being "reconstituted as curriculum or motivational strategies," thus stripping aspects of pleasure associated with it. The goal therefore should be to validate popular culture interests without taking them over. Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams (2001) make two suggestions that will help negate this situation for adults: (1) in-depth observations of students' uses of popular culture texts as a part of their literacy repertoires and (2) discussions about the multiple interpretations they created while using such texts (p. 10 of 13). Grace (2005) added that providing opportunities for students to create their own popular cultural texts also helps to validate students' interests without taking over. If, for example, creative thinking and problem solving are embedded in the production process as students script, storyboard, produce, and evaluate media, students'

critical and analytical media skills emerge naturally and authentically, and therefore more effectively, than through teacher lectures or the deconstruction of student viewing pleasures. Lewis (1996) and Buckingham (1998) have concurred with this position. What seems at face value to be merely a mindless reproduction can actually be an example of students engaged in a critical analysis of a popular culture text.

According to Alvermann et al (1999), inclusion of popular culture into school curriculum falls into one of four approaches. Although each supports the use of popular culture in the classroom, the approaches vary to a great degree in philosophy and purpose.

The first approach views popular culture as detrimental to youth. Classroom activities are planned around exposing students to the negative effects popular culture. This mindset promotes media as being the root of evil and students as mindless viewers. It does not acknowledge the pleasure students encounter when engaged in popular culture texts. Similarly, the second approach views students as thoughtless consumers of media and popular culture, and the pleasures derived from it are not acknowledged. The difference between the first and second approach is that in the second, students are taught to critically analyze popular culture, looking for its negative effects rather than just having them pointed out as in the first approach. Buckingham (1993, as cited in Alvermann et al 1999) warned that the second approach to the incorporation of popular culture actually works against critical thinking in that students begin to interpret the text from what they perceive to be their teacher's perspective and become protective and silent about their actual thoughts.

A third approach to incorporating popular culture into school curriculum emphasizes the pleasures popular culture provides to students. Alvermann et al (1999, p. 26) call this approach “pleasures without parameters” because teachers do not require students to analyze and critique the popular culture texts in which they engage. Students’ perspectives are left neither challenged nor explored more deeply.

The fourth approach to teaching popular culture represents a combination of these approaches by attempting to address the popular culture knowledge students bring to the learning environment, the pleasures that popular culture produces for students, the multiple interpretations that students produce from popular culture texts, and the critical analysis of the media texts. Buckingham (1998), Ellsworth (1989), and Luke (1994), however, have argued for the addition of self-reflection (for a summary see Alvermann et al, 1999). This self-reflective pedagogical approach places importance on individual differences within the audience and the multiple interpretations read into media texts, as well as a “situation-specific critical deconstruction of [these] texts” (Alvermann et al, 1999, p. 28). Buckingham (1998) proposed that this approach helps to democratize the curriculum by making it responsive to students’ out-of-school popular cultural interests (p. 9), yet it provides a balance between the pleasures experienced from these interests and a cognitive experience (critical analysis).

Finding a balance between validating the pleasures attained from popular culture and critically analyzing media texts can have its own pitfalls. As discussed earlier, when students see their own cultures and pleasures incorporated into the classroom they may be inclined to reject or resist what teachers tell them (Buckingham, 1998). On the other hand, when engaged in “critical analysis” students may default to the teacher’s viewpoint

(the perceived right answer) while not necessarily changing the way they think. To avoid such pitfalls, inclusion of popular culture in the classroom requires a shift in teacher-student relationships.

Green (1998) proposes teachers view their role as one of negotiation between the polar opposites within media pedagogy. With regard to the balance of roles, Morgan (1998) adds it should be “critical versus duped, autonomous versus controlled, rational versus emotional, and active versus passive” (p. 122 as cited in Alvermann et al, 1999, p. 40). This negotiation between opposites, combined with self reflective teaching presents itself in three basic roles of the teacher: learner, guide, and authority. A teachers’ role can be that of a learner (when students become the expert and teachers become the learner), a guide (placing themselves alongside students and critiquing popular culture texts together), and at some points the role of authority (at times it may be unavoidable and necessary to ensure that all students’ pleasures are respected and questioned). These roles are not linear and teachers move in and out of these roles depending on the needs of the students (Alvermann et al).

Changing the traditional roles of students and teachers in the classroom by bringing students’ experiences with popular culture into the classroom can also change power relations. Here, the teacher is no longer seen as the holder of knowledge and students become the experts. This situation reverses the power relationships in a typical classroom and to many teachers it becomes an uncomfortable situation when they do not know all the answers. This discomfort can also occur when teachers allow for critical exploration of popular culture, and students take a position that is different from what the teacher wanted.

As noted above, the role the teacher takes makes a difference in determining if students truly develop critical consciousness regarding popular culture without ruining the pleasures they attain. Giroux and Simon (1989) have argued “teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived differences [of students] that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse” (p.24). The dominant discourse could be the views and opinions of the teacher or the perspective represented by the dominant ideology (e.g. school or society). The issue comes down to a balance between a validation of pleasure and a developing critical consciousness of popular culture.

As promoted by Giroux and Simon (1989), teachers must not be deterred by the fear that students will take positions different from their own when exploring popular culture. Luke (1994 as cited in Alvermann et al, 1999) argued it is only through the “pleasures of relevant popular culture in students’ lives that we will be able to begin inquiry into their political and social interests and make connections to large social, economical, and political meanings” (p. 39). Allowing students to explore their pleasures in popular culture texts may uncover new and different understandings of the material.

Buckingham has argued that teaching about or using tools of popular culture can be seen as an extension of progressive education (Dewey) because popular culture is seen as a part of students’ experience, thus something teachers should seek to validate, acknowledge, and build upon. This acknowledgement, partnered with a critical pedagogy can promote a broader curriculum that accommodates 21st Century learners. It is the purpose of this study to seek ways in which the needs of 21st Century learners can be met through a critical pedagogy that includes the incorporation of popular culture. In the next

section, I turn the discussion to what it means to be a 21st Century learner and, specifically, what literacies are involved.

21st Century Literacies

Before discussing 21st Century literacies, I first define several terms related to the topic that are used in this report. Beginning with the broad term of literacy and then moving to the realm of critical literacy provides a framework and background.

In this study, *literacy* is defined as the ability to understand and use language and images to acquire knowledge, communicate, and think critically in all content and contexts (Hawai'i Department of Education, April, 2009). The "content and contexts" could consist of traditional school subjects, such as science or social studies or they may refer to a "cultural or communicative practice shared among a particular group" (NCTE, 2005). One way to acquire knowledge is the act of reading. *Literacy* and *reading* are not synonymous. Instead, reading is the act of decoding written texts and literacy is the act of meaning making and communicating.

While I define literacy as the act of making meaning and communicating, critical literacy looks at literacy within a social context. According to Lankshear (1997), critical literacy can involve having a critical perspective on literacy itself, on a particular text, and/or on social practices. Having this critical perspective requires analyzing and evaluating what is before us. The reflective action of critical literacy involves beginning with the everyday language and knowledge students bring to class and connecting it to new information. Critical literacy asks that the individual realize that curriculum is not neutral because dominant ideologies and Discourses are perpetuated through both the formal and hidden school curriculum. In order to have a humane society and democratic

education system, as Dewey proposed, students need to learn to critically analyze all forms of text in which they engage.

In an ever-changing high-tech, globalized world, literacy for lifelong learning needs to be thought of in new ways. Critical literacy involves the analysis and critique of the relationships among texts, language, power, social groups and social practices (Lankshear, 1997). It also includes the creation of media or other texts. It provides us with ways to critique, analyze, or create the “multiple, dynamic, and malleable” texts of the 21st Century (NCTE, 2005). Critical literacy practices are central to what it means to be a literate person in the 21st Century.

Building from the previous definitions of literacy and critical literacy, 21st Century literacies are defined as “an approach to literacy and language learning that looks at how literacy is used in everyday life--from literacy events like guided reading at school to reading a newspaper in a café” (Pahl & Roswell, 2005, p.156). Within this definition, I also include the aspects of literacy involved in interpreting popular cultural texts such as television, movies, computer and video games, popular music and music videos, instant messaging, and interactive Internet sites. In the literature, several terms are used to describe this broader view of literacy practices: 21st Century literacies, multi-modal literacies (NCTE, 2005), and new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). For this study, I refer to these practices as 21st Century literacies.

With changes in society and technology, a “literate” person in the 21st Century needs to possess the skills to navigate a variety of texts. Pahl and Roswell have contended, “literacy is a malleable repertoire of practices, not an unchanging or universal set of skills” (2005, p. xi). The skills required to be proficient in literacy may stay the

same (for example: author's purpose, point of view, or inferencing skills) however; it is the literacy practices that are flexible and the "texts" themselves that are ever changing. For example, a 21st Century learner may read books online, participate in online discussions, or participate in virtual classrooms. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2005) in order for a student to be proficient in 21st Century literacies, he/she needs to:

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to collaboratively and cross-culturally solve problems
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Be an ethical user of technology

Students today are learning the majority of technology skills outside of the school day rather than through formal schooling (Daggett, 2008). That means that some of the skills students need to live, learn, and compete in 21st Century, such as critical thinking, problem solving, technology skills and effective communication may also be learned outside of the classroom. For example, Mitchell's (1985 as cited in Luke, 2003) research on video game playing revealed that such game playing does not isolate children, rather it promotes social interaction. In addition, video games can improve children's visual memory, hand-eye coordination, spatial skills, and problem solving skills (Luke, 2003).

Gee (2003), a leading scholar on the literacies associated with video games, also identified skills that can be developed through video gaming such as critical thinking and predicting. He has argued that children think and use language in different more complex ways by using videogames. There is a plot that involves finding solutions; hence children acquire critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Not only has the notion of what we do with text changed, but the type of text that is now available has also changed. In the days of media and digital literacy, today's learners need skills to help them adapt to the constantly evolving forms of texts, such as interactive learning applications on mobile devices or the Internet. Engaging students in interpreting and analyzing various types of texts, both multimodal and traditional, is fundamental to addressing literacy in the 21st Century. There is a gap between the way educators teach literacy in school and the literary practices that students use outside of school. Print literacy is no longer adequate to address the realities of children's experiences or to prepare them for life in a rapidly changing world. Yet classrooms continue to privilege the printed word (Grace, 2007).

Books and the printed word may take precedence over digital media due to a gap in the technological skills teachers and students possess. Considering many aspects of popular culture today and 21st Century technology, it may very well be the case that a child is the 'more knowledgeable other' when it comes to adults learning about the newest video games, cell phone applications, or popular music. However, the challenge is not only for teachers to keep up with students' technological knowledge, but also to create meaningful learning experiences in which students learn how to apply their knowledge to solve real world problems (Daggett, 2008). Using 21st Century literacy

practices and tapping into students' interests, it has been argued, can create meaningful school learning experiences.

Meaningful learning experiences can be created for all students when they are allowed to make connections between the curriculum and their out-of-school experiences. On this topic, Pahl and Roswell (2005) have said, "Like it or not, textual practices such as email, online shopping, web cams, instant messaging, and electronic games using avatars are part of young people's realities. It is time to take these forms into our schools and use them" (p. 71). They go on to add,

We are teaching in a time of change, of movement and of migration, and of tremendous shifts in our communicative practices. Our students learn how to read and write in this diversified space, facing the incongruities of home practices like web logging and schooling practices like taking a role in a literature circle. It is hardly surprising that we face policy initiatives and district-wide interventions to contend with falling literacy rates and school closures (p. 136).

Connecting the curriculum to students' lives is an important concept in 21st Century literacy practices. Bringing popular culture into the classroom can provide pathways into literacy for struggling readers who have been marginalized due to lack of engagement in the reading and writing process. However, marginalized readers and writers can often demonstrate literacy and interact with popular texts with fluency, enthusiasm and engagement (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000).

The collective message is that tapping into students' 21st Century literacy practices helps form a bridge between home learning and school learning. With ever-advancing

technologies and changing popular culture, educators can no longer afford to be digitally deficient or “behind the times” with popular culture. We must begin using these 21st Century literacies if we aim to support our students’ growth to their full potential. Many teachers have embraced the concepts of 21st Century literacy according to Lankshear (1997). They view literacy learning as “more than a synonym for the mechanical teaching of decontextualized reading and writing skills.” However, he also wrote “many more have taken up the language of literacy without it meaning anything more than encoding and decoding print text” (p. 6). Here lies a challenge for future educators and policy makers if we want to see real change in our educational system.

Within a 21st Century literacy framework, the underlying belief is that “literacy is tied to students’ cultural backgrounds...which ties to belief systems, languages, values, goals, technical skills, and community values” (Pahl & Roswell, 2005, p.5). We need to build on these differences, rather than apply a one-size-fits-all, standardized curriculum. Student populations are diverse in many ways, and they come with many experiences. It is upon these differences that a school curriculum should be built.

The theories framing this study begin broadly with those that account for how students learn and from there support the notion that popular culture and 21st Century literacies can and should be included within the formal school curriculum as a way to validate students’ funds of knowledge. In the following review of literature, research regarding popular culture and 21st Century literacies will be presented to show both what has been previously studied and areas in need of further research.

Review of Research

This review of research begins by defining and providing examples of popular culture texts and the subsequent skills needed to navigate and derive meaning from them. Literature demonstrating the importance of bridging home-based literacy practices with those of school is followed by results of research studies that incorporated popular culture texts. In the search of relevant literature, it was noted that popular culture texts have been used more and more frequently to meet the needs of 21st Century learners. When popular culture has been incorporated into the curriculum, often only one form of text has been used. This fact highlighted an area of need, as there appears to be a gap in the current knowledge base. There is a need for more studies that focus on the incorporation of many popular culture texts into a formal curriculum.

Popular Culture Texts and the Navigational Skills Needed for Them

The incorporation of popular culture into the school curriculum has been the topic of research for several decades. In recent years, the new “hot topic” in education is meeting the needs of 21st Century, and with that comes a whole new arena of thinking about popular culture and the texts involved. In order to stay afloat with recent trends, some teachers have incorporated film, popular music, comic books, video games, text messaging, and the Internet into classrooms across America.

Before a discussion of popular culture can proceed, there must be a definition of the media through which popular culture is conveyed. Popular culture texts have been broadly defined to include visual images, written messages, and sound bites (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001). To navigate popular culture texts, learners need intermediality skills. By intermediality skills, Pailliotet, Semali, Rodenberg, Giles, and

Macaul (2000) referred to the ability to critically and actively read and construct meaning from a variety of texts (book, film, television, Web site, or video games) and write or express ideas through multiple media forms.

The texts that students encounter, both in and out of school, are multi-modal. According to Pahl and Roswell (2005), these texts combine the written, visual, gestural, and tactile. The Multimodal Literacies Issue Management Team of the NCTE Executive Committee (2005) analyzed the leading research on multimodal literacy in order to define the term as well as to develop research-based policy statements on the use of such literacies. According to NCTE, “Multimodal literacies consist of strategies for developing literacy practices that can be carried across multiple texts, rather than a set of practices tied to specific texts” (Adler-Kassner, in NCTE, November, 2005). This definition is added to the previous definition of 21st Century literacy and will be referred to under as the term *21st Century* literacy in this paper (definition is provided in Chapter 1). A few examples of multimodal texts include computer programs or websites in which there are graphics, text, and auditory features. An example of a multimodal project would be student production of video. Many modalities can be touched upon as students prepare the storyboard, script, do the actual filming, and finally edit. The use of 21st Century literacies has proven positive outcomes for students. The NCTE cites research suggesting that:

- Students who use computers when writing are not only more engaged and motivated in their writing, but they produce written work that is of greater length and high quality (Goldberg, et al., 2003).

- A media-literacy curriculum can lead students to higher reading comprehension scores, writing longer paragraphs, and identifying more features of purpose and audience in reading selections (Hobbs & Frost, 2003).
- On-line discussions of literature foster greater student engagement than traditional discussions, and student participants are able to use transcripts to develop metacognitive capacities. (Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004).
- Use of the internet for several years can augment student autonomy, enhance motivation, improve the quality of group work, and decrease adversarial qualities in teacher-student relationships (Schofield & Davidson, 2003).

The premise behind 21st Century literacy practices is that educators must begin to broaden views of what are considered literacy and text. Luke (1998) underlined the importance of having a wider view of what constitutes text:

As we move from an industrial to post-industrial information economy, one in which print literacy is not obsolete but certainly substantially transformed, then surely we need broader definitions of knowledge, literacy and pedagogy which will include study of the intertextuality of imageries, texts, icons, and artifacts of new information economies, of media and of popular culture.
(Luke, 1998, p. 27)

Bridging Home and School Knowledge

In the past, what school has considered literacy (however narrow this definition) has been forced upon the home, and families have been blamed for not “falling in line” with what the school expects. Both Victoria Purcell-Gates and Shirley Brice Heath have

written about this situation in reporting their work with communities of low to middle socioeconomic status. Purcell-Gates (1995) looked in depth at a minority group often overlooked: white, urban, Appalachian children and the unique relationship between print and their culture by collecting data on one family over a two year period. Her roles were both teacher and researcher in this case study where she found severe literacy problems, which spanned over generations. This family learned “survival skills” in order to navigate their way through life and school. A socio-cultural lens was used to conduct Purcell-Gates’ research, where all learners were viewed as members of a defined culture. It was an individual’s identity within this culture that determined how he/she interpreted information. It became evident that there was [and still is] a mismatch between the students’ valued home literacies and expected school literacies, and that this mismatch was a contributing factor to the child’s problems with meeting typical school literacy proficiency.

Heath shared similar findings about the nature of language development, the effects of literacy on oral language habits, and the sources of communication problems in schools and workplaces (Heath, 1983). This ethnographic study looked at two working class communities in the Piedmont of North Carolina, with one community being predominantly Caucasian and the other predominantly African American. The ethnographies of communication in the two communities became instrumental for teachers and students bridging language and culture differences (Heath, 1983, p. 266). In short, the teachers changed their teaching styles in relation to students’ home communication patterns. What was natural for mainstream schooling was very unnatural for the students of these communities. Therefore, their teachers began to help these

students learn how to recognize the differences as they taught them to use the language of “standard” English. The key to success in these classrooms was two fold. First, teachers recognized students’ cultural differences and embraced them, and secondly, teachers taught students through problem-based learning strategies in a context that had meaning for them; teachers created a bridge between the known and unknown.

The problem-based learning dealt with real world situations. Students learned to be ethnographers in these projects while the teachers determined the objectives and tied projects to the school curriculum. The benefit of problem-based learning was that it allowed students to show off abilities they could rarely display through traditional classroom learning experiences (Heath, 1983, p. 325).

These studies helped lay the foundation for understanding a problem that has existed in schools: the gap between home literacy practices and school literacy practices. If educators are to reach all students and help them maximize their educational potential, Purcell-Gates and Heath have suggested that teachers need to bridge the gap between home and school. The first way in which this gap can be closed is for teachers to adopt a broadened view of literacy, as defined earlier in this chapter. With this expanded understanding teachers can acknowledge that many of students’ home and out-of-school encounters with popular culture texts are literacy practices.

Research on Popular Culture Texts

It has been argued that there is a strong connection between literacy practices related to popular culture and those required in school (Morrell, 2002). Incorporating popular culture into a school curriculum has become a way to connect the out-of-school literacy practices with those that are valued in school. Furthermore, it has been argued

that literacy learning acquired through one medium, context, or text can complement learning in others because all forms of text share common elements, conventions, genres, and structure (Dyson, 1997). Pailliotet et al (2000) argued that when we help students identify these commonalities, we are developing student competency across literacies.

Research conducted on the use of popular culture texts has found these texts to be beneficial in teaching traditional literacy skills. For example, television and film studies have been used as tools to teach students about plot and character development. Also useful in developing an understanding of plot is comic books. As previously noted, video games have been found to help develop a variety of critical thinking skills (e.g. predicting, problem solving, and metacognition). The use of one of the most frequently studied forms, popular music, has demonstrated that students are capable of learning school-valued literacy skills when they are allowed to bring their out-of-school interests into the curriculum.

There are many reasons why music is incorporated into a school curriculum. One important benefit of the inclusion of music in school is the promotion of tolerance because music transcends cultural boundaries and generations (Moore, 2007). The content of some music promotes an increased focus on important social issues as well. It can be a powerful teaching tool because it appeals to the whole child, i.e., mind, body, and spirit. As Page (1995) said, “To many, music is not just an important part of life—music is life itself” (p. 7).

Hip-hop music is often utilized in classrooms because of its social, cultural, and academic relevance in promoting critical consciousness. Morrell (2002) studied the effects of using hip-hop music within a poetry unit and found that students moved beyond

critical readings of literary texts and became cultural producers themselves. They created poems that provided critical social commentary and encouraged action for social justice.

Hagood (in Alvermann et al, 1999) also conducted research on the inclusion of popular culture music into a school curriculum with fourth grade students. In this study, students analyzed their interests in popular culture music, and then specifically critiqued lyrics and images on album covers of some of their favorite artists. Alvermann et al (1999) also studied the effects of students' critical analysis of song lyrics, paying specific attention to imagery created with the lyrics with a group of eight graders. Important life lessons about differences among people were gleaned from students' critical analysis of popular culture music. Students also came to the understanding of the many messages conveyed in the media by deconstructing the visual images on album covers and messages through the printed text. For example, students assessed the emphasis placed on female musicians looking thin and attractive on album covers or analyze how the lyrics of a female musician can portray the message that even though society places value on being attractive, looks are not everything.

Recent multicultural education texts point to research that shows students' positive reaction to having their culture-related interests in music incorporated into the curriculum. George Lewis (1996) promoted the idea that music is chosen by individuals "not only for its message, sound, and/or danceability but also for the ways in which it can bolster self image and, like a cultural mirror, send strong reflective messages about oneself to the rest of his/her social world" (p. 37). If music is in fact a metaphoric cultural mirror, then integrating it into the curriculum can allow students to see themselves

reflected in the school curriculum and gain more perspective regarding ways they are culturally positioned in society.

In addition to the incorporation of popular culture music, media study and film study are growing as areas of formal academic study in schools. By redefining what it is to be a literate person to include the ability to critically analyze visual communication, educators legitimize popular culture films as academic texts. Morrell (2002) used film study coupled with traditional literature study to help students understand the connection between literature, popular culture, and their own lives. Students compared characters in films to those in books that contained the same theme, which led to discussion of the same themes reflected in their own lives. In Morrell's assessment, the use of popular culture films helped to lay the groundwork for more traditional academic work.

Pompe (1996 in Alvermann, 1999) studied the relation of literacy to student identity and desire through discussions with students about their favorite videos. Discussions eventually led students to produce their own video. Grace and Tobin (2002) also validated children's interests in media by bringing video production into the classroom. These studies revealed that although teachers must be careful of the dangers in guiding students through a process of critical analysis (as Pompe discovered), video production with students transcended views of popular culture that have positioned students as merely media consumers. When students produce their own video, they demonstrate key concepts of media literacy including "sense of audience and representation" (Grace, 2007, p. 21). In addition, they have the opportunity to re-negotiate the messages of the media and make their own meanings. They do not simply replicate the plots, themes, and images conveyed in the television and film.

Hodge and Tripp (1986) used an ethnographic approach to study how children watch television as a part of their social existence. They found that television viewing was an important aspect of cognitive and social development. When viewing cartoons, children were able to decipher reality from fantasy and were active interpreters of plot. Although these cognitive developments are learned from watching television, Hodge and Tripp found teachers continued to largely ignore and condemn television's potential benefits. Television, according to Hodge and Tripp, should be brought into the school curriculum to teach media literacy and appreciation so students can become adequate, informed citizens. Luke (2003) argued that television cannot be ignored in school, but instead must be viewed as a cultural icon and social practice. In fact, Buckingham (1998) argued there is little evidence to back up theories on the dangers of media.

If the television was considered the newest popular culture text of previous generations, then the video game may be considered the popular culture text of current generations. The introduction of video games brought about fears of it promoting social isolation, and the violence encountered in some games has received attention as being a desensitizer to real-life violence (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007). Recent literature has shown that the numerous positive effects video games have in relation to learning, however, outnumber these potential negative aspects. In a review of literature on the topic, Luke (2003) reported that playing video games can promote social interaction and can improve visual memory, hand-eye coordination, spatial skills, and problem solving abilities. In addition, Gee (2003) found that video games help to develop critical thinking and prediction skills.

Gee (2003) has become a leading scholar on the literacies associated with video games. He argued that children think and use language in different more complex ways by using video games. In video games there is a plot that involves problem solving, hence children acquire critical thinking and problem solving skills. Gee also identified more than 20 principles of learning that can be developed by playing video games. Some of these skills include: predicting, hypothesis-testing, and strategic thinking.

Television, music, and video games certainly play an important role in students' out-of-school knowledge; however, the most profound influence on life in the 21st Century may turn out to be the Internet (Leu et al, 2009). It has been reported widely that with unlimited information available on the World Wide Web, issues of privacy and safety of the user arise. Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Ybarra (2008), however, reviewed existing literature on the topic and found that it was inaccurate to characterize young people as being vulnerable to harm through Internet due to their lack of knowledge. In fact, by ages 12 to 13, they found that children generally understood the social complexities of the Internet at levels comparable to adults. Children are often warned not to post personal information online (in particular on social networking sites such as MySpace) because this can pose a risk. However, Wolak et al. found this is not always the case. They argued that posting personal information on sites such as MySpace did not increase children's risk of becoming a victim to an online predator. What has been found to be unsafe, however, is for young people to engage in interactive sites where the victim and perpetrator can have direct contact, such as talking online about sex to unknown people. Having knowledge about Internet safety works to protect students from what *might* happen. However, many argue, the looming fear of what *might* happen

should not deter teachers from utilizing this valuable tool in education.

Teachers have used the Internet as a tool in the classroom with activities such as web quests, blogs, email, games and online book discussions. The research base on Internet activities points to several benefits. For example, online gaming has proven to increase student motivation, deductive reasoning, collaborative problem solving, and conceptual understanding (Owston, 2009). In concurrence with the research on positive benefits of video production, students who created their own web-based game showed a significant increase in their ability to create logical sentences (a traditional literacy skill) in addition to increasing their content knowledge and collaborative skills (2009).

Many of the forms of popular culture--such as television, video games, and the Internet--have been said to have a negative influence on children. More than other forms, television has been blamed for numerous social problems (Grace, 2007). In a review of the literature, Grace reported that “television is seen as seducing children away from reality, and contributing to delinquency, amorality, acts of aggression, obesity, and declining literacy skills” (p. 3). This perspective suggests that the child is “essentially passive, helpless, and manipulated” (p. 3). Positive research findings on the effects of media can challenge this school of thought. Media, scholars like Grace claim, may actually contribute to children’s literacy learning. In Grace’s study, she demonstrated children are, in fact, active viewers who do not merely absorb media messages like a sponge.

Neuman (1988, as cited in Grace, 2007) found that children who watched television between two and three hours per day had higher reading scores than those who watched one hour or less. Other studies have pointed to academic benefits of television as

well. Television viewing can also help students learn about genre, plot, character, setting, and narrative structure (Braggs, 2002; Browne, 1999; Neuman, 1997; as cited in Grace, 2007).

In their work with middle school-aged students in a predominantly Latino community in Detroit, Michigan, Moje, Ciechanowski, & Kramer (2004), found students who used popular culture television shows such as *The Simpsons* to make meaning of science content in the Third Space. In this example, the students connected a science class discussion about growing square watermelons to a *Simpson's* episode in which they grew square watermelons. The television show not only served as a mere connection to the science topic, but as a springboard for mediation for science and scientific literacy learning. It also served as a visual mediator for the print text (Moje, et al, 2004, p. 63).

For reluctant readers, comic books have been shown to serve as entry points into literacy. Pahl and Roswell (2005) found that comics could be used to develop understanding of genre, character, and plot. In addition, comics have been used to help students learn to make inferences, a skill that then transferred to book reading (Grace, 2007).

Bringing popular culture into the classroom can provide pathways into literacy for reluctant or struggling readers who can be marginalized due to lack of engagement in the reading and writing process. Marginalized readers and writers can often read popular texts with fluency, enthusiasm and engagement as the research has shown with the use of comic books (Moje, Young, Readence, and Moore, 2000). However, the idea of popular culture being a motivating entryway into more traditional curriculum suggests the need for its incorporation. A pedagogy that includes popular culture requires a teacher to move

beyond comparing a movie to its book counterpart or using music lyrics for poetry. In case like these, popular culture texts are only teaching aids (Smith, as cited in Giroux & Simon, 1989). A curriculum that includes popular culture requires students to critically analyze the deeper meanings behind the texts. However, when doing so a teacher must be aware of the problems Buckingham (1998) has warned against—that is, the danger of ruining the pleasures students get from their popular culture.

Much of the research conducted on the use of popular culture in the classroom focused on one single type of popular culture text, such as music or television. However, when only one form of popular culture text is utilized, not all students' interests are served; nor are all students' out-of-school knowledge bases being tapped. The current study focused on multiple types of popular culture texts and, thus, filled a gap in the research literature. The focus for this research was: (1) the use of a variety of popular culture texts and (2) the use of varied popular culture texts that support teachers' critical pedagogy and promote students' critical consciousness.

Conclusion

Pedagogy is about what teachers teach and how we teach it, and it reflects our social ideas and values. In turn, if pedagogy is related to values, it is embedded in the culture of the teacher and/or classroom. In order to promote a more democratic society through the vehicle of schooling, we need to honor the various cultures of students we teach and create communities of learners in which critical thinking is engrained. This study was conducted to learn ways that the use of popular culture in a school curriculum can lead to critical thinking when the teacher uses pedagogy that allows students to

examine their interests but takes care not to destroy the pleasures students attain from their popular culture texts.

Giroux and Simon (1989) stated,

...to make popular culture the object of study within schools is to run the risk not only of reconstituting the meaning and pleasures of cultural forms but also of forcing students into a discourse that conflicts with their notion of what is considered acceptable and distant from their lives outside of school. (p. 18)

This situation certainly poses a challenge, however, it should not deter educators from using a pedagogy that promotes the use of popular culture tools and texts. As discussed earlier, there must be a balance between the home literacies and school literacies. Educators are faced with a choice about the type of students we want to nurture and the pedagogy that we pursue. If, in the end, educators want to teach students to think critically about larger social and political issues in order to promote a more democratic society, popular culture texts appear essential. However, existing scholars suggest they must be prepared for what may happen when classroom learning communities explore the pleasures of popular culture and its subversive side. They must also be prepared to respect students' reluctance to open up a side of their lives that has always been separated from school.

This study is framed with four layers of learning theory. Sociocultural and constructivist theories lay the foundation for the larger social and emotional classroom environment while theories of third space, Discourse, funds of knowledge and culturally responsive teaching point to the importance of validating and integrating students out-of-school knowledge into the school curriculum. Popular culture and 21st Century literacy

theories further narrow students' out-of-school knowledge to specify the Discourse of students' popular culture knowledge and how it holds importance within a formal school curriculum. With an understanding of the theoretical framework of this study and a review of the relevant research on the subject, I now turn to a description of the methodologies of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine and understand sixth grade students' perceptions and feelings about integrating 21st Century Literacies and popular culture into their language arts curriculum, specifically examining the students' experiences and interests with popular culture; the impact student motivation and learning; and the impact on the teacher/researcher. Taking place from October 2008 to June 2009, the study involved participants from two sixth grade classes at Aloha Elementary School. Before beginning any data collection for the study, Institutional Review Board approval was gained through the University of Hawai'i Human Subjects Committee and approval was gained from the Hawai'i Department of Education.

This study utilized qualitative research methodologies in order to explore what would happen when students' interests in popular culture and 21st Century literacy practices were integrated into a traditional English Language Arts curriculum. Data collection was based on a single case study of two sixth grade classes of students in their English Language Arts courses. This study was also a form of action research because the primary investigator was the teacher in the two classrooms investigated. Multiple methods of data collection were used in order to triangulate the data and enhance the credibility of the study. These methods included a researcher's journal, student surveys and questionnaires, interviews, and student work samples.

Chapter 2 presented the four layers of the theoretical framework that supports this study. The first of these layers proposes that people learn via constructivist approaches and influenced by sociocultural contexts. The second layer establishes that learning

occurs when it is connected to one's schema and experiences. This layer drew from the knowledge bases of culturally responsive education, funds of knowledge, Discourse theory, and third space theories. The third layer contends that popular culture is an important dimension of the knowledge base that students hold. Finally, the fourth layer asserts the need for a broadened definition of literacy including critical literacy and 21st Century literacies and asserts the need for their integration in the English Language Arts curriculum.

Chapter 3 begins with a recapitulation of the research questions and then presents the research paradigm framing this study. Specifics of the qualitative methodology used in conducting the research, including case study and action research are outlined. Next, the research background and context are presented followed by a description of the project, the instrumentation used to attain data, the timeline of the study, overview of the curriculum topics, and a description of how the data were interpreted and reported. Chapter 3 concludes with unique issues arising in this research design and how they were addressed.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

One of the biggest challenges in education today is engaging the learners. Students are no longer satisfied with "traditional" models of teaching where they learn whatever society deems necessary. As the review of literature established, it is not the facts and content at all that are the most important, rather the skills required to readily access knowledge and to think critically about it. I have come to understand that these are the skills needed in the 21st Century. It is this refinement of my beliefs as a teacher that brought me to this research topic. I wanted to know what would happen when a

curriculum was implemented that promoted 21st Century literacies in which critical thinking was the foundation and students' interests were a central driving force. I wanted to know if it would be possible to allow myself as a teacher to give up some of the control in the classroom and let my students have more of a voice. But mostly, I wanted to know if this could be done while still being accountable for state benchmarks, state testing and other mandates imposed on curriculum. On my journey, the following question and sub-questions were explored:

What happens when students' interests and experiences with popular cultural are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?

- a. What are 6th grade students' experiences and interests with popular culture?
What defines these interests?
- b. Does study of popular culture within a standards-based language arts curriculum impact student motivation and learning?
- d. What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?

There were no preconceived answers formed to address these research questions prior to collecting data for this study. It was believed that the findings would be grounded in the data gathered from the participants. Due to the inquiring nature of this study along with the centrality of student participants' perspectives, it was decided that qualitative research methodologies would be best to adequately address the research questions.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study is qualitative in nature, relying on student and teacher perspectives and rich description. Qualitative research methodologies chosen for this study include case

study and action research. These methodologies were used to conduct a single-case action research study of two sixth grade classes in their English Language Arts course. In order to justify the design, this section presents key concepts supporting the qualitative research approaches, including literature on case study and action research.

Case Study Methodologies

The characteristics of qualitative research are prominent in a case study. According to McMillan (2004), a case study “concerns [an] in-depth study of a single or few programs, events, activities, groups, or other ‘bounded systems’ defined in terms of time and place” (p.12). In the current study, the “bounded system” was the classroom in which I taught, including the student participants, the curriculum, the students’ reactions to the curriculum, and my own reactions, making it a “within-site” study of a single entity (McMillan, p.271). The case studied in this research was homogenous in that all students were exposed to the same activities, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches. However, each class was heterogeneous in student ethnicity, skill and ability levels, and other demographics.

The research question and related sub-questions of the current study align with common practices of case study, where there is often a single central question followed by several sub-questions. The primary means of data collection in case study include observation, interview, and field notes. Some of the data collection methodologies chosen for this study are in line with the case study approach. These include teacher/researcher observations documented in my researcher’s journal, focus group and key informant interviews.

Action Research

Playing a prominent role in the design of this study was the methodology of action research. Action research is “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). In the field of education, this translates to inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). Whereas research is typically seen as “dispassionate, informed, and rational,” and activism is seen as “passionate, intuitive, and weakly theorized” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 569), in the realm of action research, the two seemingly contrasting approaches merge into one process.

Action research involves a spiral of events with self-reflection as the foundation (Kemmis, 1982; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). According to Brookfield (1995), reflective teaching can lead teachers to a stronger philosophy of teaching, a more democratic classroom, and the discovery of teacher voice. The spiral of events that lead to teacher reflection begin with a plan for change, action upon the plan for change, observation of the effects of the action, reflection, adjustment of plans for change, and action upon the plan again. This series of events do not always follow a perfect spiral. Just as life is not linear, neither is research.

However the spiral may flow, success of action research is measured by change in practice and deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson, 2008). According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) change can come in the form of what people do, how people interact with the world and others, what people mean and what they value, and the discourses in which people understand and interpret their world (p. 565). This recursive relationship is the change desired as a result of action research.

In addition to the self-reflective spiral, Kemmis and McTaggart identified seven key features of action research. The first of these features is that action research is a social process. This was exemplified in the current study when the math/science teacher, the special education teacher, and I worked together to plan integrated curriculum and discuss important decisions related to this research (they were also my critical friends). The second feature is that action research is participatory in that it engages people to examine their own knowledge and practices--it is not done on others. Third, action research is practical and collaborative. People work together to examine their practices that are linked with others and then explore how to improve the interactions. Fourth, action research is emancipatory--it helps people free themselves from the constraints of unsatisfying social structures. The fifth key feature is that action research is critical. Going through action research is a process in which people try to contest and reconstitute unproductive ways of working with and relating to others. The sixth is that action research is reflexive--it helps people investigate reality in order to change it. The researcher goes through a spiral cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting. Finally, the seventh key feature is that action research aims to transform both theory and practice by developing each in relation to the other.

These characteristics were illuminated in the current study in various ways. This study exemplified the characteristics of being social, participatory, and collaborative because I learned to reflect upon and examine my practices as a teacher. I often sought input from the other sixth grade teachers (the math /science teacher and the special education teacher) and the student participants on decisions regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and the research design. The design for data analysis in the current research

was emancipatory, critical, reflective, and transformative and the process of going through the research design, described in Chapter 5, helped transform my teaching practices. I came to value reflection as a powerful tool to inform teaching.

Action research helps to close the gap between theory and practice in education. Rather than outside researchers conducting the inquiry and handing the results down to me, I conducted the research. With this came a sense of empowerment in the knowledge that the data I collected was used to make decisions about my classroom and teaching.

Beyond informing the practice in the classroom, action research can be a tool for informing the public, policymakers, and school administrators, while contributing to the knowledge base in education (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). This, in turn, can give teachers confidence to best meet the needs of their students, and empower them to be the driving force behind educational change. These are my hopes for this research report.

Action research can also have the potential to transform professional development, where teachers play a critical role as the creators of knowledge, rather than receivers of knowledge transmitted from outside the school (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1996), effective professional development is “sustained, ongoing, intensive, [and] supported by collective problem solving around specific problems of practice” (p. 203). In keeping with this statement, action research holds considerable promise as a tool for effective and successful professional development. To further support this claim, research has pointed to the fact that when teachers are allowed to make decisions and changes related to teaching and learning, student achievement is enhanced (Marks & Louis, 1997; Sweetland & Hoy, 2002; for a summary see Johnson, 2008).

In action research knowledge becomes local, rather than distant. The teacher researcher in action research knows the context in a much richer sense than a participant observer. Teacher researchers, as opposed to outside researchers, ask questions others may not ask or see patterns others may not see because of their intimacy with the context (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), action research opens communicative space between participants, creating situations in which all involved have a right to speak and act in transforming things for the better (p. 579). This opening of communicative space creates a situation where participants become co-investigators, rather than research subjects and the researcher becomes a facilitator, rather than the holder of power (Patton, 2002). In action research (as also true in types of participatory qualitative research) participants are decision makers in the design, methodology, and interpretation of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Description of Study

Research Setting and Context

Qualitative research involves consideration of the research setting. In qualitative research there is no control of behavior, setting, or imposed constraints. That is, qualitative research studies behavior as it occurs naturally (McMillan, 2004). In case study methodologies, examining behavior in its natural setting is important when the phenomenon being studied cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs (Yin, 1994). The research setting in the current case of two classes of students in sixth grade English Language Arts was very complex because it included a social context, emotional context, academic context, and inter-personal relationships. Although a key focus of this

study was on students' reactions to a curriculum that included their popular culture interests, it would have been impossible to study their reactions in isolation from the overall context of the classroom.

When studying a phenomenon in its naturally occurring setting, recreating this context by using detailed objective descriptions is the goal. Providing this rich description is a keystone of qualitative research because it aids in the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

This study took place at an elementary school in Leeward Oahu, Hawai'i. I (the primary investigator) was a teacher at the school at the time of the data collection. A pseudonym for the name of the school is used to protect confidentiality of the participants. For purposes of this report the school is referred to as Aloha Elementary School.

Established in 1959, Aloha Elementary School saw a lot of changes in the community it services. Located in a quickly developing once rural region, in 2009 there were approximately 43,637 people living in the school service area (School Status Report, 2009). This geographic area contained seven elementary schools, two middle schools and one of the largest high schools in the state. The median household income in the geographic area was \$58, 533, with 7.4% of households receiving Public assistance income and 5.7% of families with children considered to be living in poverty. These statistics are similar to or slightly lower than state averages.

Educational levels in the community Aloha Elementary services hover close to state averages. Approximately 20% of the population held college degrees and 33% had some college experience. For 27.9% of the population, the highest degree held was a high

school diploma. At a higher rate than state averages, approximately 19% of the population did not graduate from high school (School Status Report, 2009)

Between the years of 2000 and 2006, Aloha Elementary saw a tremendous increase in enrollment with the growing community and building of new homes. The school population reached the high 600's in 2005 before a new elementary school was built to help relieve the increasing population. After the new school opened, Aloha Elementary's population dropped to approximately 400 students. With this growth and decline of student population came teacher turnover and a change in administration.

At the time of this study, Aloha Elementary serviced students in kindergarten through grade six as well as provided preschool learning and programs for hearing impaired children. The population of the student body included general education, special education, and English Language Learners. Aloha Elementary also had a full inclusion program for students in Special Education (approximately 10% of the total student population) and English Language Learners (approximately 13% of the total student body). As of 2009, it was a Title I school, with approximately 53% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch (School Status and Improvement Report, November 2009). In addition to these school-wide programs, the school also provided a Primary School Adjustment Program (PSAP) for students in kindergarten through grade three, a Gifted and Talented program, and a Robotics program (School Status Report, 2009).

During the duration of this study, student ethnicity was very diverse at Aloha Elementary School, just as in many of the public schools in the state of Hawai'i. The school population consisted of students from various ethnic backgrounds including:

Filipino (27.8%), Hawai‘ian or part-Hawai‘ian (15.6%), Caucasian (10.7%), Samoan (8.9%), African American (3.7%), Japanese (2.5%), Hispanic (2.5%), Indo-Chinese (1.5%), Chinese (1.2%), and Portuguese (0.2%). Approximately 25% of students were listed as “other” due to belonging to several ethnic backgrounds. (System Evaluation and Reporting Section, Systems Accountability Office, Office of the Superintendent, 2009).

In January of 1999, Aloha Elementary School adopted the America’s Choice School Design. America’s Choice is a comprehensive standards-based school reform program that contained principles about how the school should operate. These principles include: high expectations for all students to meet standards, the implementation of daily standards-based literacy and math blocks, ongoing assessment of students in order to inform daily instruction, school-embedded professional development by the school’s literacy coach, standards based curriculum and instructional strategies, a school leadership team that coordinated implementation of the program, and “safety nets” in the school day to provide students with extensive support to meet standards (Poglinco, 2003).

America’s Choice School Design helped promote school improvement by focusing on five elements. These elements included (retrieved from <http://www.americaschoice.org/schooldesign>):

1. Creating a standards based system with assessments that monitor progress and inform instruction
2. Aligning instruction to standards and focusing on teaching on moving students from where they are to where they need to be
3. Strengthening instructional leadership
4. Building professional learning communities

5. Engaging parents and the community

Aloha Elementary addressed each of these elements in various ways. The school curriculum was based on current state-adopted standards with various school-wide assessments in place to monitor progress and inform instruction. Curriculum was planned to maximize student learning based on both the school-wide assessments and teacher created formative assessments. Professional learning communities were built into the school day in order for teachers to collaborate with colleagues and analyze student work to inform instruction.

The America's Choice model addressed the areas of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and applied learning using teacher content specialists and looping. (Looping occurs when a teacher follows a class up to the next grade. Both the class and teacher remain intact.) At Aloha Elementary School, looping took place in kindergarten and grade one, and the teacher content specialists concept was implemented in grades three through six. In the teacher specialist concept, teachers specialize in curriculum areas such as Language Arts and Social Studies or Math and Science.

As a school reform program, America's Choice promoted the Reading and Writing workshop models of instruction. In the workshop model, students are given a choice in the books they read and on topics for writing. Lessons are taught in the context of strategies that can be applied to any text or writing strategy, rather than teaching how to comprehend a single text.

In 2010, Aloha Elementary School's No Child Left Behind status was "In Good Standing" and the school was selected as a Hawai'i Distinguished School in 2003, 2004 and 2007. In 2010, Aloha Elementary was named a National Blue Ribbon School, one of

only three in the state of Hawai‘i due to a large increase in Hawai‘i State Assessment test scores in sixth grade in the 2008-2009 school year (the year this research took place).

Researcher Background

Upon graduation from college, I moved to Hawai‘i in July 2000 to begin a career in teaching that began that August. Although I had been certified to teach and had the degree to prove it, I’m not sure my program prepared me for the day-to-day life in a classroom. As with many teachers in their first few years, I was in survival mode each day. As I trying to learn what I was expected to teach, I was also in a situation were all lessons needed to be developed because there were no teacher guides available or curriculum maps in place. Basically, it was a “teach whatever you want” situation. As a more experienced teacher now, I think that freedom speaks volumes, however as a struggling new teacher it made my life difficult. My early years at the school were transitional years for the school itself, as it was in the process of building a professional learning community and adopting a school reform program (America’s Choice). In later years at the school, curriculum was defined and more guidelines as to what needed to be taught were put into place.

Compounded by the fact that there were no guides in place for what I was expected to teach, was the fact that I was an outsider to the culture. I am a Caucasian and in my first year of teaching, I was the only white person in the class. I had to quickly learn the Hawai‘i Pidgin English slang as my students would raise their hands to tell me they were “All Pau” (finished) or ask me if they could go “shi-shi” (go to the restroom). I found the school community, and larger community very welcoming and helpful in learning about the culture and before long I felt as if I had lived here my whole life.

I spent the first nine years of my teaching career in various capacities at Aloha Elementary School. I began in grade one and looped with my students to grade two. Over the next two years I taught Kindergarten and second grade. Then, I became the school's literacy coach for grades kindergarten through six for three years. Simultaneously, I also worked as the school's Design Coach (an America's Choice position to oversee the implementation of the program), the Title I coordinator, and the Hawai'i State Assessment Coordinator. The last two years there, I went back to the classroom as a sixth grade English Language Arts and Social Studies teacher.

Teaching in both upper and lower grades as well as working as the school Design Coach, Literacy Coach, and Title 1 Coordinator gave me a broad perspective on the school curriculum, state and district expectations, and the current trends in education. When I decided to go back into the classroom to teach sixth grade, I went in with a deeper understanding of what I considered to be best practices in education, which influenced my teaching. Because I understood the components and the expectations of America's Choice, I was able to modify my schedule and my instruction to incorporate students' interest in popular culture while still following the America's Choice School Design and state standards.

Sampling Methods & Participants

One of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods is captured in strategies for sampling. Whereas quantitative research selects a sample population based on the degree it can be representative of the larger population, qualitative research selects participants based on individuals who will provide the best information to address the research question. This type of sampling is often referred to as

purposeful sampling. Purposeful samples, which are usually small in size, allow in-depth inquiry to understanding a phenomenon. The objective of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the research question. Patton (2002) further reinforced the benefits of purposeful sampling when he wrote, “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 245). In addition to reporting methods and results in their proper contexts, emphasizing the purpose and limitations of the sample being studied will help reduce controversies with bias when readers are unfamiliar with purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The participants for the current study were selected by using purposeful sampling.

Forty students volunteered to participate in the study, ranging from ages 10 to 11. The study included 16 male and 24 female participants. Of the 40 students, 36 attended the school throughout the entire research period. Two students left the school before the end of the study, and two students entered the school in December but still chose to be participants. Three students were in the school’s special education program, five were English Language Learners, and three were in the school’s gifted and talented program (all of whom were fully included all day for instruction). Of the total population, there were two students (one male and one female) who declined to participate.

Participants for this study were chosen purposefully for their potential to assist in answering the research question about what would happen when sixth grade students’ popular culture interests were integrated into their English Language Arts curriculum. However, the sample population that was used in this study was also one of convenience

in that they were the students assigned to my class the year in which this study took place. All students in the sixth grade at the school were asked to participate in this study because I was the only teacher of English Language Arts in sixth grade and taught all sixth grade students at some point during the day. This sample is representative of the population at the school because it is only two students shy of the entire population. In addition I judged that the sample studied was representational of sixth grade students at other schools in the area based on demographics (in terms of ethnicity, gender, religion, and academic proficiency).

To protect the anonymity of all participants, pseudonyms were used to identify students. Before any data collection occurred, all students were given a consent form and parents were sent an assent form for their minor child (See Appendix A and B). Once informed consent was established, data collection activities took place from October 2008 through June 2009. Table 3.1 shows the demographics of the participants, including: their pseudonym, gender (M=Male, F=Female) identifies any Department of Education label (e.g. SPED = special education; ELL= English Language Learner; GT= Gifted and Talented, Gen Ed= General Education), and students that were key informants for interviews are identified in the “Notes” column.

Table 3.1. Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

| Pseudonym | Gender | DOE Label | Notes |
|-----------|--------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Aiden | M | Gen Ed | Key Informant - Left mid year |
| Sophia | F | ELL | |
| Charlotte | F | Gen Ed | Key Informant |
| Liam | M | GT | Key Informant |
| Ava | F | ELL | |
| Addison | F | Gen Ed | |
| Olivia | F | GT | |
| Noah | M | Gen Ed | |
| Jaxon | M | Gen Ed | Key Informant |
| Amelia | F | ELL | |
| Ethan | M | Gen Ed | Key Informant -Replaced Aiden |
| Lilly | F | Gen Ed | |
| Caden | M | Gen Ed | |
| Isabella | F | Gen Ed | |
| Chloe | F | GT | Key Informant |
| Abigail | F | ELL | Key Informant |
| Mason | M | Gen Ed | |
| Scarlet | F | Gen Ed | |
| Madeline | F | Gen Ed | |
| Grace | F | Gen Ed | |

Table 3.1 (Continued) Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

| Pseudonym | Gender | DOE Label | Notes |
|-----------|--------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Layla | F | SPED | |
| Claire | F | Gen Ed | |
| Asher | M | Gen Ed | |
| Logan | M | Gen Ed | Key Informant |
| Elizabeth | F | Gen Ed | |
| Landen | M | Gen Ed | |
| Violet | F | Gen Ed | |
| Ryan | M | Gen Ed | |
| Jacob | M | Gen Ed | |
| Caleb | M | Gen Ed | |
| Stella | F | SPED | Key Informant -Left mid-year |
| Evelyn | F | ELL | Key Informant |
| Emily | F | Gen Ed | Key Informant -Replaced Stella |
| Leah | F | Gen Ed | |
| Owen | M | Gen Ed | |
| Eden | F | Gen Ed | |
| James | M | SPED | |
| Alex | M | Gen Ed | Key Informant |
| Natalie | F | Gen Ed | |
| Alexis | F | Gen Ed | |

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

One of the key characteristics of qualitative research is that data are collected directly from the source. The investigator is at the center of collecting these data because in order to fully understand what it being studied, it is helpful to be immersed. Sources of data that came directly from the participants included descriptive surveys (“Interest Surveys” and “Self and Activity Assessment”), interviews (focus group and key informant), and student work. Other pieces of data vital to this design were my researcher’s journal, which included both observations and reflections as a researcher as well as a teacher, and scores from the Hawai‘i State Assessment.

Researcher’s Journal. Keeping a research journal was a vital data source in this action research. The journal served to document research decisions; record my thoughts, feelings, and impressions; and document my increased understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This study utilized a researcher journal throughout the duration of the data collection period with a total of 21 dated entries. Included in the researcher’s journal were teacher observations, teacher reflections, and researcher reflections. Some of the notes were hand written, some typed on a word processor, and the majority were dictated into a digital voice recorder and later transcribed for analysis.

Student Questionnaires and Interests Surveys. Interest Surveys were used at the very beginning of this study to gain initial information on students’ popular culture interests. The survey consisted of open-ended questions that sought to gain initial information on students’ interests and experiences with popular culture. The survey was piloted with students in previous years in order to refine the questions in a manner that

would ask open-ended probing questions (See Appendix C). The data gathered from this interest survey was used to drive the integration of popular culture into the curriculum and prepare for focus group interviews.

As the curriculum was put into place, students were given a survey after each assignment (“Self and Activity Assessment”, Appendix D). These documents asked opened ended, semi-structured questions that had no scale in which to quantify their data. All data obtained from these surveys supplemented and enhanced the information gathered in the interviews. Some questions were repeated in both the surveys and interviews. Finally, at the end of the year, students were asked to fill out an anonymous “Final Evaluation” of the course in which they were asked to reflect upon the year’s curriculum and to provide a final “grade” of the teacher (Appendix E).

Focus Group Interviews. There were two types of interviews utilized in this study: focus group and key informant interviews. The focus group interviews were designed to promote interaction among the participants and lead to a better understanding of what was studied. Focus group interviews were conducted with participants that responded similarly to various questions on the interest survey so that the conversation could go in depth about students’ particular interests. For example, groups brought together those who liked to play video games, expressed similar music tastes, or enjoyed spending the majority of their free time on computers. Many of these common interests were gender specific; therefore, the groups were homogenous according to male or female (e.g. girls preferred magazines over boys and boys preferred video games over most girls).

There were 10 separate focus groups, with three groups containing three participants, six groups containing four participants, and one group of five participants. Focus group interviews were used only once, to help select a purposeful sampling for individual interviews. See Appendix F for a protocol of the focus group interviews.

Interview questions were semi-structured as to allow for follow up on the Interest Survey. As McMillan (2004) recommended, semi-structured interview questions were open ended, yet specific in intent. For example, questions such as: What type of music/artist/song do you enjoy listening to? How do you use email, MySpace, or other forms of Internet socialization? How do you use your cell phone? These questions served to provide information on student interests that could later be integrated into the curriculum as well as addressed the research sub-question: *What are 6th grade students' experiences and interests with popular culture?*

In order to reduce interviewer effects, all interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcripts were given back to the participant to review for accuracy. In addition to member checking, I worked to reduce interviewer effects by varying the interviewer. Three different students conducted three of the focus group interviews, and the other sixth grade teacher (my critical friend) conducted the final round of key informant interviews.

All interviews (both focus group and individual) took place before or after school, so they did not interfere with instructional time. The focus group interviews were transcribed and analysis of the transcription helped me to select students for the individual key informant interviews. Protocols for Focus group interviews can be found in Appendix F.

Key Informant Interviews. Key informant interviews were completed after the focus groups. Key informant interviews were held with a few knowledgeable and articulate participants in hopes that they would provide further insight into the problem (McMillan, 2004). Five boys and five girls of different ability levels were selected for individual key informant interviews. Qualities such as willingness to think, talk and share about their use of popular culture and the integration of popular culture into the curriculum were considered, in selecting the interviewees.

The key informant interviews were completed three times during the course of the study to allow for more in-depth conversations about the participants' responses to the curriculum. The first was in January/February (see Appendix G for protocol); the second was in March/April (see Appendix H for protocol), and the third in May/June (see Appendix I for protocol). These interviews were transcribed for later analysis.

Student Work Samples. Student work was a very valuable component of the data collected. Only work of those students that agreed to be participants was analyzed for purposes related to this study. Student work involving the integration of popular culture into the curriculum was used to examine ways that and the extent to which the incorporation of popular culture affected students' academic achievement in an English Language Arts course. It was also used to verify (or not) data that were attained in interviews and "Self and Activity Assessments."

Hawai'i State Assessment Scores. Test scores in reading from the Hawai'i State Assessment were used to compare how the participants performed on a standardized test based on the Hawai'i Content and Performance III standards and benchmarks.

Longitudinal scores from the same students over time were used as well as the scores of the students in this study when they completed sixth grade.

Systematic data collection over time from multiple sources was critical to reach an understanding of the phenomenon studied. Multiple perspectives and multiple points of data collection helped me in understanding the classroom context, students' responses to the curriculum, and how I, as the teacher/researcher, was being impacted during the course of this study.

Timeline for Data Collection and Description of Curriculum Topics

October 2008: Interest survey. Students were given an interest survey (Appendix C). Results from this survey were used to group students for focus group interviews based on common interests.

October 2008: Quarterly evaluation. Students were asked to give feedback on what was and was not working for them in terms of curriculum and teaching at the end of each quarter. This information was used to gain feedback on the course.

October – December 2008: Curriculum topic I: Report writing unit. Students wrote two research reports in this unit that were tied to state Social Studies and Science content standards. The format for presentation of the reports was based on student choice: PowerPoint, traditional report, poster, movie script, alphabet book, email, comic strip, or brochure.

November 2008: Focus group interviews. There were a total of 10 focus group interviews, five from each class. Six of the focus groups consisted of four participants, three groups consisted of three participants, and one group consisted of five participants. All groups were single-sex, with a total of six all female groups and four all male groups.

Three of the focus group interviews were conducted each by a different student (a different student interviewer for each group) and I, the primary investigator, conducted seven. I assigned students to conduct the interviews to capture more candid conversations between students about the topics related to popular culture. I was concerned students would give answers they thought I, as their teacher, wanted to hear. The second reason I chose to have students conduct three of the focus group interviews was to empower student participants. I felt if they played an integral part of the research, they would feel more open to the process.

December 2008: Second quarterly evaluation. See above.

January-February 2009: First individual interviews were conducted. After the focus group interviews, five male participants and five female participants were selected for individual interviews. These interviews were conducted three times with each student throughout the study, once in January/February, once in March/April, and once in May/June. Participant attrition occurred with two students when they exited from the school before the January/February interviews. Two other students were chosen to participate in the individual interviews that were similar in popular culture interests and academic ability as the two students that left the study/school.

January-February 2009: Curriculum topic II: Theme. The literary concept of theme in a work of literature was related to the concept of theme as applied to a movie star's clothing in a magazine. In this activity, students found a picture in a magazine, described the clothing theme, and tied it to the idea that theme needs to be supported by accessories, just as themes within a literary work are supported by the various elements. In literature, accessories are likened to the characters, setting, and plot.

January-February 2009: Curriculum topic III: Author study unit. After studying the work of the author Katherine Paterson, students were allowed choice in writing a literature response to K. Paterson or Stephenie Meyers (if they had read all four of her *Twilight* series books and were able to discuss the content in the same manner as K. Paterson). Students also had choice in how the information gathered was presented: in addition to previous choices they could now choose to build a website or write a letter or email to future 6th grade students telling them about the author study. Prior to beginning this author study, students completed a web quest to learn more about the author and her life to gain insight on how the author's life has affected her work.

March 2009: Third quarterly evaluation. See above.

March-April 2009: Second individual interviews were conducted with students.

March-April 2009: Curriculum topic IV: Poetry unit. Music lyrics were used to teach students about elements of literary language (e.g. metaphors, hyperbole, similes, etc), and music videos were used along with teaching students about mood and tone in poetry. Students were then given choice of a more traditional poem (i.e. *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost) and asked to analyze the poem for its use of literary language and its theme.

April 2009: Curriculum topic V: Cinemoem. As the summative assessment for the poetry unit, students created a music video for the poem they chose to analyze. Students could work with others who had chosen the same poem to collaboratively create a music video using iMovie. The video needed to capture the mood and tone of the poem via images and sounds. Individual accountability was attained through students' personal reflections of how the music video captured the theme, mood, and tone of their poem.

April 2009: Curriculum topic VI: Text messaging. To review for the state assessment (Hawai‘i State Assessment), text messaging was used as a way to engage students in a review game. Students worked in groups to find examples of sample questions from previous Social Studies learning logs or reading tests to match a given benchmark. The group would then text me the location of their question. The first group to correctly locate a question to hit the reading benchmark would receive a team point.

April 2009: Curriculum topic VII: Persuasive writing unit. Students had opportunity to employ their choice of media for data collection. They used interview, online, or print resources in order to research the problem and develop a proposed solution for a social issue they were interested in (e.g. child abuse, traffic problems, graffiti, global warming). Students were given a choice in how the information gathered was presented as in previous writing assignments.

April 2009: Curriculum topic VIII: Public service announcement. After completing individual research projects on a social issue and presenting it for the persuasive writing unit, students with the same topics worked together to make public service announcements. The public service announcements were made with the Apple program iMovie.

May-June 2009: Third individual interview was conducted with students.

May-June 2009: Curriculum topic IX: Literature circles. Students had choice in selecting a book (from titles I pre-selected) to read for literature circles. Daily assignments related to the literature circles included:

- Participating in online book discussion via the class website (www.freewebs.com/ebes6thgrade).

- Graffiti boards (Serebrin, 2004). This activity involves students responding to a topic, key question, illustration, quote or comment by recording words, phrases, drawings or pictures on large pieces of paper pinned to the classroom walls or tables. Students tapped into their popular cultural knowledge of graffiti and tagging to create boards that looked like the graffiti they saw around them. We discussed how the letters were cartoon-like in appearance and how graffiti artists use initials and code words to represent larger meaning.
- Text messaging. The text messaging assignment had students use their knowledge of text messaging lingo to respond to their reading and open ended questions related to the book they had read. We discussed common text message “lingo” and meanings behind the lingo, such as “LOL” (laugh out loud), “OMG” (oh, my gosh), =(for sad, =) for happy, and “TISNF” (that is so not fair). Students texted me their responses on the cell phone I purchased for school use.
- Post-it-to-Talk: While reading, students were assigned to jot down thoughts, questions, connections, inferences, or predictions about the text onto post it notes. The post-its were the starting point for the group’s discussions the following day.
- Final project for the book: students had three choices:
 1. Video Game. In this option, students needed to change the plot of the book into a video game format (after studying elements of video games) and prepare a proposal of the video game to present to the class, including the characters, levels, and main objective of the game.
 2. Develop a sound track for the book. Using a free playlist creating website, students needed to compile at least 10 songs that matched the

theme and character actions of the text. They needed to describe the connection between their play list and the text in order to show understanding of the book's (and the songs') main theme and author's message. The play list along with a reflection on why songs were chosen to demonstrate knowledge of the text was presented to the class.

3. Movie trailer. Students could create a "movie trailer" to represent the plot of the book using iMovie. The movie trailer was to be no longer than three minutes and needed to highlight the main characters, problem, and theme without giving away the ending to the book. The movie trailer and a reflection explaining the images in the trailer were to be presented to the class (no students chose this option).

June 2009: English Language Arts final evaluation. Students were given a survey at the end of the school year to provide their feedback and reflections of the entire English Language Arts curriculum.

Data Analysis Procedures

In qualitative research, data are not collected to prove or disprove pre-determined hypotheses (McMillan, 2004). Rather, patterns emerge from the data and conclusions are generated from the "bottom up." The process of inductive analysis hinges on patterns that emerge without predetermining what they may be. The end product requires a synthesis of patterns (Patton, 2002). This initial analysis influences further data collection and helps the researcher look for themes or patterns, which in turn helps to deepen the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon.

The process of analyzing data is an intricate process of weaving the data with the researcher's interpretation. This process requires the data to be systematically collected and subsequently well organized, at the same time adhering to a guiding framework for interpreting the information. During the eight-month period data were collected, data were also being analyzed. The preliminary analysis (done by the researcher and critical friends) helped to guide further data collection (e.g. interview questions and the direction of the curriculum). This recursive spiral of data collection and analysis pulled from a grounded theory approach. This approach to qualitative research analysis harkens back to the work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). They promoted the idea of generating broad themes from specific data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. Charmaz (2006, p.5) outlined Glaser and Strauss's (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987) seven basic guidelines for use of grounded theory in data analysis:

- Simultaneously collect and analyze data
- Construct codes and categories from the data
- Make comparisons during each stage of the analysis (constant comparative method)
- Advance theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
- Write memos to elaborate categories, specify properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
- Aim toward theory construction when sampling, not population representativeness
- Conduct the literature review after developing an independent analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that each researcher should use the guidelines flexibly. Charmaz (2006) concurred, adding that that grounded theory methods

“consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data” (p. 2).

In the current study, many aspects of the data collection and analysis pulled from the seven guidelines of grounded theory outlined above, however some of the guidelines were modified. Following these guidelines, the data were collected and subjected to preliminary analysis simultaneously, codes were constructed from the data, and nine broad themes were constructed, each reflecting the participants of the study, but each also influenced by my personal experiences and interactions with the data.

I did not follow the guideline regarding the timing of the review of literature on the topic. The above guidelines suggest the literature review be done after an independent analysis of the data. However, I believed that existing theories could not be ignored prior to the data analysis and determined that such literature would deepen researcher insight into designing and interpreting the study and would also illuminate possible gaps in the research that needed explore.

The amount of data collected during this study required an organized and efficient data management system in order to promote easy retrieval. To manage data, all voice recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were digitally downloaded and saved into folders. Student work and “Student Self Assessment and Activity Assessments” were filed together, and researcher memos and observations were transcribed or digitally downloaded from the voice recorder and filed in electronic folders. Basically, all electronic files were organized by type of data into electronic folders and all hard copy data were filed in a similar manner.

Using the qualitative analysis software, HyperRESEARCH (ResearchWare, 1988-2010), coding was the initial step in data analysis. As Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 56) stated, “Coding is analysis . . . [codes] are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the information compiled during a study.” Coding of data was completed in accordance with a two-phase grounded theory approach: initial coding and focused coding. Initial coding involved naming each word, line, or segment of data. Initial coding served as a temporary starting point to immerse me into the data. Therefore, it was important when applying initial codes that I keep them simple (See Table 3.2 for a list of the initial codes applied to each data source).

The second phase of coding employed is referred to as “focused coding.” During this process, I selected the most significant or frequent initial codes or broke the initial codes down into more descriptive language in order to “synthesize and explain larger segments of the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). It is at this time that codes from various data sources can be compared and then categorized. For example, initial codes from interview transcripts were compared to my researcher’s journal and to students’ responses on the “Self and Activity Assessments.” By comparing data to data, a more focused code was developed (Charmaz, 2006).

After combing through the data a second time to develop focused codes, patterns within the data began to emerge and similarities between codes were noticed. For example, the codes “gender” and “parental involvement” converged when it was noted that gender differences existed between the levels of trust students perceived from their parents. Whereas boys generally said their parents trusted what they were doing on the computer, girls more often said their parents monitored their computer use. (See Table

3.2 for a list of the focused codes that emerged from the initial codes for each data source).

Table 3.2 displays the initial codes and focused codes that emerged from the data and shows how the two sets of codes align. It is followed by Table 3.3 that breaks the initial and focused codes down for each data source: Researcher’s Journal, Student Questionnaires and Interest Surveys, Focus Group Interviews, Key Informant Interviews, and Student Work.

Table 3.2. Alignments of Initial to Focused Codes

| Initial Code | Alignment to Focused Codes |
|---------------------|--|
| Changing Practice | Critical Friend |
| | Teacher Evolution |
| Choice | Choice |
| Climate | Classroom Climate |
| | Cooperative Learning and Socialization |
| Empower | Student Empowerment |
| | Teacher Empowerment |
| Gender | Gender |
| Influences | Parental Influences |
| | Peer Influences |

Table 3.2. (Continued) Alignments of Initial to Focused Codes

| Initial Code | Alignment to Focused Codes |
|---------------------|---|
| Interests | Cell Phones Computers and Internet Gaming Graffiti Music Popular Culture Interests |
| Learning Styles | Learning Styles |
| Pleasure | Pleasure Subversive Behavior |
| Relationships | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| Schooling | Critical Thinking Formal Curriculum Hidden Curriculum |
| Time | Time |

Table 3.3. Coding of Data by Source

| Data Source | Initial Codes | Focused Codes | |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Researcher's Journal | Changing Practice | Cell Phone | Music |
| | Choice | Choice | Peer Influences |
| | Climate | Classroom Climate | Pleasure |
| | Empower | Computer or Internet | Pop Culture Interests |
| | Gender | Cooperation and Socialization | Student Empowerment |
| | Influences | Critical Friend | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| | Interests | Formal Curriculum | Subversive Behavior |
| | Learning Styles | Gaming | Teacher Empowerment |
| | Pleasure | Gender | Teacher Evolution |
| | Relationships | Hidden Curriculum | Television |
| Student Questionnaires and Interest Survey | Schooling | Learning Styles | Time |
| | Changing Practice | Cell Phone | Learning Styles |
| | Choice | Choice | Music |
| | Climate | Classroom Climate | Peer Influences |
| | Empower | Computer/Internet | Pleasure |
| | Gender | Cooperation and Socialization | Pop Culture Interests |
| | Influences | Critical Friend | Student Empowerment |
| | Interests | Formal Curriculum | Student Teacher Relationships |
| | Learning Styles | Gaming | Subversive Behavior |
| | Pleasure | Gender | Teacher Empowerment |
| Focus Group Interviews | Relationships | Graffiti | Teacher Evolution |
| | Schooling | Hidden Curriculum | Television |
| | Time | Music | Time |
| | Changing Practice | Cell Phone | Parental Influence |
| | Climate | Computer/Internet | Peer Influences |
| | Empower | Cooperation and Socialization | Pleasure |
| | Gender | Critical Friend | Pop Culture Interests |
| | Influences | Critical Thinking | Student Empowerment |
| | Interests | Formal Curriculum | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| | Pleasure | Gaming | Subversive Behavior |

Table 3.3. (Continued) Coding of Data by Source

| Data Source | Initial Codes | Focused Codes | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Key Informant Interviews | Changing Practice | Cell Phone | Learning Styles |
| | Choice | Choice | Music |
| | Climate | Classroom Climate | Parental Influences |
| | Empower | Computer/Internet | Peer Influences |
| | Gender | Cooperation and Socialization | Pleasure |
| | Influences | Critical Friend | Pop Culture Interests |
| | Interests | Critical Thinking | Student Empowerment |
| | Learning Styles | Formal Curriculum | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| | Pleasure | Gaming | |
| | Relationships | Gender | |
| | Schooling | Hidden Curriculum | |
| Student Work | Climate | Classroom Climate | Pop Culture Interests |
| | Empower | Cooperation and Socialization | Student Empowerment |
| | Interests | Critical Thinking | Student-Teacher Relationships |
| | Pleasure | Formal Curriculum | Subversive Behavior |
| | Relationships | Music | |
| | Schooling | | |

The final stage in qualitative data analysis involved looking for relationships among patterns that would suggest generalizations or themes (McMillan, 2004). These themes are supported with the data (e.g. direct quotes from interviews) and are drawn from my synthesis of the data. My background and perspective inevitably affect the interpretation of the data, which is why transparency on background and experience increases credibility in the findings. Using an inductive approach to synthesize the data and emerging patterns, I identified nine broad themes in this study that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Ensuring Credibility

The main criterion for evaluating qualitative research is the credibility of the study; that is “the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and

trustworthy” (McMillan, 2004, p. 277). To enhance the credibility of this study, detailed descriptions of the have been included. In describing this context, I hope to help readers better understand the findings and assists in the event the study will be replicated.

Because it was understood that the inquirer also affects the way findings are received, this study includes information about the researcher (e.g. the experiences the researcher brings to the field and personal connections the researcher has to the topic being studied). Reporting any personal and professional information that may affect the data collection, analysis, or interpretation as well as the researcher’s degree of involvement in the study helps promote transparency and increase credibility in the overall study (McMillan, 2004; Patton, 2002).

When judging the overall credibility of a qualitative research report, there are three principles to consider: triangulation, reliability, and validity (McMillan, 2004). Each is introduced in the following sections and then highlighted as applied in this study.

Triangulation. The first factor to consider when determining the credibility of qualitative research is triangulation. Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods and reducing the effects of bias. Two triangulation techniques used in this study were data triangulation and investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002).

Data triangulation involved collecting different types of data within qualitative methods (i.e. interviews, observations, or document analysis) at different points in time. Over a period of eight months, multiple data sources were employed to collect and compare the consistency of identified trends, such as surveys, interviews, and my researcher’s journal. It should be noted, however that triangulation of data sources may

not lead to the same exact conclusion; therefore the role of the analyzer is to try and understand these differences (Patton, 2002).

Researcher biases and preconceived ideas need to be recognized in order to increase credibility in a study (Johnson, 2008). Having multiple perspectives with investigator triangulation provides a check on bias in data collection and analysis. Investigator triangulation implies assigning multiple people to collect and/or analyze data (Patton, 2002). This study employed the use of critical friends as a form of investigator triangulation. A description of the study's critical friends and their roles will proceed in the section on validity.

A common misunderstanding related to triangulation is that its purpose is to illuminate the same results from different sources. However, being aware of qualitative research's real-world situations helps to curtail this misconception leading to the understanding that inconsistencies in findings from different types of data or from different perspectives can be enlightening to the study (Patton, 2002). Searching for alternative themes and patterns is important in the data analysis process. The purpose of this process is not to disprove the alternatives, but rather to "look for data that supports the alternative explanation" (Patton, 2002, p. 553). If strong evidence cannot be found to support the alternative, credibility in the original explanation presented is established.

To further ensure credibility in qualitative research, negative cases are highlighted to expand, change, or cast doubt on the "rule" being proposed (Patton, 2002). A negative case is the data that do not fit within the pattern and theme. Lincoln and Guba (1986) have proposed that the role of the researcher is to search until no further negative cases are found. Reporting negative cases and exploring alternative themes and patterns

enhances credibility by showing the researcher's search for what makes sense rather than the researcher's efforts to funnel all the data into a single conclusion (Patton, 2002).

Reliability. The second factor to consider when determining the credibility of qualitative research is reliability. Reliability is the extent to which what is recorded as data is what actually occurred in the setting being studied. One way reliability was ensured in the current study was by giving the participants their interview transcripts so they could verify that the recording was accurate. Reliability can also be thought of as the dependability of the research.

Validity. The third factor to consider when determining the credibility of qualitative research is validity. Although numerous types of validity can be considered in qualitative research, this concept is generally considered on two basic levels: internal and external. Internal validity is the extent to which the interpretations of the researcher reflect reality. This is strengthened if the researcher uses detailed field notes, collects data in the natural setting, and repeats patterns of observation (McMillan, 2004). External validity refers to the how the results can be generalized to other populations; however this is not often the case with qualitative research. Instead, qualitative researchers ensure external validity by using the concepts of translatability and comparability. Questions such as, *How do these results compare to another setting?* or *What can I learn from these results?* rather than, *How can we generalize these results to other populations?* are consistent with qualitative research external validity measures.

In addition to internal and external validity, there were specific types of validity criteria applied to action research that were used in this study. Herr and Anderson (2005), who pull from a wide body of research (Argyris et al., 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Brooks & Watkins, 1994; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cunningham, 1983; Dewey, 1938; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Lather, 1986; Martin, 1987; Myers, 1985; Tandon, Kelly, & Mock, 2001; Tobert, 1981; and Watkins, 1991), have proposed utilizing the following to judge the rigor of action research: dialogic validity, catalytic validity, and democratic validity.

Dialogic validity is similar to peer review in that it helps promote critical and reflective dialogue. A critical friend can help to promote dialogic validity (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). Although I was the sole investigator in this study, two critical friends helped examine and analyze early data, as suggested to promote dialogic validity. These critical friends were also sixth grade teachers at the school and shared common students with me (I taught English Language Arts and Social Studies, while my critical friends were the Math/Science teacher and the special education teacher). Having this collaborative approach to inform my teaching and research helped promote democratic validity.

With the use of critical friends in this study, new levels of understanding were uncovered because they asked me to make explicit what I understand on a more implicit level (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Interaction with my critical friends regarding the study served as a form of validation in the research process. It was my hope to reduce subjectivity and bias through the use of critical friends because they helped to examine my thoughts and preconceived notions.

Catalytic validity highlights the transformative potential of action research, in that it recounts a change in the investigator's and participant's understandings. This type of validity reinforced the importance of keeping my research journal for reflection. Finally,

democratic validity refers to the extent the research was done collaboratively with all parties having a stake in the problem or context. In the case of this study, democratic validity was sought by allowing student interests to drive the integration of popular culture into the curriculum. Their voice was valued in the curriculum. Also, by providing student participants with interview transcripts as well as having three students conduct three of the focus group interviews democratic validity was sought.

Before beginning to collect data for this study, I put much thought into how to increase the study's credibility. I was acutely aware that bias was possible due to my dual roles as teacher in these two classrooms and as primary investigator of the study. An attempt was made to overcome this and other possible sources of bias through several triangulation and validity seeking techniques as discussed previously.

Whether or not the research design takes the form of action research or another form of qualitative research, the criteria for determining the trustworthiness of the data help to ensure the credibility of the work. Furthermore, trustworthiness of the findings in a qualitative research report is directly tied to trustworthiness of the researcher. The degree to which the research context, methods of data collection and data analysis are described, helps to promote trustworthiness in the study. In the next section, problematic issues with this research design are identified along with ways I sought to minimize them.

Design Issues

Having the dual role of teacher and researcher can naturally pose problems and raise issues in the area of action research. One such issue is that of having a restricted or biased viewpoint due to immersion in the culture being studied. However, the opposite perspective is that such immersion also may allow for deeper understanding of the events

and practices being reported. Hammack (1997, as cited in Nolen and Vander Putten, 2007) expressed concern over action research in which an insider (teacher, per se) takes on the role of researcher without outside academic collaboration. The teacher is not only acting as the researcher but also as a change agent and these conflicting roles can confound the teacher's primary objective in the classroom: student learning. The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) provided guidelines which all researchers must abide by to conduct ethical research – respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Nolen and Vander Putten (2007) have contended that action research poses ethical issues with the guidelines in terms of 'respect to persons' in that minors may not possess the maturity or independence needed to decline participation in studies conducted by researchers whom they are also dependent upon for their grades and school experiences. They go on to say, "If the research is not clearly defined apart from what the student would ordinarily be required to do in the classroom, then the student will have difficulty making an informed decision and freely choosing (or choosing not) to participate" (p. 402).

Building community is an important component of a democratic, constructivist classroom and it is through this process of building community that students became part of the decision making process during my study. Students' expressed interests in popular culture were an integrated part of the mandated English Language Arts curriculum I taught. Thus, the curriculum researched was consistent with the everyday instruction that students would have received otherwise. Having said this, I would like to address Nolen and Vander Putten's statement claim that research must be separate in order for students

to have the choice not to participate. This curriculum would have been taught with or without the research being conducted in the classroom. The components of this study that were separate from the curriculum consisted of some of the data collection pieces: researcher's journal, student questionnaires, interest surveys, and interviews. Students had choice as to whether or not they wanted to participate in the student questionnaires, interest survey and interview aspects of the study. Once they agreed to participate in these components of the research, they had an "opt out" option before participating any further. However, none of the students chose to opt out once they agreed to participate.

Another recommendation to help avoid a conflict between the roles of the teacher versus the researcher was suggested by Tanke and Tanke (1982). They suggested that someone other than the researcher seek participants' consent to participate. In order to reduce the risk of students feeling coerced to participate because I was their teacher, all consent and assent forms were distributed and collected by another teacher on the grade level.

Nolen and Vander Putten (2007) outlined four recommendations to help teachers when conducting action research in order to forego ethical dilemmas. I followed each of these recommendations during my study. The following bullets describe their recommendation (in italics) then explain how I followed this recommendation:

- *Revise consent and assent forms to clarify that there is no penalty for refusing to participate and that student grades will not be affected.* Paragraph six of the consent and assent form (Appendix A and B respectively) clearly states:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the

project with no penalty. Your (your child's) grades in English Language Arts and your (your child's) relationship with me, your teacher, will in no way be affected whether you choose to (or not to) participate in this study.

- *Invite another school professional to collect data to minimize any possible coercion (conduct interviews, per se).* Two co-workers were utilized as critical friends during this study (the other sixth grade general education teacher and the special education teacher that worked with the grade). They conducted interviews, gave me suggestions for selecting students for individual interviews, and provided commentary on the interview transcripts. Three students also assisted in conducting interviews during focus groups.
- *Include a final “yes or no” response item stating “Please include my answers in the study,” which allows students to opt out of the study while appearing to participate.* The “Self Assessment and Activity Assessment” form (Appendix D) provided students with the opportunity to opt out of the research at any time. The sentence on the form said, “I would like my answers to this survey to be used for research purposes: YES NO.”
- *Establish a relationship between researcher and participants that is as democratic as possible so the participants become part of the decision-making process in all phases of the research.*

Power relations clearly existed between student (participant) and teacher (researcher), and cannot necessarily be negated through a constructivist approach to teaching in which knowledge is co-constructed by the teacher and learner. I devoted concerted thought and effort to reduce the traditional teacher/student roles in order to empower the students

(participants). Wax (1982) suggested the relationship between researcher and participants should be characterized by parity and reciprocity, meaning the relationship can be one of balance of power as well as demonstration of mutual respect. The focus on the relationships between the participants and the researcher progressed to a more collaborative stance during the research process.

The student-centered approach to my English Language Arts curriculum helped in this effort since student interests drove many of the curriculum activities. Also, having students not only self-assess their own work, but also assess the learning activities, allowed students to have more ownership over the curriculum. Another research technique I used to promote a more democratic study was to allow participating students to interview each other and review all interview transcripts before the data was used. Patton (2002) advised, “People who participate in creating something tend to feel more ownership of what they have created and make more use of it... [They] are more likely to feel ownership not only of *their* finding but also of the inquiry process itself (p. 184)”

The methods described in this chapter provided the framework for data collection in this qualitative research study. Chapter 3 also provided specific examples of how the data were analyzed and synthesized in order to develop broad themes and generate theory. The next chapter reports the findings of the study based on the nine themes that were gleaned from the data and incorporates quotations from the participants to support the findings. These themes are organized around the research question and three sub-questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand sixth grade students' popular culture-related literacy practices and to explore what happened when a teacher and students designed a curriculum built upon these practices and interests. The data collection was based on a single case, action research study approach of two sixth grade classes in their English Language Arts course.

Conducted by me, the teacher researcher, this study utilized action research and case study methodologies. I implemented a language arts curriculum that incorporated students' popular culture interests through a variety of means (music video, creating websites, developing video games, iMovie, etc.). Data were collected over the course of one school year, 2008-2009 through interviews, student questionnaires, a researcher's journal, student work samples, and the Hawai'i State Assessment results.

Demographics and Research Questions

There were a total of 40 students participating in the study, ranging from ages 10 to 11. The study included 16 male and 24 female participants. Of the 40 students, 36 attended the school throughout the entire research period. Two students left the school before the end of the study and two students entered the school in December but still chose to participate in the study. The sample population included the entire sixth grade at the school, except for two students who chose not to participate in the study.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were developed to distinguish individual student's responses. Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 displays

all of the participant's pseudonyms along with demographic information. Some pieces of data were anonymous (Self and Activity Assessments (SAA), Final Evaluations (FE) and Hawai'i State Assessment (HSA) results), however most were not. Data that were not anonymous included: Quarterly Evaluations (QE), Interest Surveys (IS), focus group interviews (FGI), key informant individual interviews (beginning year interview-BYI, mid-year interview- MYI, and end-of-year interview- EYI), and student work.

Data were collected from a variety of sources over an extended period of time in order to help create a complete picture of what was being studied. Coding of data yielded twenty-five focused codes that spanned across data sources—see Table 3.3 for a list of each data source and the subsequent codes. (Charmaz, 2006). These were further analyzed to develop nine themes that emerged from the data. These themes are: Social-Emotional Classroom Environment; Popular Culture Interests and Connections to Schooling; Outside Influences; Gender; Critical Thinking; Student Empowerment; Formal Curriculum; Pleasure; and Transforming Practice.

The Social-Emotional Classroom Environment encompassed the overall climate in the classroom including cooperative and social learning, relationships in the classroom, the hidden curriculum, risk taking, and learning styles. Popular Culture Interests and Connections to Schooling accounts for the various popular culture texts in which students engage, while Outside Interests and Gender explain two ways in which students' interests in popular culture are defined. Critical Thinking takes into account how students began to analyze, evaluate, and examine what was placed before them with a critical eye. This critical perspective led to the next theme, Student Empowerment. Having voice and choice in the curriculum also led to student success and empowerment. The theme,

Formal Curriculum chronicles student achievement in the formal school curriculum as prescribed by the Hawai‘i Content and Performance Standards III. The theme of Pleasure accounts for student motivation and enjoyment of the curriculum. Finally, Transforming Practice explains the empowerment and evolution of my teaching practices through this process.

These nine themes are presented according to the research question and sub-questions that each addresses. There was one broad, overarching question for this research with three sub-questions as noted below:

What happens when students’ interests and experiences with popular cultural are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?

a. What are 6th grade students’ experiences and interests with popular culture?

What defines these interests?

b. Does study of popular culture within a standards-based language arts curriculum impact student motivation and learning?

c. What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?

Chapter 4 reports results by emergent theme as they address the research question and three sub-questions. Data revealed there to be a democratic classroom climate with positive student-student and student teacher relationships; enhanced student motivation and gains in student academic achievement, and empowerment to both students and teacher.

Research Question: What Happens When?

The broad, open-ended research question, “What happens when students’ interests and experiences with popular cultural are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?” is addressed with the theme Social-Emotional Classroom Environment. This theme explains the context in which this research took place and help to explains the dynamics within the classroom. This context was created, I believe, because of the conscious effort to connect students’ popular culture interests to the school curriculum.

Social-Emotional Classroom Environment

Social-emotional classroom environment encompasses the ways students learn, the student-teacher relationships, the student-student relationships, the pedagogical approach a teacher uses, and the interactions within the classroom. Findings in support of this theme support the idea that a positive social-emotional classroom environment is essential for effective teaching of the whole child: social, emotional, physical and intellectual. Findings also suggested that student voice was valued in this class and that students’ needs and individuality were honored. The traditional student-teacher relationship was reconfigured to one that was student-centered and teachers were no longer seen as the holder of all knowledge.

The type of climate discussed in the classrooms studied was formed because of my conscious effort to know my students and their outside interests better. In part this occurred as a result of this research, yet it also reflected upon my philosophy and practice as a teacher.

There are many contributing factors to a positive social-emotional classroom environment. The factors include: cooperative learning and socialization, student-teacher

relationships, hidden curriculum, risk taking, and learning styles. I address each of these subtopics and provide examples of how the theme “Social-Emotional Classroom Environment” emerged from the data.

Cooperative Learning and Socialization

Cooperative learning and socialization take into account the big ideas of: socialization for enjoyment, learning from/with each other, teaching each other and social networking. Below I highlight each with examples from the data.

Socialization for Enjoyment. I realized early on in the research that socialization is very important for middle level students, as seen in this quote from my field notes: “Keeping them moving and socially interacting throughout the class period is the best way to keep them engaged. I’ve become more conscious of this while incorporating their popular culture interests” (Researcher’s Journal (RJ), February 17, 2009).

The more I reflected upon students’ feedback the more I began to realize how much they valued the social aspect of learning and that they were able to work collaboratively so frequently. It seemed that many of the students valued the social aspect above all else. This sentiment rang true across assignments and student surveys and interviews. In her interview in the beginning of the year, Chloe commented on the importance of socialization in her life. When asked what she thought the main purpose of school was, she said: “If you ask all the kids my age, they are all going to say friends. My favorite part of the day is when I get to hang out with my friends in the morning, after school, and when we get to work with partners.” Six of the forty participants said their favorite part of doing research was that they got to work in partners and/or groups

(Anonymous, SAA of Technology Research Report). Other students provided similar feedback about preferring to work in groups because they could talk to their friends.

In addition to being with their friends, my students provided other examples that exemplify the importance of socialization and led them to describe the learning activities as fun. “I like this activity because it was fun taking pictures [with a digital camera] and being with my friends and cooperating,” and “I enjoyed the activity because I got to work with a group, poetry, and computers” (Anonymous Students, SAA of Poetry Unit and Cinemoem). Two students used the word “fun” to specifically describe the socialization and group work aspect of particular assignments. For example, “Working with a group is better to learn and it is more fun” (Anonymous, Quarter 3 Evaluation) and “It was fun to interact with classmates” (Anonymous, SAA of Literature Circles). Overall students found the work to be more fun and engaging when they were able to work with their peers.

Learning from/with each other. Many students enjoyed working with others because it gave them time to socialize with their peers. Others valued the time because they learned from their classmates and enjoyed the community that a cooperative learning environment created. For example, in her final interview, Emily said,

Sometimes the people I had in my groups they would talk about it [the assignment] more and while they were talking about it more everybody would share their ideas of what they were learning and you have time to talk about what you are learning and stuff and it makes you learn more by learning from different people.

Other students commented on the benefits of learning from their peers as well.

Abigail shared that, “...if I didn't understand my group could help me” (EYI). Students

began to rely on one another to help them when they did not understand or needed assistance. Working in groups satisfied, students' desire to work with their peers and have fun. As one student admitted, "The best thing is that we can be in groups because it is best to be with partners if you need a hand" (Anonymous, SAA Literature Circle Final Project).

Teaching each other. Learning from others was one benefit from students working in groups. However, some students felt that they were not only learning from but also teaching their group members. For example, "I think my work Meets Proficiency because I helped the team work together and I helped them when they didn't know how to do something" (Anonymous, SAA of Persuasive Writing and Public Service Announcement). The benefits of cooperative learning were not limited to learning from the group or teaching the group. For some students cooperative learning served as a reciprocal cycle of teaching and learning. In the poetry and Cinepoem unit, two students commented on the cooperative learning aspect. One of these students said, "Working in groups was my favorite part because we bounced ideas off each other" (Anonymous, SAA of Poetry Unit and Cinepoem) while the other said, "Cinemoems [were my favorite] because we worked so hard on trying to learn what the poem was about - working together as a group" (Anonymous, FE).

The cooperative learning aspect of Literature circles were often mentioned positively in Self and Activity Assessments of Literature Circle Activities and Final Evaluations of the course. For example, "Literature circles were my favorite activity because I liked hearing other people's thoughts" and "I liked that I got to read and discuss and express my thoughts with a group [during Literature Circles]" (Anonymous Students,

FE). Another had similar thoughts, “I enjoyed literature circles because I got to talk to my group about things I didn't understand and I also got the chance to share my way of thinking with my group as well” (Anonymous, FE). In the Final Evaluation of the course, students were asked about their favorite part of the course and one student responded: “I enjoyed literature circles because you can discuss any thing you might think [about the book] or don't know about” (Anonymous).

Social networking. In a 21st Century learning environment, classroom walls do not need to be the limits for learning. Cooperative learning and socialization can take place beyond classroom doors with the use of the Internet and online social networking. In conducting focus group interviews, I gathered that social networking sites were used by many of the students. I found that MySpace, Friendster, You Tube, and online games were the most popular among my students. When I used the online social network for educational purposes, it helped engage my students and extended their learning beyond the school day. I created a class website that had blog and wiki capabilities in which posting to the site or commenting was limited to members only. This website became a portal for online book discussions as well as a social networking site amongst students and myself. With our class website, students valued both the social networking aspect as well as the ability to have an online learning environment.

The website was compared to the popular social networking site, MySpace by three different students. For example, “The online book discussion is like MySpace but better” (Anonymous, FE), while another added, “Its like MySpace but simpler and all of your friends are there” (Anonymous, FE). Three students expressed that their favorite part of the class website was the ability to design a character/profile/account (Anonymous

students, SAA of Online Book Discussions), while two other students said the ability to chat online and connect with each other was enjoyable. A couple of students further commented that their favorite part of the website was seeing what others had to say about the book. They also enjoyed posting responses to their classmates. In his final interview, Ethan said the following about the class website, “It was pretty cool that our class had a website because it was new for everybody. I liked the part where we read what everybody wrote and then got to respond. It was neat to see everyone's opinions.”

Although most students valued the social aspect of the curriculum and cooperative learning with their peers, a few felt otherwise. For example, one student preferred working alone versus in a group. He shared that his “favorite part of this assignment was doing this by ourselves in iMovie [not work in a group]” (Anonymous, SAA of Poetry Unit and Cinemoem).

Some frustrations with group work or partners were grounded in students not resolving problems that arose. Students “got irritated a lot because the group kept arguing.” (Anonymous, SAA of Persuasive Writing and Public Service Announcement) and “didn’t really like this activity because some of us don't cooperate.” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Boards). Of course not all students enjoy online social networking either. When asked his opinions of our class website, Logan did not seem excited about the idea in his mid-year interview:

I don't really get into it [emails, online social networking] that much. Even at home when I get on Teen Biz [<http://www.kidbiz3000.com>] I just read and answer the thought questions. I don't ever send emails. I did send an email once

that says, ‘Stop sending me EMAILS!’ because everyone kept sending me emails (Logan, MYI).

In my classroom I found that creating a positive social-emotional classroom environment required students to interact with each other, and just like anything that needs to be learned, learning positive conflict resolution skills was part of the process. As expressed over and over again by my students, the social and cooperative aspects of our learning environment were contributing factors to their learning and pleasure in school, and the positive feedback I received far outnumbered the few issues that arose during the process. When we did deal with conflict resolution, taking the time to discuss the problem and possible solutions usually helped the group to move forward. Having positive relationships among students and between students and myself became central because positive relationships allowed for open communication when problems did arise.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The approach a teacher takes in building relationships can be a determining factor in the social-emotional classroom environment. By building relationships with my students, they felt that the environment was safe, and they began to take risks that they may not have otherwise.

During the school year that this research took place, I strived to know each student personally. Teaching students became easier as I knew their likes and dislikes and was able to connect new learning to their interests. Remembering myself as an adolescent of their age, and recalling the celebrities, movies, video games, and music I liked also helped me relate to them. Through the current research process, relationships and trust formed synchronously between the students and myself (RJ, February 17, 2009).

I wrote in my research journal that it is my professional responsibility as a teacher to know each student academically. Knowing students' individual strengths and needs helped in planning instruction suited to their academic level. However, it was equally important to know students interests outside of school. One of the ways I was able to build a positive relationship with my students was taking the time to get to know who they were outside of school. This, in turn really helped me to know them better academically.

Conducting research really forced me to get to know my students for the people they are. What a difference it makes to know that I can look at them and see beyond *the one that doesn't do homework* or *the one who doesn't like to read* to see *the one who loves soccer* and *the one who works all weekend with mom cooking in a food stand*. (RJ, dated February 17, 2009)

In order to build trusting relationships with my students I also had to open up and share parts of my life. It helped my students see beyond “the teacher that gives me too much homework” or “the teacher that will get upset if I don’t turn in my assignment.” The result was a positive climate based on good relationships between my students and me.

As the school year progressed, I began to notice how my investment in relationships was paying off. The more I listened and cared about their lives, the better students responded in the classroom. The overall climate in our room was one of trust and risk taking. There were times, however, that boundaries needed to be set because students began to feel as if they could share things with me as if I were their peer. Below are two excerpts from field notes that exemplify this:

Two of the girls stayed after school today and during our conversation they asked me if it was okay to tell me what someone said...I figured it probably was a little inappropriate, but valued their openness so told them to go ahead. They told me what the person said, which included an inappropriate word. Later in the conversation, [Isabella] must have felt really comfortable to use this word around me because she said it again casually! I told her it was not okay this time and explained how I enjoyed our conversations, but they also needed to remember that I am an adult and their teacher, not their peer. (RJ, dated January 30, 2009)

Later in that same conversation with the two students, I recalled:

Chloe asked if they could text message me a response to their reading. I told them I'm afraid to give everyone my cell phone number because of someone prank-calling me later. She and Isabella told me that would be "DH." That's one I've never heard before, so reluctantly I asked what it meant. "It means dick head", they casually said. (RJ dated January 30, 2009).

My response was to again remind the girls that I am their teacher not their peer and that some words are not appropriate to be said in front of me.

As mentioned earlier, relationships help to build a positive classroom environment and relationships have a reciprocal nature – meaning they go both ways. When students were asked to give me a report card grade as a teacher in the Final Evaluation of the course, a couple of students mentioned that they liked getting to know me personally. For example, "I would give you the grade 'Meets with Excellence' because you give us a connection to your personal life" (Anonymous, FE) and "I grade

you as ‘Meets with Excellence’ because you were always there for us and you took your own time helping us” (Anonymous, FE).

In the digital age, there are more ways to build relationships than just face-to-face or talking. Text messaging has become a very common way for people to communicate. It allows for information to be sent back and forth quickly when you may not have the time or be in the proper setting for a voice conversation. As a way to strengthen relationships and communication between myself, my students, and their parents I added a cellular phone line to my existing account. The line I added was solely for the use of communication with my students and their parents. I gave the number to all parents and to students and only asked that they not call on Sundays or late at night. All students followed my wishes about when to call or not to call. The phone was used not only to open up communication, but also for educational purposes. Students would text me quick responses to their reading, answers to questions posed in class, and we used the phone once to play a review game. Students would text me their answer to review questions. Since not all students owned a cell phone, all of the texting assignments were optional. The phone just provided another choice for students. When we used texting in class, there would only be one phone per group and the students whose phones we used were given parent permission to send the text messages. Many students expressed that text messaging was their favorite activity because they enjoyed the communication with the teacher. One student even suggested that she would like to use text messaging as a form of reading conferences.

A positive social-emotional classroom environment does not automatically happen. It requires a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to build trust and

relationships with all students, and for students to build trust with each other. With these steps, the two classes in English Language arts found the social nature of learning can occur.

Hidden Curriculum

Hidden curriculum is the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs through rules, structure, and social interactions within a school or classroom. The hidden curriculum also encompasses the nature of teacher-student relationships. It is the *way* in which things are taught that also help to create the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Kelley, 1988).

The first part of the hidden curriculum affecting student participants was the norms of school. One facet of this is how students learn to give an answer that they think the teacher is looking for and this answer may or may not be what they believe to be true. It became clear to me that in order to break this cycle and have my students truly open themselves up as learners, I would have to open myself up as a learner. Often in interviews, I had to probe students to tell me what they really thought. For example, when asked what he enjoys doing after school, one student said, “First I do my homework and then I....” At this point in the interview I stopped him and asked him to tell me what he *enjoys* doing, in which he replied, “I go skating at the community park or skating at a friend’s house” (Alex, BYI). In another example of giving an answer he wanted me to hear, Alex told me his Internet activity consisted mostly of researching new books to read. With further probing, he later retracted this answer and admitted that he “did that last year” (Alex, BYI).

As noted in Chapter 2, Strong (2003) suggested that grades have been used to motivate, control, or manage student behavior. The hidden curriculum of school and the use of grades have restricted students to stay within their comfort zone and not take risks in their learning. Strong (2003) summed up this issue by saying that learning requires risks, taking risks may lead to mistakes, and making mistakes can result in lower grades. I found that the emphasis placed on grades prevented some students from trying new things in this study. For example, Ethan did not want to make a website for his writing assignment because he thought he would “mess up and get a bad grade” (Ethan, MYI). Chloe shared how her parents reward good grades, “That’s how I get what I get - because of my grades. My dad said as long as I keep up the Meets Proficiency and Meets with Excellence” (Chloe, EYI).

The hidden curriculum has taught students about the norms of school. Those that do well at conforming to what the school expects are more successful and those who don’t conform may struggle. For some students, the conforming school comes naturally and they enjoy their experience, however, findings showed that this is not true for all students. My students responded positively to the popular culture curriculum in part because they felt that they had choice and voice. When asked if using popular culture in the curriculum engaged him in learning, Jaxon said, “Yea, because school used to be like you have to do this and that and sometimes you have to do independent work but this year you actually get to do something that you want to do” (Jaxon, EYI). Charlotte had similar feedback, “Looking at the music videos was fun because we get to have entertainment for once in class and we can see it instead of reading it. We could actually see it instead of picturing it in our head” (Charlotte, SAA of Cinepoem).

My reflections helped me to understand the effects of the hidden curriculum in my role as a teacher that may perpetuate unstated values and norms. I realized the overwhelming importance of how the hidden curriculum impacts us when I reflected upon each year of teaching. I began to understand that the hidden curriculum can perpetuate negative behaviors, but it can also perpetuate positive ones. In the memo, which summed up my thoughts, I realized that, “I don’t remember the formal curriculum that I taught each year, I remember the hidden curriculum, the relationships with students and parents, and the interpersonal incidents that happened from day to day” (RJ, February 17, 2009). These memories are the ones to stay with me and can be applied universally in my life. For my students “I want them to remember the way they were treated when they leave me. I want them to have positive memories of norms and values transmitted in the classroom and remember the lessons I taught synonymously - Mostly I want them to remember that school was fun - not boring as so many of them claimed about previous years” (RJ, February 17, 2009).

Results confirmed that a teacher’s awareness of the hidden messages being sent in the classroom could lead to a commitment to change those messages when they are negative for students. In this study, results showed largely positive impacts when the teacher changed her role to a mediator of learning rather than a keeper of knowledge. Hidden curriculum plays an equally important role as the formal curriculum in the development of learners, and it can help build a positive social and emotional classroom environment. In this study, it was clear that students did not feel bound by the conformities of schooling, and this led them to take more risks.

Risk Taking

The current study showed that a positive classroom climate allowed for student risk taking during the learning process, and data showed that feeling confident enough to take risks came from having positive relationships – both among students and between the students and myself. I found it challenging to pull apart the different aspects of a positive social and emotional classroom environment and discuss each separately because I felt that the hidden curriculum, student-teacher relationships, and risk taking are symbiotic, where each depends upon the other.

It became evident to me that students in the two participating language arts classes began to feel lifted from the restraints placed upon them in previous years of school. Some were still reluctant to try new things because of their concern that they would fail, and get poor grades. However, others began to feel confident enough to try new things. Risk taking was evident when students were provided the option to make a website to present information during the Response to Literature assignment. Creating a website was something new and challenging for everyone. For example, Abigail said, “I made a website [for my response to literature]. It was cool because I made my own website and that is what I usually do - go on websites when I have my free time. It was medium hard to make but want to try it again” (Abigail, MYI). When asked why she usually chose Powerpoints as a format for her writing, one student said, “I thought it would be easy but when some people did the websites I looked at it and I thought it would be cooler to do things that I can’t do in PowerPoint. I was kinda scared to do a website. I thought it was really hard, but after seeing others do it I don’t think it is hard anymore” (Emily, MYI).

Not all students decided to take risks and try new things. Some stuck to their comfort zone when given options for presenting their research reports. For example, when asked why he chose to present his Response to Literature writing assignment in a brochure format, Alex responded, “I wanted to do something that I am used to”(Alex, MYI).

Increased levels of student risk taking were contributing factors to the positive social and emotional classroom environment created in this study. Another contributing factor was the teacher awareness that all students learn differently. When educators utilize teaching strategies that tap into students’ various learning styles, all students have the opportunity to feel valued and successful.

Learning Styles

My effort as teacher to honor the fact that all students learn differently was an important part of building a positive social-emotional classroom environment. As with all classrooms, my students’ needs, interests, and learning styles varied greatly. For example, I had a particular student who did not like any type of music at all. He, instead, loved reading fantasy books and watching television. On the other hand, many other students loved music and thoroughly enjoyed any activity we did that involved this medium. In the two classrooms studied where a positive social-emotional environment is established, these differences were accepted and accommodated in a varied, multimodal curriculum

I deliberately used auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning techniques, so that students’ various learning styles, or modalities, were met. For example, visual learners engaged in activities that included drawing. Seven students expressed their favorite part of the research reports was that they got to draw. They chose the ABC Book option or

created a comic strip as a means to present their information (SAA of Report Writing). On the Self and Activity Assessment of Graffiti Boards, 18 different students expressed that their favorite part of the activity was that they got to draw during class time. When asked about their favorite part of the use of the graffiti boards, one student said, “I liked that we could draw creatively and this was the best way to show-off what we know and what we have learned” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Board). Four other visual learners offered the suggestion that they draw scenes from their literature circles as an additional assignment.

Kinesthetic learners engaged in the filming of the public service announcement commercials. Students chose to create iMovies of images, sound, and voice-over to get their message across, or they acted out scenes to create their Public Service Announcement. Two of the ten groups chose to act out their commercials. One student felt the acting was the best part of completing the project, “The acting part [was my favorite] because it was fun and cool” (Anonymous, SAA of Public Service Announcement). Another kinesthetic learner suggested that students act out scenes from the books studied in their literature circles in the final course evaluation.

Auditory learners engaged in group discussions and during the activities that included music – the Poetry and Cinemoem unit, Public Service Announcement assignment and the Literature Circle final assignment of creating a soundtrack for the book. For example, several students expressed that listening to music helped them concentrate and think better when working at school (Anonymous, SAA of Cinemoem; Anonymous, SAA of Soundtrack). Further, on the Final Course Evaluation, seven

students said their favorite part of the course was being able to hear other's thoughts during literature circle book discussions.

Addressing the main research question of what happens when students' interests and experiences with popular culture are incorporated into a Language Arts curriculum, I found there to be a more positive social and emotional classroom environment. This environment was a dynamic entity and it took time to achieve. As discussed above, some of the factors that contributed to such an environment in this study included cooperation and social learning, positive student-teacher relationships, teacher awareness of the hidden curriculum, student risk taking, and curriculum options that met students' learning styles.

Research Sub-Question (a): What are Students' Interests and What Defines these Interests?

Research sub-question (a) asks, "What are 6th grade students' experiences and interests with popular culture? What defines these interests?" This question is addressed with three of the nine themes. Popular Culture Interests and Connections to Schooling describes the many popular culture texts in which students engaged. Ways in which students' interests are defined include their Outside Influences and Gender differences.

Popular Culture Interest and Connections to Schooling

According to the students in this study, popular culture is "what we use in everyday life" (Anonymous, SAA of Cinemoem) and "popular or new things that people like nowadays" (Liam, EYI). From the shows we watch on television to the websites we frequent on the Internet to the music we listen to, popular culture is a part of student lives

n this study. The pleasure students find in popular culture were individually defined yet shaped by outside influences. In this study, data showed that student interests in popular culture varied substantially. For instance, one student liked reading comics, one liked playing Yugio cards, two were into skateboarding, one liked anime, and some said they liked looking at magazines. Hello Kitty was popular among some, and popular clothing trends included high top shoes, DC shoe brand, tight-leg (“skinny”) jeans, and Jansport brand backpacks (RJ, February 4, 2009).

Findings showed that students pursued many interests and media within popular culture, including: computer/internet, cell phones, gaming (including both video games and online games), graffiti, music, photography, television, and the *Twilight* saga by author Stephenie Meyers. As interests were identified, I aimed to integrate these interests into the curriculum for this study.

Computer and Internet

Thirty-eight students reported having a computer at home or access to one via a family member’s home (Interest Survey). Including time spent at school, students reported various amounts of time spent on a computer. Three students said they rarely used the computer, six reported using it for less than an hour per day, 14 reported using it for one to three hours, seven claimed to use a computer for more than three hours, and seven students said the amount of time they spent on the computer varied from day to day.

Students’ reported out-of-school use of the computer varied from school assignments to surfing the Internet. One school related activity completed on the computer at home was the online reading program, Teen Biz. Others involved

researching topics for writing assignments and using the class website. Computer activities not related to school included visiting the following websites: MySpace, YouTube, Maple Story, IMEEM, AOL instant messenger, hotmail, synthasite.com, nickleldoen.com, disneychannel.com, cartoonnetwork.com, and unspecified online games.

Of the sites mentioned above, MySpace and YouTube were the most popular. As will be discussed under “Pleasure: Pushing the Boundaries”, eighteen students had MySpace accounts. Some were more active on their accounts than others, “I go on everyday, sometimes two times- once before school and then for a while after school” (Chloe, FGI). Common activities completed on MySpace included commenting on other people’s posts, instant messaging, looking for “friends” to add, uploading pictures, and editing their profile page.

YouTube was another widely popular website used by students in this study. Use of the site ranged from watching videos (videos by “Ickest” were mentioned often) to filming and uploading their own videos. One student said he posted videos of “me and my friends hanging out doing funny stuff” (Aiden, BYI)

Computers were used as a portal to music as well. The most common way students attained new music was to download it on their computer, sometimes from paid sites such as iTunes and sometimes from free sites. They also listened to sites that allowed for free radio listening and that catered to the listeners’ taste (Pandora Radio for example).

Computer use at school included a variety of activities to connect to students’ popular culture interests and to provide basic access to the Internet and word processing.

Students had access to computers during the ELA rotation time so they could complete their Teen Biz assignment; students had access to computers for word processing and creating PowerPoint presentations, researching topics on the Internet, and creating iMovies and websites.

Many students became more engaged when they were able to use computers for various in-school assignments. When asked how popular culture was integrated into the language arts curriculum, twenty-six students noted the use of the Internet and certain computer programs. When asked if their popular culture interests were met, two quotations help to highlight the integration of technology and computer use, “We got to use technology and technology is my thing” (Anonymous, FE) and “Most of the day I spend time on my computer so this assignment matches my popular culture interests” (Anonymous, SAA of Video Game Plan). Furthermore, fourteen students described access to computers and the Internet in class research reports as the way their popular culture interests were integrated.

Using the iMovie program on the computer, students created three videos during the year (the Cinemoem, Public Service Announcement and one in their Science class). For most students, this was the first time using movie-making program. Five students considered the iMovies their favorite part of the course in the final evaluation. While making the iMovies, the built in camera on the computer became a popular feature for many students. Students used Apple’s program Photo Booth to create photo credits of group members for their iMovies. Six students said this feature was their favorite part of making iMovies (SAA of Cinemoem and SAA of Public Service Announcement). Finally,

getting to “see it all come together” brought a sense of accomplishment when they completed a movie (Anonymous, SAA of Public Service Announcement).

Computers were used in the course curriculum for online book discussions on the class website. Thirty-seven students expressed that being able to go online and use the computer to discuss their book read in their literature circle was pleasurable to them (SAA of Online Book Discussions). By using the blog feature of the website, students had the assignment of responding to a threaded discussion on several occasions. Ten students likened going online to discuss their book to the instant messaging chat feature of MySpace. For example, “It is like MySpace because we get to email and talk to friends but still do work at the same time” and “I love chatting and discussing online and we could actually do it in school! We are always going on MySpace discussing things and now we can discuss a book for reading” (Anonymous, SAA of Online Book Discussions). The threaded discussion component of the website allowed for students to share their voice and opinions on the book they were reading, and it also allowed them to consider other’s point of view. “Seeing other people’s responses” was cited twice and sharing their own point of view was mentioned five times on the Self and Activity Assessment of Online Book Discussions. Other aspects of the class website that students enjoyed were that they could access it while at home (one student), that they got to type responses rather than hand write (four students), that they could design their profile account for the website (three students), and that they got to use the internet for a school assignment (two students) (Anonymous, SAA of Online Book Discussions).

Creating IMovies and visiting the class website were so well received by students that I became aware of the importance of students using the computer to connect to their

popular culture interests in movies and the internet. Creating a website was the next step for the class, and this became an option for students' writing assignment, Response to Literature. Before creating their own website about the work of one author, students needed to spend time studying the genre of websites. Students were attracted to completing the website because of: "getting to finish it at home" (Charlotte, MYI), "creating a website about my favorite books" (Anonymous, SAA of Response to Literature), "having a world wide audience for school work" (Anonymous, SAA of Response to Literature), and "getting to use the computer and internet to complete an assignment" (11 Anonymous students, SAA of Response to Literature).

Students generated new ideas about other uses of computers in class. With all of the time spent on computers, students were well versed in the many possibilities a computer offers. On the Self and Activity Assessment of each project, students were asked how the assignment could be improved and they made several suggestions that included the use of computers. One of these suggestions was that they create the blog post to start a threaded discussion on the class website (two students). Also in relation to the class website and threaded book discussions, one student suggested the students and teacher agree on a set time and use an instant message feature to discuss the books. Students also suggested that the class have a group email to communicate with each other (We did have this feature on the TeenBiz.com program, but not on the class website.) Finally, students suggested that an interactive drawing program be used for the graffiti board activity, such as the Whiteboard application (five Anonymous students, SAA of Graffiti Boards).

Cell Phones

About half (twenty) of the students in this study claimed to have their own cell phone, while three said they had access to use their parent's or sibling's phone. These phones were being used to talk to friends, send text messages, check email and MySpace, take pictures, use the utilities such as the alarm clock and calculator features, play games, and surf the Internet.

Two class assignments utilized cell phones and students had access to my phone number to contact me if needed beyond school hours. The two assignments were well received by students, 19 of them said they enjoyed text messaging me a response to the book used in their literature circle and eight of them said they enjoyed using cell phones and text messaging as a way to review for a test. Various reasons were cited for why they enjoyed the integration of text messaging in the language arts curriculum: texting is easier than writing (six students); texting is easier than talking on the phone to someone (two students); texting is something they enjoy doing outside of school (twenty-eight students), and "texting is really popular with teenagers like us" (Anonymous, SAA of Text Messaging). Other reasons cited included: it was the first time sending a text message (two students); it allowed them to use Pidgin English or texting lingo in school (two students); it is something that is not normally allowed at school (eleven students); and they were more engaged in their learning because of text messaging (four students).

When asked how the assignments using text messaging could be improved, twenty-two students said nothing should be changed. They did, however offer suggestions as to how text messaging could be used for other activities. For example, Ethan suggested that class discussions take place via text messaging (MYI). Chloe's

suggestion led to the use of text messaging their response to a reading assignment, “When we finish a book we can text it to you a summary. It can be in class or from home” (Chloe, MYI).

Although well received by the majority, not all students enjoyed activities that included text messaging. Three students said they did not like the activities because they didn’t have a cell phone. Two others said they had a phone but did not like to send text messages. Although a few students gave feedback of this manner, the positive feedback received on the activities far outnumbered the negative feedback.

Gaming

In this study, gaming refers to both video game consoles and playing online games. On the Interest Survey, 37 of the 40 participants said they play video games for various amounts of time. Some devoted a lot of time to playing the games, “Every hour that isn't consumed by schools. On weekends I play as often as mom lets me. It can be as much as 8-12 hours of playing video games” (Logan, EYI) while others claimed to “barely play” (Scarlet, IS).

When asked about the titles and a description of the games they play, there were a wide variety of responses. However, within this range the same titles were mentioned more than once. Popular games played on video game consoles included Music Games (*Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*); Super Mario Games (*Mario Kart*, *Super Mario Smash Brawl*, *Super Mario Brothers*); *Cooking Mama*; *Wii Carnival*; fighting games (*Call of Duty*, *Halo*, *God of War*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Black*); sports games (*Madden football*, *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*, *NCAA Football*, and *Wii Sports*); *Tetris*; *SpongeBob*; and *Raving Rabbids*. Popular online games mentioned were: Google dress up and cooking games,

Soul Caliber, Maple Story, Thrillville, and IMEEM.com. Evelyn explained the concept behind IMEEMS to me during an interview:

You have different worlds and you can chat with people or meet with people.

You go into a room and can see your Avatar in there and you can move around the room to tag or graffiti. You can watch videos and listen to music on it too (Evelyn, BYI).

Each student can articulate what makes him or her want to play certain games. For example, they want to play: what their friends play, what their parents allow them to play, or what they may be into at the time. Logan, one of the more avid video game players explained his criteria to me during an interview:

The video games I play... most of them have to do with an active story line and I mostly like ones that aren't Teen rated because Mom and Dad won't let me play those anyway. Plus a few months ago I got this Aragon Teen rated one and I never even noticed it was for Teens and it is a lot more violent than the movies or the book (Logan, BYI).

Using video games in the curriculum posed a challenge to me in the sense that I did not own a console. With student input, I developed three assignments that included video games without the need for the console: 1) Analyzing a video game plot when we learned about the literary elements of narrative (done as homework). 2) Studying the genre of the video game brochure and then creating a video game brochure as a way to display your report of information and 3) Turning the plot of a book into a video game using IMovie. Of the three assignments, students found the third to be the most enjoyable. It was in this assignment that my video game fans felt their interests were met,

I liked the video game plan because I like to play video games as much as reading and since the plan was about a book it used both interests. I really liked making my own video game and it was about a book I liked to read (Logan, EYI).

Eleven other students gave similar positive feedback about the assignment, for example, “We play video games all the time and this time we got to make our own while we were learning” (Anonymous, SAA of Video Game Plan). Making their own game was even perceived to be a skill they could apply later in life, “I liked making a video game because when I grow up it will make me rich” (Anonymous, SAA of Video Game Plan).

Graffiti

Although defacing public property is a crime, expressing them selves artistically through graffiti (also known as “tagging”) is something two students admitted to enjoy doing (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Boards). Many other students expressed their interests in drawing when provided the option to illustrate an ABC book for their report of information. This feedback led me to the integration of Graffiti Boards (Serebrin, 2004) to facilitate discussions of their literature circle books. Students use graffiti like font to draw words and symbols to represent the big ideas from their reading. On the final evaluation, eight students expressed that graffiti boards were their favorite activity in the course. Furthermore, eleven students expressed that graffiti boards were their favorite activity related specifically to literature circles, “It was fun writing in graffiti -we got to do something really creative and it showed the character traits and feelings” (Anonymous, FE). Another student said, “It was a cool new way to show your thinking” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Board).

Students created several graffiti boards over the course of time that we studied one book. At the end of the book, they were asked to choose one board their group created, explain their thinking behind the board, and assess their work. Thirty-six students said their work “Meets Proficiency” and gave various reasons why, “I thought outside the box” (four students)...”I had good word choice and showed depth in my thinking”...”the words showed the big ideas of the novel” (thirteen students)... “I used strong words to match the novel” (Anonymous students, SAA of Graffiti Boards). Four students assessed their work as “Working Towards Proficiency” because “we used words from graffiti boards in the past” and “because we don't show enough evidence” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Boards).

On this assessment of their work, students were also asked to assess the activity to help shape the assignment the next time it was used. All but two students said they liked the activity. Of the two that said they did not like it, reasons listed were that it “wasn't really graffiti, it was just words” and because it “didn't use any electronics” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Boards). Reasons for liking the activity included that it was fun (seven students), included drawing (fifteen students), was something new, allowed for creativity (five students), was like tagging (two students), and helped facilitate discussions about their reading (six students).

Actual use of graffiti was a taboo topic in class because of the legal ramifications associated with it. We did not have open discussions about tagging in the community, but did discuss ways graffiti artists could express themselves without defacing public property. Graffiti boards met the needs of two groups of students: those that enjoyed drawing and those who were graffiti artists. When asked if they felt the activity

incorporated their popular culture interests, 24 of them said it did and seven said it did not. Reasons why they felt it did or did not incorporate their interests were similar to the responses when asked if they liked the activity. The following two quotations provided slightly different points of view: “I liked the activity because we were tagging on something educational ” and “It didn’t incorporate my interests because I don't like graffiti because it is bad” (Anonymous, SAA of Graffiti Boards).

Music

When I first thought of the idea of incorporating students’ popular culture interests into a language arts curriculum, I planned on focusing only on music. I had several curricular topics mapped out in my mind (some I had tried the year before with previous students) and figured the rest could be shaped by ideas from the participants in the study. My thoughts were that music was one form of popular culture that attracted everyone, since everyone enjoys listening to some form of music. When the students that became participants in this study entered my classroom, I quickly began to talk about music with them to find out what they liked. I was very surprised when one of my students told me that he didn’t like music. He said he didn’t like to listen to any kind of music, found it distracting, and would often bring ear phones for the car so he did not have to listen to it when his family went places (Logan, BYI). This knowledge quickly changed the course of my study to include all forms of popular culture because I could not justify a study of the incorporation of music alone knowing I would be excluding one of my students.

Having said that, music was very popular among all other students in the study. Their taste in music varied greatly. Their favorite genres of music were rock, R&B,

Hawai‘ian/Local, Reggae, hip-hop, rap, pop, jazz, Christian, heavy metal, and alternative (Interest Survey). When questioned further about their tastes in music, some students were able to give explanations, “I like rap, but they talk too fast and it is hard to understand. I like that it rhymes” (Mason, FGI) and “I like rap songs because they know how you feel and it makes you feel better”(Leah, FGI). Here is what a student had to say about rock music, “I like rock because it makes me free. It helps to take the stress out” (Amelia, FGI). One student explained why some people do not like any of the popular music today, “A lot of people don't like music that is mainstream - they like stuff that is still underground. Just to be different I guess” (Chloe, BYI).

When I was their age, the ways I had to listen to music included radio, Music Television (MTV), or cassettes/compact disks. My students were not limited to these choices. In fact, many of them used none of these options when it came to the device they used to listen to music. Listening to music on the radio was limited to the car and the majority of students listened to music via the computer and/or a portable digital audio devices such as an iPod or MP3 player. On the computer, Imeem and MySpace were popular websites students used to listen to free music. There was one student who said he listened to the radio and compact disks, “I listen to the radio 102.7 “The Bomb.” The last CD I bought was the new one from AC/DC” (Alex, BYI).

Music was incorporated in numerous ways throughout the course, but there were two major assignments that utilized music: the poetry and cinempoem unit and the soundtrack assignment for the literature circles. The poetry unit began as a study of music lyrics to learn about poetic elements and literary language and later evolved into the creation of the cinempoem (Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the assignment).

Students responded well to using music as an entryway for poetry. For most, the idea that music is poetry was something they had not considered previously. Looking at the music lyrics helped them understand some of the literary language that poets use, “Lyrics can help me understand poetry because when you sing the song, you can easily find the rhythm by how you sing it –there are repeating verses of a song that can help you see how poetry can repeat” (Charlotte, MYI).

After studying lyrics, we began to look at music videos to examine how the mood and tone of the song can be portrayed through images, actions, and sound. Students demonstrated an understanding of these concepts after watching the music videos for Jason Miraz’s *I’m Yours* and Paramore’s *Crush, Crush, Crush*. For example, “In the music videos their actions expressed how they felt - like the tone in poems” (Jaxon, MYI). Visual learners also benefited from watching the music videos, “Watching the video was good because instead of listening to it you can say it to yourself and visualize what he is saying” (Ethan, MYI). Two students even said that watching these music videos was their favorite activity for the year (Anonymous, FE). Abigail offered insight to her learning of poetry through music, “I learned that mood and tone are different in different poems” (Abigail, MYI).

After students demonstrated an understanding of how the mood and tone of music are captured through images, actions, and sounds, students were given the assignment to create a music video, using iMovie, to capture the mood and tone of a poem (cinemoem). For many students, the musical aspect of the project was found to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the assignment (fourteen anonymous students, SAA of Cinemoem). From the interviews that followed this project, two big ideas (that were related to music)

surfaced as to why students found the cinempoem project pleasurable: “the project was fun because we got to listen to music” (Chloe, MYI) and “I like the cinempoem the best because we got to bring in our own, modern day, music” (Evelyn, MYI). On the Self and Activity Assessment of the Cinempoem project, six students felt that changing the music would have improved their work.

Considering students’ interest and engagement in their work when music was involved, I created the soundtrack assignment. This assignment was one of three options students had as a way to present the big ideas from their literature circle book and 29 students chose this option. For the assignment, students had to determine ten important events of their novel and choose a song to match the big idea of each event. The songs were compiled on a free online playlist website (www.playlist.com). The lyrics were then printed and deconstructed for meaning, and finally students needed to explain why they chose each song and how it connected to their novel.

On the final course evaluation, three students said the playlist assignment was their favorite of all the literature circle assignments, and six said it was their favorite activity of all the assignments we did during the year. The reasons why students said this was their favorite activity included getting to “listen to songs you like”; “getting to listen to music we normally can’t in school”; “it was fun, interesting, and different”; and being able to “show my knowledge of songs” (Anonymous students, FE and SAA of Soundtrack).

From our poetry unit, students were adept at deconstructing lyrics to songs. This skill helped them find music that matched the big ideas of their novel. For example, “I liked the soundtrack assignment because we got to look for songs, listen for the theme,

and deconstruct the lyrics which helps me better understand the mood, tone, and message of the songs, like poetry” (Anonymous, FE). Another student demonstrated this skill when connecting the Guns and Roses song, *Welcome to the Jungle* to a fighting scene from S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, “We choose *Welcome to the Jungle* for the rumble scene because it is an energetic song and people in fights are full of energy. Also the song talks about fighting” (Claire, Student Work). Listening to and looking at music with a critical eye provided students a pathway to connect their out of school interests to the school curriculum.

This critical eye that students developed for music became an attribute that students felt could have been better utilized to improve their work. Common reasons cited for improvement of their work on the Self and Activity Assessment of the Soundtrack included, “finding songs that matched the theme, mood, and/or tone of the novel better,” “analyzing the songs better,” and providing “better explanation why the song was chosen” (Anonymous, SAA of Soundtrack). One student succinctly stated this new learning, “Thinking about the figurative message of the song instead of literally helped. I made better connections when thinking "outside of the box"” (Anonymous, SAA of Soundtrack).

Throughout the year, feedback on how activities could be improved included the incorporation of music. For example, “correct the grammar in song lyrics as a grammar lesson” (Caden, FGI), “make a music video for the book we are reading” (Anonymous, SAA of Soundtrack), “write our own songs for poetry” (Anonymous, SAA of Cinepoem), and “write a song” to present their report of information (Anonymous, SAA of Report Writing). At times, student feedback was used to shape future assignments during that

school year; other times the feedback was used to revise the curriculum for years to come. It was evident, however, that music was one source of popular culture that many students felt connected to and that fit into our curriculum in many ways.

Photography

Although there were no assignments that were specific to photography nor did any of the Self and Activity Assessments specifically focus on photography, students used photography as part of several assignments that included iMovie. It was also the topic of conversation during a focus group interview and was a commonly cited use of the cell phone.

Fourteen students reported that they enjoyed taking pictures with the camera in their cinemoem project. In relation to photography, one student said, "Finding and taking pictures [was my favorite part] because it's like we were photographers and artists" (Anonymous, SAA of Poetry Unit and Cinemoem). Apple Computer's program, Photo Booth was very popular amongst students. This program was utilized for the credits of their iMovie projects (and was not a program I showed them how to use; they either knew about it previously or found it on the computers and figured it out on their own). Ten students said the part of creating the Public Service Announcement that was most enjoyable to them was taking pictures at the Photo Booth (Anonymous, SAA of Public Service Announcement), and three said the same of the Cinemoem (Anonymous, SAA of Cinemoem).

As discussed under the "Cell Phone" subheading above, students frequently used the camera on their cell phones. Some of the students that used MySpace enjoyed editing pictures using the website Photobucket before putting pictures on their profile page,

“I use the pop art feature. It splits it up into four pictures and they are all colorful and you can add text” (Chloe).

“You can add stickers too” (Abigail).

“And speech bubbles” (Isabella) (FGI).

Photography was an interest of students that I overlooked and did not realize how many students enjoyed taking pictures and doing activities related to photography until I began analyzing the data.

Television

Students in this study reported varied amounts of time per day spent watching television: one student said she watches less than one hour a day; 23 students said they watch one to three hours a day; 13 said they watch more than three hours a day; and three students gave unspecified amounts (e.g. “a lot” and “hours”) (Interest Survey). The Music Television Network (MTV) was a commonly mentioned channel, having a variety of shows aimed at adolescents (*America’s Best Dance Crew*, *Playlists*, *Parental Control*, *Cribs*, *Paris Hilton My New BFF*, *Sex...with Mom and Dad*, and music videos). Disney Channel (*Hannah Montana*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, and *The Suite Life on Deck*); Nickelodeon (*SpongeBob Squarepants*, and *Drake and Josh*); Cartoon Network, *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, sporting events, and *The George Lopez Show* were other popular networks and shows viewed by the students at home.

Logan, an avid television watcher, explained how he negotiates time to watch television with his mother,

I ask mom whether or not I can watch TV... sometimes she says, “yes”
sometimes she says, “do your homework” and sometimes she says, "you’re so

obsessed with that TV." As long as I work hard on my homework afterwards I can strike up a bargain with her. I work as hard as I can on the homework if I have any before *Avatar* and even if I don't finish I can still watch the two episodes and then go back to my homework when then the show is done (Logan, BYI).

Although television played an important role in their out of school lives, there were no major assignments related to television in the curriculum. There were only two minor ways they had an opportunity to experience this interest in the curriculum. The first was to analyze a television show for the elements of fiction as a homework assignment (i.e. character analysis, plot, setting, and theme). The second was examining their favorite movie star's outfit when we compared the theme of a clothing outfit to the theme of a literary work.

Twilight

Twilight became a popular culture icon before my eyes. It began with a few girls reading the book, then many of them watching the movie, and before I knew it there were *Twilight* actors posted all over their notebooks. Students even had *Twilight* backpacks, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and buttons pinned to themselves and belongings. I think one of the reasons it became so popular in my classroom was that I was also a fan of the books and movie. I am sure my influence and connections I made to it while teaching were a motivating factor as to why many of my students read or attempted to read the 400-plus page novels (both males and females).

Twilight was brought into the school curriculum very carefully for two reasons. First, I did not think the third (*Eclipse*) and fourth (*Breaking Dawn*) book in the series were appropriate for school discussions and critique by eleven and twelve year olds, and

secondly I didn't want my own interests to overpower my students' in a curriculum that was being designed to meet their needs and interests. I secured funds to purchase several copies of books one (*Twilight*) and two (*New Moon*) in the series for our classroom library. Students needed to bring in a note from their parents before borrowing these books. After several students had time to read the books, they formed a voluntary book club during lunch. Students brought their lunch back to the classroom and we (students, other sixth grade teachers, and myself) would discuss the book's theme, character traits, plot, symbolism, and comparisons to the movie. My researcher's journal reflect how the decision was made to keep the book club open only to those students who had read the book (and not just watched the movie),

I am debating if I should allow kids who have only seen the movie to be a part of our book club (trying to keep a broadened sense of literacy in mind). Ms. C [my critical friend] thinks we should stick to the ones that have read the book because the movie only scratches the surface. Also, so many of the students are scrambling to go and get the book now to read! I have never seen the kids so excited like this before! (RJ, February 3, 2009).

During other informal conversations, students came in before or after school and our discussions would often lead themselves to *Twilight* or other books in the series. My researcher's journal shared a glimpse of one of these conversations,

The kids are enjoying coming in each morning to talk to me about *Twilight* and I'm enjoying the same...sharing common interest! Chloe said she has read all the books twice. I think she feels empowered to have knowledge that I don't have

(about the *Twilight* books) since I haven't read the whole series yet (RJ, January 30, 2009).

Without being required, *Twilight* found its way into our curriculum in two ways. One way that students were given a choice to write their response to literature paper as an in depth analysis of Stephenie Meyers as an author. To do so they would be required to read four books written by her (Only three students chose this option, I think because they were the only ones to read four of her books). The second way it was integrated into our curriculum was when a group used a *Twilight* theme for their Cinepoem video. The poem the students selected was *Untitled* by Alphra Behn and they interpreted the poem to be about love, which they also identified as one of the themes of *Twilight*. The images and background music for their Cinepoem were pictures and music from the movie. Student A15 explained why the group chose a *Twilight* theme for their cinepoem, "It was the first thing that came to our mind when we thought about the theme of the poem because it was about love and we know that *Twilight* was a love story" (Chloe, MYI).

Students' interests in popular culture varied greatly as one could only expect with a group of 40 eleven and twelve year olds. Outside of school students participated in activities, such as watching television, using the cell phone, using the computer, playing video games, taking pictures, listening to music, and enjoying the *Twilight* saga's popularity. Some students tried to pick activities that made them different from the crowd and others tended to be drawn toward activities that were popular among their friends and family. These outside influences were a significant theme that emerged in the data as explained earlier in this chapter.

Outside Influences

My students were faced daily with influences from others- peer pressure, parental influences, and the feeling that they must think/feel/behave in a certain way because that is what their teacher expects. These outside influences appeared throughout the data in two significant forms not previously noted: parental influences and peer influences.

Parental Influence and Involvement in Popular Culture

From students' viewpoints, the influence some parents had over their children appeared to be greater than others. According to students, some parents participated in popular culture interests similar to those of their child, others objected to their child's interests, and others did not share their child's interest but allowed their child to participate within limits.

With so many students using the website MySpace and clearly being under the required age of the user agreement, a question I frequently asked students was if their parents knew about their use of it. Responses indicated that parents knew about their child's MySpace account. The degree of parental involvement on MySpace did vary, however. For some, parental involvement was the knowledge of their child's account. For these students, when asked if their parents go on the computer and check their accounts, common replies included "No, they trust me" (Grace, Evelyn, Leah; FGI) or "No, but they know I do it" (Addison, Isabella, Abigail, FGI). Some parents monitor their child's account by asking to see their child's profile page, "My parents have to look at the "friend" if they don't know who they are" (Claire, FGI). Other parents monitor their child's account because they also have MySpace accounts and are friends with their

child. A few students said their moms created their MySpace pages for them, i.e., “My mom is on MySpace. She made my MySpace when I was in 2nd grade” (Chloe, FGI).

Participating in popular culture activities was a family event for some students, and for others the time they spent engaged in their popular culture interests was a point of contention between the child and parent. One student reported that his family plays Nintendo’s Wii Sports together (Liam, BYI). Three students said watching television is something done as a family, viewing shows such as *American Idol* and movies together. Some students and their parents shared similar taste in music and for many of these students, it was their parents who “got them into” that type of music (Ethan, FGI). Statements like “my mom likes my kind of music” (Stella, MYI); “Dad and I like the same type of music” (Caden, FGI); and “My parents have more of an influence over the type of music I like than my friends because they like old school reggae, rock, and rap” (Ethan, FGI) were examples of parent and child sharing common taste in music. For those students who did not share similar music tastes as their parents, one cited reason was that parents listened to “Filipino music” (Liam, BYI; Charlotte, FGI; Landen, FGI). Another reason was “parents didn’t understand what the song was about” (Noah, FGI). Because of the number of students saying their parents spoke and listened to Filipino music, I did question Noah further to find out if he meant that his parents did not understand the English language in the song, or just the meaning, and he clarified it is the meaning they don’t understand.

The time some students spent engaged in their popular culture interests, especially related to the computer was a point of contention between parent and child. According to

four students, it was the amount of time being physically inactive that the parent disapproved of the most.

They yell at me that I'm on there too long because I'm not doing anything. They think that I'm only sitting there - doing nothing but I am doing stuff, like watching videos, making videos, going to MySpace, and making backgrounds for people [for MySpace] (Chloe, EYI).

For another student, the amount of time spent was a concern for his parents because of the effects on his eyes:

They don't care how much time I spend as long as I get enough rest for my eyes. They always say to each other how red my eyes are. My mom makes a joke that my eyes are popping out. (Logan, EYI).

Being physically active was a reason why one student felt his parents did not mind the amount of time he spent engaged in his favorite pastime, skateboarding, "I am being active not being a couch potato" (Alex, EYI).

In this study, students reported various levels of parental involvement in their engagement in popular culture. For some students, parents helped to shape their interests and for others, parents' interests were far from their children's. Aside from the influence they felt their parents had, students also reported varying degrees of peer influence.

Peer Influences

Two big ideas emerged within the area of peer influence: the need to fit in and to a lesser degree, the need for individuality. For example, when asked if friends or parents have a bigger influence over the type of music they like, many more students answered

“friends” (FGI). Although she may have liked the same type of music as her friends, one student attributed her tastes in music as anything that was “underground and not mainstream, just to be different” (Chloe, BYI).

The need to fit in and participate in activities that others did was seen across various forms of popular culture. Two students cited the reason for reading *Twilight* was because “everyone had it and was reading it” (Chloe, BYI; Aiden, BYI). Being part of a group that shares common interests even led one student to refer to herself as “we” when I asked her about the type of magazines she enjoyed looking at, “We look at the cover and whatever one has the pictures of the people we like, or whatever we are into is the one we buy” (Olivia, FGI). One student attributed her use of MySpace to the fact that “everybody is on there” (Chloe, BYI).

Students were surrounded by influences – some stronger than others. These influences helped shape their interests and preferences in the type of popular culture in which they engaged. Being aware of the influences they faced and how they chose to participate or not within the different forms of popular culture provided useful information to me in meeting their needs in the classroom.

Gender

Pleasure in popular texts is individually defined. In this study, I found that popular culture interests varied among girls and boys. Not to my surprise, the interests that were most engaging to each gender fell into my stereotypical assumptions about young males and females. For example, girls liked looking at magazine pictures of movie stars and boys liked video games.

Males

Boys' biggest popular culture interest was gaming – both with game consoles (such as Nintendo or Sony's Play Station) and Online. My researcher's journal alluded to the need to find a way to include video games in the curriculum because the boys seemed to be most interested in this. In fact, one boy provided the following feedback, "I wish our teacher would incorporate some other things (important things) we're interested in like video games" (Anonymous male, Quarter 3 Evaluation).

I realized how important video games were to some boys during a focus group interview. As shared by one male student, "I LOVE video games. They are my hobby. They are my sport" (Jaxon, FGI). Games the boys reported playing included war games, Mario Cart and "action" games. Jacob said, "I play first person games where you are shooting, like Halo 3. Most of the games I play have violence" (Jacob, FGI).

Violence in video games came up as the topic of a couple of other conversations as well, "My dad plays violent games and they have cursing" (Owen, FGI). Even their sports games have violence. "I have a baseball game where the players brawl with each other" (Ryan, FGI). One of the most violent video games on the market, Grand Theft Auto was reported being played by Owen. During a focus group interview, student B13M also claimed to play violent video games, "I play shooting games, like *Gods of War*." One student perceived the killing in his video game as not being violent. He said, "I don't play violent games. There is killing but it isn't lifelike – there is no blood" (Logan, FGI). Violence is not only being perpetuated in video games for some boys, but also on television. One boy reported, "We watch movies everyday that has violence and swearing – my Dad tells me not to say them, but I hear them" (Jacob, FGI).

However, not all boys played violent video games, as pointed out by Caleb, “I’m not allowed to play violent video games” (FGI) and “those types of games aren’t important in my life” (Jaxon, FGI). Video games commonly mentioned that are not violent include, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. The following interview with Liam gives insight to some of the gaming habits of a boy in the study:

Me: What types of video games do you play?

Liam: Equal sports and equal adventure games.

Me: What is the Poke’man game you mentioned in your Interest Survey? What is the purpose of the game?

Liam: It is like monsters like you have to tame them and then you challenge them too. It is like the online game I play *Maple Story* (Liam, BYI).

Boys played games on the computer as well. As mentioned above, the game *Maple Story* is one such game. *Maple Story* is a free online role-playing game where players defeat monsters and can interact with other players through online chats, banning together to defeat monsters, trading, or playing other mini-games (retrieved from <http://maplestory.nexon.net/Guide/Intro.aspx> on July 18, 2011).

The average amount of time boys claimed to spend on the computer during the day was about 30 minutes. During that time, they were mostly on the Internet, visiting sites such as YouTube, MySpace, Instant Messenger, and Google. Logan said he went online to watch his favorite television shows that he had missed during the scheduled television airing, to play games, and to visits website mentioned on television such as Disney Channel or Cartoon Network. Contrary to the majority of the students in the other focus group interviews, however, one focus group of three boys claimed that none had a

MySpace account, none uploaded videos to YouTube, and only one reported having email. One boy in this group explained his reasons for not having MySpace, "I can talk to my friends at school, but I do have email. I have Hotmail. I use that for communicating with people just in case like my cousins who live in California" (Liam, FGI). This contrasting information reported by this an all boy focus group could be caused by all members just agreeing with the rest. They talked extensively about video games, but did not appear to be very interested in answering questions about computer use.

The use of cell phones has become the norm for the majority of the population. As cell phone companies began to market the family plan to make it easier for all members to have their own phone, it seemed more and more children got cell phones. However, the majority of boys reported that they did not have a cell phone. Of the few who did have one or have access to one, they reported using it for "an alarm" (Owen, FGI) or "for emergencies, not really to call people" (Landen, FGI).

The majority of the boys in the study were not interested in magazines. For example, "I like to read books - I'm not into magazines" (Liam, MYI) and "Magazines are not something I care about" (Jaxon, SAA of the Theme Reflection). A possible explanation for why boys did not care to look at magazines came from Caden, "I don't really know about actors" (SAA of Theme Reflection). Only two of the boys in the study reported liking magazines. Both of these boys enjoyed skateboarding and said they look at skateboarding magazines to learn new tricks and look at the clothing brands.

Boys' taste in music ranged from Reggae to Pop to Hip Hop. Interestingly, several boys reported liking music by female musicians. For example, "I like Hip Hop but they are mostly girls" (Asher, FGI). One of the boys in a focus group revealed that, "I

like girl songs because I like singing them,” (Jacob) while another student added, “I like Pop, but it is usually a lot of girls’ songs though, like *Paramore*”(Owen). To add to this conversation, a third male said, “I like yelling songs – like *Because of You* by Kelly Clarkson” (Alex). In the genre of rock music, the mention of “yelling” songs reminded the fourth boy of one of his favorite songs, “I like yelling songs too like *Psychosocial* by Slipknot” (Caleb).

During the focus group interviews, I asked students questions about how they thought music lyrics could be used in school. The responses boys gave were different from girls’ responses. Boys noticed the story behind music lyrics, and suggested we categorize music lyrics into different genres (e.g. realistic fiction). They also suggested we use music lyrics as text for grammar lessons (e.g. finding and labeling parts of speech), as text used to practice the reading strategy of making personal connections, as a search for the theme in the lyrics, and to play in the background in order to promote concentration.

Boys’ taste in popular culture varied greatly from those of girls. As a female teacher, I had to constantly be aware of the likes and dislikes of the boys in the class. One male student expressed how having a female teacher did not always benefit boys; “Sometimes it is not good because female teachers do better with female students not boys” (Caden, FE). This quotation became the topic of a journal entry in which I began to reflect upon my actions and how I may have made the boys in the class feel marginalized. It certainly made me more aware of the tools of popular culture I used in the curriculum and I questioned if the boys felt as validated in their interests as the girls.

Females

If I had to provide one word to describe the most popular interest of the girls in this study, it would be *Twilight*. Comments like the following highlight this point, “Twilight is huge”, “I love Twilight”, and “The Twilight saga will always be the BOMB.” In an interview with A15M (one of the biggest *Twilight* fans in the study), she explained what drew her to the saga:

A15M: What draws us to Twilight is the love story

SB: What about the boys in the class?

A15M: I think they are drawn to the vampire- like the Edward version on line [unpublished on Stephenie Meyer’s website, *Midnight Sun*]. That version is boring to me.

Due to the popularity of the *Twilight* saga with the students in this study, I discuss it more in depth later in this chapter.

Like the boys, girls also played video games. A commonly mentioned video game played by girls was Nintendo’s *Cooking Mama*. The following conversation from a focus group interview highlighted an explanation of the game,

Abigail: It’s a game for the [Nintendo] Wii and you just cook and you get points

Me: So do you have a kitchen where you can pick any ingredients?

Abigail: Yea, there is a cookbook and you get points for following the recipes

Chloe: And if it turns out good.

Me: And how do they decide if it turns out good?

Chloe: If you follow the steps correctly.

Isabella: The best one is called “Even better than Mama”. The harder the recipe and the better it turns out the more points you get.

Other games played by the females in the study were *Super Mario Cart* (a racing game), *Super Mario Brawl*, *Ultimate Band*, *Rock Band*, *Guitar Hero*, *Raving Rabbits*, *Brain Age*, *Pixie Hollow*, and *SpongeBob*.

Females in the study reported using the computer for MySpace.com, weeble.com, yahoo.com Gmail.com, Facebook.com, online dress up games (no specific ones mentioned), an online game called “shooting the ball”, Nickelodeon.com, Disney Channel.com, and Teen Biz.com, and one of the girls said she goes online to take care of her virtual pet, Webkins.

Many girls reported either having a cell phone of their own or having access to one. Cell phones were being used for taking pictures, text messaging, sending emails, and checking and updating MySpace. Interestingly, talking on the phone was not mentioned. In an interview one student shared how text messaging is one of her favorite pastimes,

I don’t really watch television because it bores me to just sit there. I normally use the computer a little bit but it hurts the eyes at times, but my cell phone – that is what I use because I text a lot (Evelyn, EYI).

Looking at movie stars and musicians in magazines was a popular pastime of many of the girls in this study. The girls enjoy look at Twilight actors and actresses, the Jonas Brothers, and “Disney Channel stars” (Abigail). When asked if they enjoy looking at the magazine *American Girl*, all but one girl said no for the reason that they do not look at magazines to read articles, they look at them to see pictures of the stars. The following conversation with Charlotte exemplified this point,

Charlotte: I like magazines with posters in them of famous people because they really tell gossip, but some of it isn't true. They just put it there but I think it's mean.

Me: Do you think all of it is mean?

Charlotte: Some of it. Like there is this one gossip that Jo [Jonas] is getting out of the Jonas Brothers but it isn't true, he just wanted to have a second job if the Jonas Brothers fall.

Me: What do you do with the posters from the magazine?

Charlotte: I usually hang them in my room, but I have to take it all down because we are fixing the house.

Me: What posters did you have in your room?

Charlotte: Jonas Brothers. It creeps my mom out when she goes inside, so she doesn't go in much. That's what I like about it.

My researcher's journal documented my observations of the girls during the magazine-theme activity. The room was buzzing with talk about the actors and how attractive they thought some were, "he is so hot" and "I love him." Although they were talking about the male actors, all the pictures they cut out to use in the activity were females. I asked them to find a few men or boys, and they picked out ones that were unknowns to them- none of the actors/musicians that they had all over their notebooks. As my field notes reflected, "I think they must keep those for themselves to hang in their room or put on their notebooks and are not willing to give them up for the class activity!" (RJ, January 30, 2009).

Favorite music genres for the girls in the study include rock, pop, and R & B. During focus group interviews, when girls were asked how they thought music lyrics could be incorporated into the curriculum, answers were different from boys. Where boys noticed the story behind music, girls tended to notice the poetic elements of the lyrics. They also suggested we dissect the lyrics to learn new vocabulary.

Other interests the girls shared had more to do with their social interactions. They liked to talk about the “dramas” in their lives. In her first individual interview, Charlotte shared the following about what she likes to do after school,

Me: What do you do when you are together with your friends?

Charlotte: Usually just talk about things...girly things.

Me: What do you mean by girly things?

Charlotte: Clothes.... And we talk about boys, but not bad things. We talk about what happened at school, like about the drama. Just to say what we think about it.

As mentioned earlier, individuals have their own preferences in popular culture interests. Such interests are individually defined, yet at such an impressionable time in their lives, evidence in this study showed that interests were also gender defined for some. Students of the same gender tended to be drawn to similar likes and dislikes.

Research Sub-Question b: Motivation and Learning

Research sub-question b asked, “Does study of popular culture within a standards-based language arts curriculum impact student motivation and learning?” This sub-question is addressed by presenting data from four themes that emerged from the research: Critical Thinking, Student Empowerment, Formal Curriculum, and Pleasure.

These themes provided data to support the learning that took place in the classroom and the engagement of students during the process.

Critical Thinking

Creating a classroom climate where true learning can take place, where risks are encouraged and differences are celebrated is no small task. These key elements created a classroom climate conducive to critical thinking, which ultimately led to student empowerment. In my classroom, students were taught to be critical thinkers rather than accepting of the status quo. Throughout the year they learned how to analyze and evaluate, and ultimately use this critical perspective with what was presented before them. The results of these practices facilitated connecting student learning to popular culture, and ultimately led to my growth as a teacher, student growth, and self-reflection.

Students learned to be critical and learn to think for themselves through the use of popular culture. This medium served as an entryway that was familiar to them, engaged and motivated them, and led to their growth as critical thinkers. For example, Chloe said, “Popular culture helped me understand what I was learning because it showed me how things relate and how I could use my popular culture interests to learn other things” (Chloe, EYI).

I can recall a pivotal moment in my teaching during the current study when I realized it would be ok to relinquish my perceived need to be the one with all the knowledge. Instead, I learned I could let my students’ expertise take the lead. It was the first time we used the Apple Program, iMovie, and we were making a music video for a poem (the Cinemoem unit). I began the project with the end product in mind, knew what I wanted to teach my students about poetic elements and what benchmarks I needed to

address, and then let them take the lead to complete the project. My researcher's journal captured this sentiment, "I didn't teach them how to do these things- just gave them the resources (CD's, cameras, computers) and the foundation of the literary elements and benchmarks I was addressing. They figured the rest out on their own" (RJ, March 20, 2009). The cinepoem poetry unit was a breakthrough for both students and myself in terms of thinking critically. For me, it was the realization that students could figure out how to use the technology put before them. For students, it was the understanding of the figurative meaning within poetry.

This understanding came when they were asked to critically examine the text in order to capture the mood and tone of the poem through images and music. For example, one student reflected upon how his thinking changed about the meaning of the poem

Sonnet by Christina Rossetti:

When I first read it I thought it was about going on vacation or something but talking with my group about the figurative meaning changed my thinking.

Someone may be sad about you leaving but they would be sadder if you are going forever. Poetry uses words to express what they want you to feel. They try to express their feelings through words. (Jaxon, Student Work: Cinepoem assignment)

Charlotte reflected on her critical analysis of poetry, "I learned that you have to not see what the poem is about, you have to go deeper into what it is really about like in real life" (Charlotte, Student Work: Cinepoem assignment). Furthermore, Chloe shared that, "I learned how hyperbole and personification give more meaning to the poem" (Chloe,

Student Work: Cinemoem Assignment). Another student shared that she felt challenged and as a result was proud of learning how to actually understand poetry,

We kinda learned about poetry back in 4th grade, but then those were kind of easy poems. I learned that you need to be more figurative when you write poems - not actually mean it. And when reading poems, put more feeling in and emotion and try pausing instead of just reading it like a book. I think tone and mood are important to the poem because they express the author's feelings and the words.
(Evelyn, MYI)

Through popular culture, students connected music, which is an integral part of their lives, to poetry that they did not seem to understand before this unit. Ethan appreciated examining the lyrics to a song and then watching the music video,

...Because instead of listening to it you can say it to yourself and visualize what he is saying... I liked looking at music to learn about similes and metaphors - because none of us really usually like poems- we don't read poems but we like to listen to music. It was the music we listen to now (Ethan, MYI).

Another way that we used popular culture to learn about language arts, was by relating the elements of narrative (e.g. characters, plot, setting) to clothing accessories, which helped students connect how story elements contribute to the overall theme of a work in the same way that clothing accessories (e.g. purse, jewelry, makeup, hair) contribute to the overall look a person is trying to attain. One student shared her thoughts on theme as a result of her learning while connecting elements of plot to fashion.

Theme is the reason of the book - it is what the book is trying teach you--the message.... [in the magazine picture] theme is how the person is dressing. This is

the whole theme of what she is trying to wear. And for the book it is how you read it- you can figure out the theme by text clues (Charlotte, MYI).

Students were able to identify a theme of a given work and back up their assumption with specific details from the book. As a class we did an author study on Katherine Paterson and one of the books read was *Bridge to Terabithia*. Students were asked to critically examine the elements of plot to support the theme of the text. Students were able to (1) Critique the text to interpret the theme and (2) Provide evidence from the text to support their assumptions. Two students did exceptionally well in providing text details to support their theme:

Jess was shy and lonely but when he met Leslie he had special someone. When they went to Terabithia, the main setting, Leslie and Jess understood and connected so much to each other. This showed me how special Jess's and Leslie's friendship must've meant. When Leslie died, the main conflict, Jess still hadn't given her up. He would cherish all their happy times and would never leave her side. This is why I think the theme is that friendship is a golden prize and that you can learn from your losses and mistakes. (Chloe, Student Work: Theme reflection)

Madeline also presented a critical analysis of the text and was able to support it with evidence from the text:

My theme is, no matter what happens everything happens for a reason because that's the path of life. Sometimes things happen that you don't want to but you have to learn that's the path of life and good and bad things can happen. An example I'll use is when Leslie died, Jess was really upset at first but then realized

what Leslie had given him, courage. Even though he still misses Leslie, he knows she's in a better place. (Madeline, Student Work: Theme reflection)

Self-reflection upon the learning process and their work is another contributing factor to students becoming critical thinkers. The more they were asked to do this; I began to notice students providing more specific details with their self-assessments. For example, in the SAA of Online book discussions four anonymous students said their work could be improved by thinking deeper instead of at the surface level when responding to the questions. Another student said his work could be improved by "showing higher level thinking" while three other students said that using more support or text evidence for answers would help to improve their work. Students also demonstrated this critical awareness as they assessed their work on the Soundtrack Literature Circle Final project. For example an anonymous student said, "[My work] meets proficiency because the songs connected to each chosen event in the book and the soundtrack and the reflection shows my understanding of the text." Another added, "Thinking about the figurative message of the song instead of the literal message, helped me make better connections when thinking "outside of the box"(Anonymous). A third student added that, "Thinking figuratively on the lyrics and making better connections to the events" would be a way to improve his work (Anonymous). Through self-reflection these students critically examined their own work and showed understanding of the necessary components to meet proficiency or to do what was needed to improve their work.

Self-reflection and connecting new learning to previous experiences and knowledge are two elements that I believe help encourage critical thinking. In a

classroom where students are taught to be critical thinkers and are allowed the freedom to explore, they begin to feel empowered with a new sense of wonder.

Student Empowerment

In this study, student empowerment developed within a positive social-emotional environment. Students had a voice in the curriculum and classroom decisions, choice in their assignments, and at times, more knowledge about popular culture and technology than I did, as their teacher. Fostering student voice in the classroom helped to make students feel validated and empowered.

Voice

I asked for and valued student feedback. Not only did their interests in popular culture help drive the curriculum, their feedback led to adjustments of each activity. They had a voice in the decisions that affected our classroom, and they felt comfortable enough to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions in our learning community.

To help facilitate discussions in the classroom, a community ball was created in the beginning of the year. On the first day of school, the class sat in a circle and passed yarn around the circle while each student took a few minutes to talk about himself. As the speaker was talking, he was winding the yarn into a ball while the person on his right helped hold the yarn and feed it to the person talking. The ball symbolized our community of learners because we were each a part of the ball. The afternoon class added their yarn to the ball created in the first class. From that day on, the ball of yarn was used to facilitate discussions – the holder of the ball had the power to speak. The speaker then chose the person to pass the ball to next.

Students openly voiced their opinions and felt as if their voice mattered within our academic community. For example, one student said the part they valued most in the class was "...that I got to read and discuss and express my thoughts with a group [during Literature Circles]" (Anonymous, FE). Having an audience and real purpose for their work helped to contribute to the idea of having a voice within an academic community as well. For example, on the Self and Activity Assessment of the Public Service Announcement, an anonymous student said he/she liked the activity "because other people can see it and they can learn from it."

Other ways students had voice in the classroom were to give feedback on work completed and to help shape future assignments. Often in interviews, I would run ideas I had by them for upcoming projects and get their input to help develop the curriculum. For example, when asked if there were any other activities she wanted to do in class before the year was over, student A16 F said, "The text messaging one - I want to try something with texting again" (Abigail, MYI). Her feedback gave me the idea for students to send me a text message to respond to a question about the book they were reading in their literature circle. When asked the same question, Charlotte said, "In 5th grade we were supposed to do a commercial advertising our own items - like drinks or like that and make a commercial. I would like to do a commercial on something" (Charlotte, MYI). This feedback helped shape the idea that turned into the Public Service Announcement after writing persuasive research papers.

Students were given a voice on all major decisions within the classroom by voting. Examples of this included change of schedules, order of daily schedule, books they read, and assignment choice (RJ, February 17, 2009). This democratic classroom

environment was one facet that led to student empowerment. Giving them choice was another contributing factor.

Choice

One of the easiest and most efficient ways to help empower students was to give them a choice over their assignments. The options provided to them were all equal in rigor, were all held to the same standards and benchmarks, yet provided different paths to achieve the same goals. The differentiation within assignments allowed for all learners to choose the path that was best suited for him. Often times, students valued having different choices to show what they learned above all else.

For all research papers, students had several options for how they would present their work. A brochure, poster, Alphabet book, or PowerPoint were options given for the first project. Over the course of the year, I tried to include options that met the interests of all learners. For example, students were given the option to turn their research report into the same genre as a video game guidebook. As I learned that students were capable of producing work using technology, even if I didn't necessarily know how, I began to include those types of choices (a website for example). Having the choice of how to present their work was frequently cited as the best part of nearly all activities on the Self and Activity Assessments. Five students cited this as the best part of the Cinepoem activity, 15 cited this for the Technology Report, 17 for the Response to Literature, and 21 students said this about the Religion Report. Without mentioning any particular assignment, six students said in the Final Evaluation that having the option to choose their own format for writing was what they valued the most about the course. Logan had this to say about choice of format for his writing assignments: "I like the choice because

when I get tired of one way, I can choose another way or if I don't want to do it this way today I can do another way” (Logan, FE).

One student perceived an improvement in his writing because of the choice, “I really improved in writing because we got to choose the format to write our paper” (Anonymous, FE). Another felt the choices helped him to better attend to the task, “My work Meets Proficiency because I was able to focus on my paper because the different formats (website, email, etc) helped me to be focused” (Anonymous, FE). Having choice also engaged learners to show what they knew, “Getting to choose the format for our writing piece not just a boring paper. I was inspired to write about what I learned” (Anonymous, FE). And another student expressed he enjoyed the assignment more because the choices were not “so old school like pens and paper” (Anonymous, FE).

Choosing the format for how to present their writing was critical in student empowerment, as was choosing their own topics for writing. As one student pointed out, “I liked that we had choice on what to write and we had choice on how to do it” (Anonymous, FE).

Although I believe that within each genre of writing students should have complete choice over their topic, the need to cover content-area specific topics prevented me from giving them this option. When students wrote an informative report I used Social Studies and Science benchmarks and then gave them a theme from which they could choose their own topic (e.g. World Religions for Social Studies and Technology that Affects our Daily Life for Science). Although they were given a choice, they were not allowed to freely explore and research something that they may truly care about. This point was made clear by one student’s feedback. When asked how the assignment could

be improved he said, “Getting to choose a topic that affected me” (Anonymous, SAA of Report writing).

Our persuasive papers were different. Their only parameters were that they choose a social issue that they cared about and that they wanted to change for the better. This type of choice was well received. One student validated this point, “My topic for persuasive writing is on skateboarding. It is something real people like, instead of researching something the teacher assigns” (Ethan, MYI). Alex shared the same supposition, “It [Poplar Culture] helps me learn because it makes me do better and I like choosing my own topic. I choose something I am good at” (MYI). Similar to Alex, Ethan said, “Using pop culture is interesting. Probably because it was neat to use the Internet and we got to pick our topics for our reports and there was so much information that we didn't know about” (EYI).

Another area that students were given choice was in the reading workshop. After students completed the assignment for the day, there was a 30-minute independent work period. This was the time that I could work with small groups or provide individualized instruction. Students had choice during this time as to what literacy activity they would participate in, such as: independent reading of a book of their choice, listening to books at a listening center, reading articles online, selecting books from our classroom library, or playing reading-based board games. On the Final Evaluation, thirteen students mentioned this time, referred to in the class as “English Language Arts Rotation,” as being their favorite in the course. For example, “ I liked the rotation schedule because we get to do different kinds of things like reading on the carpet, going on the computers for Teen Biz, listening center, and reading in the library” (Anonymous, FE). Another student expressed

that she liked having choice over what she was reading during this time, “I liked independent reading because I could read anything. I would just get lost in my book” (Anonymous, FE).

Although they were offered choice on many aspects of most assignments, students still requested more choice when asked how assignments can be improved. On the Self and Activity Assessment of Graffiti Boards, three students suggested that a way to improve the activity would be to have other choices rather than a graffiti board. Two students gave similar feedback on the Text-Messaging assignment for Literature Circles. On the religion reports, 16 students asked that more options be provided for how they present their report. On the response to literature, two students suggested that they get to choose the author rather than choose from the two options I provided. (The school-directed curriculum uses Katherine Paterson as the author to study in sixth grade. I gave them the additional option of Stephenie Meyers.)

Giving students a voice in the classroom and providing them with choices in curriculum as well as establishing rituals and routines in the class helped to promote a democratic atmosphere and facilitate student empowerment. One particular student’s words sum this up well, “We were able to have the *freedom* to choose a lot of things in the class” (Anonymous, FE).

Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum was based on the Hawai‘i Content and Performance III standards (HCPS III) as required by the state (Retrieved June 2, 2011 from <http://standardstoolkit.k12.hi.us/index.html>). Here, the formal curriculum can be thought of as a product where the behavior objectives, also called standards and benchmarks,

provide a clear idea of the outcomes that then guide curriculum content. Students learned about the formal curriculum while having popular culture and technology as a tool to meet the benchmarks and standards. Data provided in this section is organized according to the three reading standards for sixth grade.

Results from the Hawai‘i State Assessment (the state standardized test used to determine Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act) are provided on three reading standards for students in the two classes participating in the current study. Around the time of this assessment, many of my researcher’s journal entries were centered on the topic of this test. My researcher’s journal on the first day of the Hawai‘i State Assessment (HSA) standardized test highlighted the pressures placed upon teachers and students to pass the test:

I made a motivational iMovie for the kids. It was cheesy, but reminded them how smart they are and that they can do it [pass the test]. I challenged them in the video to be the first class ever at the school that has 100% proficiency. I think motivation does a lot for self-esteem and confidence. As much as I hate the idea of a single test being the sole judge of me as a teacher and of what my students have learned, I am very anxious on how they do. I know they are capable, I just hope they can show the world (RJ, April 7, 2009).

Five other entries of my researcher’s journal centered on the topic of the HSA and pointed to my fears that my students might not perform well because I was not spending time prepping students to take the test. For example,

I just hope what I am doing is enough.... I’m feeling torn between spending time engaged in authentic reading and writing activities versus doing test prep...I keep

wondering if I am doing the right thing instead of the test prep. I know the students are engaged in learning, but is that enough... As much as I am against the idea of a single test determining so much, I still want my kids to do well. (RJ, April 2009).

Scores for the HSA came out in August 2009. My fears were put to rest. Students with the popular culture curriculum exceeded my expectations. They outperformed any other group of students in the school's history. In fact, they showed such a gain in proficiency that our school was named a Hawai'i Distinguished School, and was honored as a National Blue Ribbon School in Washington, D.C. Overall, 91% of the students in the grade met or exceeded proficiency in Reading. These scores showed a gain of 34% (the class was at 57% proficient or exceeding proficiency in grade five). The school's average sixth grade reading scaled score was 333, which was higher than the average score of sixth graders in the complex area (314) and statewide (310). Broken down into subgroups, 96% of the females in the grade were proficient, 95% of the Asian/Pacific Islanders, 87% of the Disadvantaged, and 84% of the males were proficient (School Report, Grade 6 Spring 2009). These students also showed considerable gains on the Mathematics portion of the HSA with 84% of the grade proficient, which was a 36% gain from 5th grade.

The HSA assessed students in grade six on the Reading and Math standards and benchmarks. It served as the standardized summative assessment of the formal curriculum in these areas. The formal curriculum as organized by the Hawai'i Content and Performance III Language Arts Reading standards are described in the next paragraphs. Data from the Hawai'i State Assessment and student responses were used to

highlight students' learning of the formal curriculum. Although the standards for writing and oral communication were a part of the formal curriculum, they were integrated into every assignment; therefore this section on the formal curriculum will specifically address the three reading standards.

Standard 1: Reading: Conventions and Skills

This standard requires students to use their knowledge of the conventions of language and texts to construct meaning within text. Students demonstrated their proficiency in this standard through vocabulary and word study. On the final evaluation of the course, three students mentioned parts of the curriculum that addressed this standard as their favorite in the course. For example, one student said, "I enjoyed Words Their Way and Vocabulary because it helped me learn new words and helped me learn spelling rules"(Anonymous, FE). Another student said, "Vocabulary helped us learn about new words that people use" (Anonymous, FE) while another added, " I enjoyed Words Their Way because we got to learn new words, find out the spelling rule that applied to the words and what it means" (Anonymous, FE).

On the Hawai'i State Assessment, 58% of the 6th grade students met or exceeded proficiency, 40% were near proficiency, and 2% did not meet proficiency for Reading Standard 1: Conventions and Skills. The School Report (Hawai'i Department of Education, Spring 2009) from which these data were extracted defined "near proficiency" as a category that includes students who scored slightly above or below the Meets Proficiency mark. These data compare favorably to the school complex area (38% meets or exceeds, 46% near proficiency, and 16% not meeting) and the state (39% meets or exceeds, 42% near proficiency, and 18% not meeting).

Standard 2: Reading: Reading Comprehension

This standard required students to use a variety of reading strategies to construct meaning from text. To be proficient in this standard, students needed to have an understanding of how text structure and organizational structure determined how a reader extracts meaning. Appropriate reading strategies needed to be used in order to construct meaning and students needed to look for evidence the writer cited to support arguments in the text.

One of the benchmarks for this standard required students to draw and support conclusions about information in the text. In their self-assessments this was an area that many students felt they needed to improve upon. On the Activity and Self Assessment of the online book discussions, ten different students cited the need for more depth in thinking, “I need to show higher level thinking” (Anonymous) or “I need to think deeper about the text” (Anonymous). On the other hand, some students felt this was an area in which they did well. For example, one student claimed, “my work meets proficiency because I made inferences and predictions about the text” (Anonymous, SAA of Online Book Discussions).

Students employed a variety of reading strategies to deconstruct text based on the task and purpose given. When we did a web quest to learn about Katherine Paterson and how her life has impacted her work as an author, students immediately recognized that they were using the reading strategy of determining importance when they researched the topic on the Internet. They had to determine which links seemed important to read based on their specific purpose (RJ, January 15, 2009).

Eighty-four percent of students in the 6th grade met or exceeded proficiency on this standard on the Hawai‘i State Assessment. This compares to 55% meeting or exceeding in the complex area and 50% meeting or exceeding in the state. Twelve percent of students in this study scored near proficiency compared to 25% at the complex area and 25% at the state. Five percent of the students in the study did not meet proficiency on this standard, compared to 20% at the complex area and 25% at the state (School Report, Spring 2009).

Standard 3: Reading: Literary Response and Analysis

This standard required students to respond to literary texts from a range of stances: personal, interpretive, and critical. Taking an interpretive stance, students needed to analyze literary elements to interpret theme. Literary elements that were a part of this standard at sixth grade included stylistic elements (rhyme scheme, rhythm, alliteration), personification, and hyperbole. In a critical stance, students needed to understand how an author’s background was reflected in the literature. Finally, from a personal stance, students needed to make a connection between the development of plot, characters, or setting and self.

The interpretive stance required students to analyze the literary elements presented within the text (setting, characters, plot, and conflict) in order to interpret the theme of a literary text.

In the current study, students were taught skills to master this benchmark by examining their favorite stars in magazines. They were to analyze how the person was dressed in order to interpret a theme for the star’s outfit. They had to support their theme with the clothing accessories worn by the star (e.g. jewelry, hair, shoes, purse). This idea

was later transferred to theme within a literary work where the setting, characters, plot and conflict were like the clothing accessories, and the theme of the outfit was related to the theme of the book. Below is an example of students determining the theme from a magazine picture of the musician Snoop Dog:

Snoop Dog is going for a gangsta theme. We think so because his jersey is Converse and he is wearing baggy pants. Also because of the way his hair is made [in cornrow braids]. The position he is standing in also makes him look fly or stunning.

This exercise translated to an understanding of the theme in *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, “one person can change your entire life” (Mason, Student Work: Theme reflection).

Analysis of text and the theme of a work required an understanding of what the term “theme” meant. As one student stated, “The accessories...setting, plot, character traits...help to build the theme” (Logan, MYI). As hoped for by doing the assignment, students were able to connect the meaning of “theme” to the magazine activity,

Theme is the reason of the book - it is what the book is trying teach you - the message...like how the person is dressing [in the magazine picture] is the whole theme of what she is trying to wear. And in a book it is how you read it- you can see the theme by text clues (Charlotte, MYI).

The assignment to critically explore their popular culture interests in the novel *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyers met with some resistance. I tried to apply aspects of the formal curriculum (character traits in this example) in a lunchtime informal book club conversation I had with students about *Twilight*. According to one girl,

Nobody likes that... [in response to me asking if we could talk about the character traits of *Twilight* characters]. Maybe we could talk about the difference between the movie and the book or discuss your favorite scene.

But just not what we talk about in school (Chloe, MYI).

Although by confession they did not like to apply our formal curriculum topics to the books they read for pleasure, when engaged in a conversation about the characters of *Twilight*, students took an interpretive stance:

I like *Twilight* because I like the plot.... Bella is a round and dynamic character...Edward is dynamic. Before Bella he was static but she caused him to become dynamic.... Alice is flat and static - but she definitely influences the story because she helps when Alex has Bella (Alexis, EYI).

Students were required to take a critical stance when reading the work of Katherine Paterson for an author study. The unit began with a web quest to learn about her life and her work and by the end of the unit of study each student had read three of her books. On the Self and Activity Assessment of the Response to Literature writing assignment, students expressed that getting to know Paterson as a writer helped them to understand her work better.

Through the Cinemoem Unit, students learned about literary language and poetic elements. "They were kind of hard [the poems], but it was a good challenge for us. We learned more about poems and actually how to understand them" (Evelyn, MYI). Ethan showed his understanding of mood and tone when he expressed what he learned during this unit,

From watching the music videos I learned that tone and mood are important to the poem because they express the author's feelings and the words, I don't know how to explain it...they are strong” (Ethan, MYI).

Other evidence I used to assess students’ learning of the formal curriculum included observations. As students were learning the concept of mood, I noted,

The two boys are listening to nature sounds and reading the words to the poem. When they decided upon the nature sound they thought fit, they said they felt it matched the poem. They said they looked at how the words and background music will help to create mood in their poem. (RJ, March 20, 2009).

Understanding, identifying, and interpreting literary language were key concepts in the Cinepoem unit. For example, Chloe shared her thoughts on hyperboles, “I learned about what a hyperbole is and how hyperbole and personification gives more meaning to the poem.” Ethan explained how using music engaged him to learn about literary language,

I liked looking at music to learn about similes and metaphors...because none of us really usually like poems. We don't read poems but we like to listen to music. It was the music we listen to now. My cinepoem was trying to use the new moon as a metaphor to the poem. How it brings a fresh fragrance - that means that it is refreshing to our senses. [In our Cinepoem video] I was stressed out and the new moon made me feel better. (Ethan, MYI).

For reading standard three, 65% of the students in 6th grade met or exceeded proficiency, compared to 44% at the complex area and 41% at the state. Twenty-three percent of the students were near proficiency, compared to 37% at the complex area and

37% at the state. Twelve percent did not meet proficiency, compared to 19% at the complex area and 22% at the state.

The formal curriculum drove assessments and the day-to-day lessons. My purpose in doing this research was to demonstrate that I could address the requirements of the formal curriculum while using a non-traditional approach to teaching and learning, all the while holding my students to high expectations. The data used to support the discussion in this section points to the fact that 91% of the students did achieve the requirements of the formal curriculum.

Pleasure

Popular culture tends to be organized around fun and pleasure. Students expressed pleasure in the curriculum when popular culture was integrated, and they said they were having fun on numerous occasions. When asked what part of the curriculum they would like to change to make it better for future sixth graders, 17 students responded that no change was needed, as exemplified by the following quote: "I would change nothing because I thought your class was super fun and creative. I loved it and I don't want it to change" (Anonymous, FE).

Often though, it is through a relation to pleasure, that popular culture can be associated with in negative ways to poor taste and values, and counter-culture or resistance. The subversive side that can accompany popular culture reflects opposition to dominant ideologies, and, thus, is one reason why many consider it to be the degradation of society (Giroux & Simon, 1989). A defense of popular culture as curriculum in school necessitates a more balanced way of viewing it--its strengths and weaknesses. The two big ideas that are discussed in this section are pleasure and pushing the boundaries.

Often students joined the words “learning” with “fun” when they described the curriculum. Over several assignments, 18 students specifically mentioned that learning was fun. In an example of this point one student said, “I didn't like reading but you got me into it. You made reading fun and enjoyable. Some assignments were new to me and FUN. You made learning FUN!” (Anonymous, FE).

Students were able to find pleasure in the learning process when their popular culture interests were integrated. In this study, students were engaged and enjoyed their learning. An example of this is when a student expressed her opinions on making a video game for her final project on the book read in her literature circle, “I love playing video games and we can learn more because we get to do something we like, and the more we like the activity the more we can learn” (Charlotte, MYI). More than once, students connected high engagement with greater learning. For example, “Because I was more interested in it, it helped me understand it better” (Liam, EYI) and “When using popular culture I pay more attention and learn more stuff” (Evelyn, EYI).

Activities that allowed students to have large chunks of time to work on projects and provided hands-on tasks for them seemed to be the most engaging. These types of activities were well received and cited as being the most pleasurable. Data showed that one of the most engaging assignments for students was creating iMovies. In order to create the iMovie (for the Cinemoem and Public Service Announcement) they had to utilize a variety of tools – laptop computers, cameras (both still shots and video), the Internet, voice recording, and the program Photo Booth. My researcher’s journal reflected my observations during one of these blocks of time; “Kids were really engaged - taking pictures with digital cameras, searching the Internet for clip art and music. Some were

listening to music on CD's while reading the poem to see what matched... they were all in their element!" (RJ, March 17, 2009).

Another part of the course that was commonly mentioned as pleasurable to students was a time during the reading workshop called "ELA rotation" (as discussed in the Empowerment: Choice section). During this time, students had free choice over a variety of activities. Seven different students mentioned that their favorite part of the class was the reading rotation centers because they were fun and they learned from the work centers they were in. Another student added, "I like the ELA rotation because when we finish our work we don't just read."

The greater the pleasure students found in their work, the more engaged they were and the more they learned. There was another aspect of pleasure that I found significant in the data – 11 and 12 year olds found it pleasurable to push the boundaries. By that, I am referring to behaviors or activities that go against the "rules" or norms of school and/or society.

Pushing the Boundaries

Because pleasure was individually defined, what one may find pleasurable may not be so for someone else. This also held true for behaviors that fell outside the norms in school. For instance, one of the activities well received by my students was the use of cell phones in class. Eleven students said they enjoyed using the phone in class to send text messages because it is "not usual for teachers to let us text in class" (Evelyn, MYI) or something they are "NOT supposed to use" in school (Anonymous, FE). Four students cited pleasure attained in texting because they got to use Pidgin English, "We got to use da phone and Pidgin instead of clear English" (Anonymous, SAA Text Messaging).

Many of the things students found pleasure in were in relation to things that they are usually not “supposed” to do in school. Listening to music in class was found to be pleasurable by many students because they “got to listen to music that [they] listen to at home” - which is music they “normally can’t listen to in school because of the lyrics or theme” (Anonymous, FE). A few students admitted that some of the music they enjoyed listening to at home contain lyrics considered inappropriate in school and for their age group. Listening to music with sexually explicit lyrics or inappropriate language could in itself be considered offensive, however these same students said it did not embarrass them if they were around an adult when explicit lyrics were being played (FGI). Another focus group interview revealed that students felt many of the songs they listened to would not be appropriate for school purposes.

Another way students found pleasure in pushing the boundaries was through use of their MySpace accounts. Although not used for school purposes, MySpace was a frequently used form of popular culture. Engaging in these activities contained a definite subversive element since, as one student wrote, they risked a possibility of “involving the police,” (Abigail, FGI). When creating a MySpace account, a user must agree to the terms of use, which say that users must be 13 years of age or older (retrieved on June 6, 2011 from www.myspace.com/help/terms). Although students in this study were between the ages of 11 and 12, eighteen of them had MySpace accounts (Interest Survey). All students that had a MySpace account said they made their page private (meaning only friends can view their page). As an additional precaution to not get “busted,” four of them said that they do not use their real name because “you have to be a certain age and what if they call the police” (Abigail; FGI).

For these students, pushing the boundaries and behaving outside the norms of schooling were clearly pleasurable. Sometimes these behaviors were subversive in that they openly were breaking rules (such as the MySpace example). In other cases, the pleasure was derived just from the feeling of going against what they have been previously told not to do. Watching violent television and playing violent video games brought pleasure to some of the boys in the study. Saying swear words when their parents tell them not to (Jacob, FGI), being open about sexual attraction to the opposite sex, “I like his tight shirt that shows off his body” (Charlotte, SAA of Theme Activity) or admitting to using spray paint to graffiti (Anonymous, SAA Graffiti Boards) are other examples of pleasure found in pushing the boundaries of society.

Research sub-question (b), *What is the impact on student motivation and achievement*, was addressed with data from four main themes. Students were highly motivated and enjoyed the curriculum that integrated their popular culture interests as was explained by “Pleasure.” However, beyond being motivated, students showed high academic achievement (Formal Curriculum) that came through a developing critical eye (Critical Thinking). With their academic success and voice in the curriculum, students became empowered (Student Empowerment). The final research question explores the impact on the teacher when engaged in action research and reflective teaching.

Research Sub-Question (c): What is the Impact on the Teacher?

Research sub-question (c) asked, “What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?” To address this question data will be presented on the theme, Transforming Practice. This theme

chronicles my evolving practice and beliefs as well as the empowerment I felt as students succeeded in the curriculum.

Transforming Practice

I lived and breathed this curriculum. I reflected on my teaching and students' learning and made adjustments, then reflected again. For that process, I became a better teacher and I transformed my practice. The theme of Transforming Practice explores two big ideas: teacher empowerment and teacher evolution. Transforming practice required a shift in thinking from teaching to learning. This evolution of thought falls into step with Dewey's ideas of a democratic classroom. In the process of conducting and analyzing results of this study, my teaching and pedagogical practices became more student centered, and more prone to operate on constructivist principles.

Teacher Empowerment

My own teacher empowerment was evident in the confidence to make changes as I saw fit within my classroom. I acknowledged that I had a good understanding of the content and curriculum and could justify the decisions to make changes. I had a strong foundation of knowledge and beliefs about what constituted good teaching, or teaching that led to student success. I felt that the changes I was making to my schedule and curriculum still fell within these parameters. For example,

I have been going on my instinct - going off what I feel my students need and are interested in. For example, I haven't been following the true "workshop" model all year. Nor are Ms. C [my partner teacher] and I doing the directive to focus on test preparation on Wednesdays and forgo our regular schedule. I'm not doing it

because I don't agree with the idea and secondly I would like to think that good teaching will be enough - that we don't need to spend countless hours on strategies to solve multiple choice questions unless the questions have a bigger purpose. (RJ, March 20, 2009)

Having the support of a partner teacher [also my critical friend] with whom I shared a similar philosophy of teaching and learning was a big contributor that led to an increased sense of competence and confidence. It was empowering to know that if I were to make changes to my curriculum or question decisions that affected us, I would have someone that “goes against the grain” with me (RJ, February 17, 2009). This idea was also exemplified in my researcher’s journal,

Just having someone to bounce ideas off of - whether it is about curriculum or discipline - is such an underrated practice in teaching. After talking it over with her I don't feel bound by what "outsiders" to my classroom tell me to do with my instructional time. I do what I think would be best for my students (RJ, February 17, 2009).

As confidence in my teaching skills grew, so did my sense of empowerment. This research made me become a student of teaching. Reflecting upon my work and upon my students’ learning forced me to be critical about my daily practice, “I think I've improved dramatically from my beginnings as a teacher (like most do). But I even feel as if I've improved from last year” (RJ, February 17, 2009). I learned it was okay to let my students explore areas that I didn’t hold all the answers to. I first realized this when we did the cinempoem projects and worked with iMovie. This was a situation where they took the lead and I became the guide on the side. I learned from them. I can still recall my

realization of this and recall how empowered I felt. I let go of the reins and the kids were still learning. I knew at that moment that I had crossed a threshold in my career. I was empowered and more importantly, my students were empowered. I knew that if I carefully set up the learning community and provided my students with the scaffolding needed, they would soar.

The feeling of empowerment came from success. I had justification to make decisions for what was best for the learners in my classroom. My classroom became a place for a cognitive shift. Students' needs were placed above all else and students' interests guided me. I evolved as a teacher. And these decisions were validated in the 6th graders' high scores on the HSA standardized tests that year, as well as in many other ways.

Teacher Evolution

An evolution occurred within my practice. However, before a discussion of where I am after the study, there needs to be an explanation of where I came from, as reported in my researcher journal.

My first year of teaching was at Aloha Elementary School in 1st grade. I did the best that I could - staying late everyday and working at night even longer. I did whatever was told to me by the school. I don't remember any lessons that I taught or if my students learned anything. I do remember the name of every student in the class though.

My second year teaching was 2nd grade with the same class (I looped). What I remember from this year are my students. I remember their names and can

still recognize most them when I see them as high school students. I don't remember the curriculum or know if my students learned.

My third year of teaching was in Kindergarten. I remember many little incidents involving four and five year old children...the field trips, singing songs, and how much kindergartners cry for the first weeks of school. I do not remember any specific lessons. I survived this year - at the end I thought it was pretty easy...once we got over all that crying and not knowing how to stand in line or hold scissors (these kids are my 6th graders in this study).

For my fourth year of teaching I was back in 2nd grade. I held parent workshops teaching the parents about reading comprehension strategies - I assume I taught my students the same but do not remember! I still do not remember teaching specific lessons! I remember all the names of my students- they were my 6th graders the first year I taught sixth grade.

In the fifth through seventh years of my career I was the school Literacy Coach. I was a part of the school leadership team and learned a lot about how the school works (politically and logistically). I also learned about how the whole system worked - going to workshops galore. I helped to plan, coordinate, and deliver professional development for the school. I missed the connection with kids.

My eighth and ninth year were back to the classroom for a complete and much desired change - 6th grade English Language Arts. Although it was a new grade and curriculum, I was really excited to try working with older students. I finally felt I found my niche. I was so intent on trying out all the things I had been

"preaching" for the past three years. I was determined to make the workshop models work and prove that it could be done and was the best way of teaching kids - I felt I had to do this.

Now here I am in the second year of teaching sixth grade. Getting back to the classroom was probably the best career choice I have ever made - if I would have stayed out then moved on to other positions I would have always been a mediocre teacher - without enough experience with kids to grow as a teacher. I am not trying to prove anything to anyone anymore, except to my students (RJ, February 17, 2009).

I share this lengthy piece of my researcher's journal that trace nine years of teaching because the common theme that arose was that students were what I remembered the most from each year of teaching. The ending of this reflection is an example of the transformation of my practice, "I have learned that it shouldn't matter what your colleagues think of you - it should matter what your students think of you" (RJ, February 17, 2009).

I have always valued having positive relationships with my students, but learning to value their opinions was a transformation for me. What they thought of me and if they thought I was meeting their needs became an important piece of feedback that was greatly valued. At the end of the year, I asked students to provide a grade for me as their teacher (anonymously) on the final evaluation. As I read over their comments, I realized it was not the grade they gave me that I valued the most, it was their reasoning for the grade. Comments that I found to be the most enlightening or entertaining include:

You taught us everything we need to know in ELA and pushed us farther... You were a fun but strict teacher... You made learning fun for us... You taught us well and you were very patient with us... You did great with all the teaching and assignments but did we have to have homework... You were always there for us and you took your own time helping us... You are kind... You taught me what I needed to learn but you got cranky sometimes... You make us laugh... We worked real hard throughout the school year... You were a good teacher putting some sense into your students' minds... You worked hard and encouraged us... Even though you had some mistakes you still tried your best.

Transforming my practice was a result of the empowerment I felt and the evolution of my pedagogical approach to be student centered. I have always claimed to be a student-centered teacher, but I am not sure if I ever really was before embarking on this research. I came away from this study with confidence in myself as a teacher but more importantly confidence in the power of a student centered classroom.

The final sub-question of this study examined the impact that this process would have on me- the teacher in the classroom. Data showed that as the students were successful, I became empowered as a teacher. My sense of empowerment also came through the process of reflecting upon my teaching and having colleagues (my critical friends) with whom I shared the same philosophy of teaching. Finally, teaching practices were transformed to become student centered as my beliefs about teaching merged with practice.

Summary and Conclusion

The information presented in this chapter came from a variety of sources. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, from an analysis of the data, nine main themes emerged. These themes were organized and presented under the research question in which they addressed. Data revealed that the main research question of *what happens when students' popular culture interests are integrated into the school curriculum* led to a strong Social-Emotional Classroom Environment, in which student motivation and academic achievement were enhanced. This climate took into account the responsive nature of a student-centered curriculum and led to strong student teacher relationships. Students began to take risks and free themselves of the negative effects of a hidden curriculum as their various learning styles were met through cooperative and social learning.

Sub-question (a) explored my students' various interests in popular culture and what defined these interests. Data revealed students' interests were shaped by both parental and peer influences as well as by gender. Student interests in popular culture texts ranged from television to video games to *Twilight* to the various uses of the cell phone and computers. Research sub-question (c) investigated the impact of incorporating popular culture into the school curriculum on student motivation and achievement. Data demonstrated students' use of critical thinking, sense of empowerment, success in the formal curriculum, and a priority of pleasure.

Finally, the impact of a curriculum that incorporates students' popular culture interests on me, their teacher and primary investigator, was explored in research sub-question (c). Data affirmed a transformation of my teaching practice through

empowerment and self-reflection. The information presented in this chapter will be used as a basis for discussion to interpret the findings for the research question and sub-questions in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine what would happen when sixth grade students' popular culture interests were integrated into their language arts curriculum, specifically examining what shapes the various interests of 11 and 12 year old students and looking at the impact on motivation and academic achievement. Mostly though, I wanted to know if I could make these changes while still being accountable for state standards and benchmarks, standardized state testing, and other mandates imposed on curriculum.

I also wanted to know what the impact would be on me when students' interests in popular culture were integrated into the curriculum. This topic was important to investigate because students' needs and interests are always changing as are the skills needed to be literate. What it means to be literate in today's society requires problem solving and critical thinking that can transfer across multiple text forms. I wanted to know if students would be able to meet these demands while engaging in their popular culture interests while simultaneously addressing a formal curriculum. The results from the Hawai'i State Assessment, as discussed in Chapter 4 suggested that it was possible. The specific question and sub-questions that guided me in the research process included:

What happens when students' interests and experiences with popular cultural are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?

- a. What are 6th grade students' experiences and interests with popular culture?

What defines these interests?

- b. Does study of popular culture within a standards-based language arts

curriculum impact student motivation and learning?

- e. What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?

Chapter 5 presents the theoretical implications of the findings in terms of the research questions, which is followed by a discussion on the theory that emerged from this study. Next, implications for practice are presented to describe how the findings can be applied to the field of education. Finally, recommendations for research are presented to provide direction to future studies in this area.

Theoretical Implications

This section presents discussion and interpretation of each research question and sub question organized around the nine themes presented in Chapter 4. A summary of each theme is interwoven with the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 2.

Research Question: What happens when?

The main question framing this research asked, “What happens when students’ interests and experiences with popular culture and 21st Century Literacies are incorporated into a sixth grade classroom curriculum?” Looking at the big picture, the answer to this question is that, overall, students were successful in their learning and found pleasure in it. Data showed there was a positive classroom environment due to the nature of the teacher-student and student-student relationships. The curriculum was transformative, students were empowered, and I became a better teacher. This conclusion is elaborated upon and supported with the findings from the study as they are addressed

under the subsequent sub-questions. However, in order to understand how these results occurred, a description of the classroom climate is offered.

Describing life in a classroom is a complex matter. Phillip Jackson (1968) suggested that teachers engage in nearly 1000 interpersonal interactions on any given day in a classroom. Trying to capture and describe all of these interactions as well as the ones between students is nearly impossible. In Chapter 4, information was presented about the social and emotional classroom environment to describe the life of the classroom under study. The climate of the classroom was a direct result of the research. I can say from my experience as a teacher that I had not achieved such a positive, caring, and trusting classroom environment previously.

Social-Emotional Classroom Environment. The environment in which this study took place had all of the components of a successful classroom. Students took risks in their learning. They took risks because they felt safe, honored and valued; shared positive, caring relationships with their peers and teacher, were validated within the curriculum as their learning styles were met, and reaped the benefits of social and cooperative learning. This environment was a place where the traditional conformities of school, maintained through a hidden curriculum, were brought to the surface and challenged.

The middle-school aged students in this study thrived academically, and socialization was a part of our everyday work. According to a sociocultural view of learning, higher order thinking functions develop from social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In this classroom, socialization was encouraged to co-create knowledge and solidify new learning. The resulting climate was one where students were engaged, took

an active role in the learning process, and found pleasure in doing so. In this environment, students learned from one another; learned with each other; and also contributed to their classmates' learning. Provided with opportunities to "bounce ideas off each other," a learning cycle developed in which students emulated dynamic and varying roles (Anonymous, SAA of Poetry Unit and Cinemoem). During the course of one day or a single work period they moved from learner to teacher and back to learner. This evolution of roles from the 'more knowledgeable other' to the novice and back helped them internalize new knowledge and move through their Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). As all learners contributed to the academic task, knowledge was co-constructed in a social context. The process by which students internalized new knowledge from their social interactions supported the validity in the social learning theory.

Dewey's (1938; 1998) principle of interaction explained that students must learn to work together because isolation does not prepare students for real world experiences. Collaboration in the classroom can help students problem solve within a group setting, while students learn the norms of how to work together. However, in today's digital society, collaboration is not limited to face-to-face contact. Applying the same codes of behavior as one would to a face-to-face situation, students valued experiences with interactions via academic social networking (i.e. individual and group accountability, respect everyone's opinions and form a consensus when problems arise). Some of the online programs (TeenBiz.com, class website, etc.) we used in the curriculum helped provide this opportunity for students. Another benefit of academic social networking

within the curriculum was that it extended learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day and classroom walls.

The social aspect of our learning environment forged trusting relationships. Building trusting relationships required all parties to be open to the other. I always felt it important that I know my students and their families, but I knew the students in this study like none before. I invested time in their personal lives and opened up my life to them. Because we invested time in building relationships, within the classroom community mutual respect was evident. We operated on democratic principles and re-defined the traditional student-teacher relationship.

Green (1998) concurred that the traditional roles and relationship between student and teacher must shift when there is an inclusion of popular culture in the curriculum. Here, a teacher may take on the role of a learner (as highlighted in my Researcher's Journal regarding the Cinemoem project in Chapter 4) or that of a guide (e.g. the *Twilight* book club discussions). Without this balance of a teacher's role, students may default to the teacher's viewpoint or perceived right answer when asked to critique the popular culture text in which they find pleasure, as my students did in the beginning of the study. The hidden curriculum of school taught students to give the answers that they thought the teacher wanted to hear. However, as time was invested in relationships, students slowly freed themselves from saying what they thought I wanted to hear and allowed their honest opinions and responses to be unveiled.

From the hidden curriculum of school students learned that taking risks could lead to mistakes and mistakes can lead to failure (Strong, 2003). School and society places an importance on grades. Grades are what labels for learning and are the reporting

mechanism on how students are meeting the expectations placed before them. Initially, this “grade factor” prevented some students from taking risks in their learning. Over time, as trust in our relationship grew and trust in the academic community of our classroom grew, confidence began to emerge for students as they realized that taking risks is a healthy part of learning. Promoting an emancipatory approach (Gay, 2000) to learning, where thinking was valued over a single truth, helped go against this negative effect of the hidden curriculum. I found that a classroom where there is a positive social-emotional environment, is a classroom where students will take risks.

The hidden curriculum can be perpetuated in a positive light when teachers create environments where the overall climate in the classroom allows for and encourages risks, values relationships, practices democratic principles, and promotes thinking rather than offering a single right answer. When the norms and values transmitted in the English language arts classrooms studied were based on these recommendations, and all members were honored and accepted for their individuality and voice, the hidden curriculum left a lasting, positive effect on students.

Through a variety of pedagogical approaches, students’ various learning styles were met. John-Steiner’s (1996) concept of cognitive pluralism supports teaching across various learning styles. Individual learners make meaning through a variety of tools and in order to best serve all learners, new information needs to be presented in different formats that span the various learning styles of students. Being responsive to students’ learning styles is an important consideration in comprehensive teaching (Gay, 2000). Knowing the whole child allows for teachers to tailor instruction to students’ intellectual, social, emotional, and political domains of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

The main research question of *what happens when...* has been addressed by providing contextual information about the classroom environment. The three sub-questions discussed next address specific aspects of the inclusion of popular culture – identifying students’ popular culture interests and what defines these interests, student motivation and learning, and the impact on the teacher when popular culture is integrated into a formal school curriculum.

Research Sub-Question (a): Experiences with Popular Culture

Popular Culture Interests and Connections to Schooling. Dewey (1998) believed continual observation of childhood’s interests is the entryway into the child’s life. Furthermore, the theories framing this study promote validating and building a curriculum upon prior knowledge in order to promote learning (i.e. Schema Theory, Anderson, R.C. 1977; Funds of Knowledge Theory, Gonzales et al. 2005; Third Space Theory, Moje et al. 2004; Discourse Theory, Gee 1990; and Culturally Responsive Education, Gay 2000). In designing a student-centered curriculum, one that took a constructivist approach and built upon the students that it served, learning about students’ interests in popular culture was necessary. Through observations, conversations, interviews, and surveys I found the following Funds of Knowledge (Gonzales et al.) to be the most commonly shared popular culture interests: computer/internet, cell phones, gaming, graffiti, music, photography, television, and the *Twilight* book and movie. Because these interests emerged as the most popular, they were the ones primarily I chose to integrate within the formal curriculum. I also found that these interests are shaped and defined by students’ gender and outside influences (i.e. parental and peer influences; the need to fit in versus the need for individuality).

Gee's (1990) Discourse theory explains how students that shared common interests (e.g. boys and video games or girls and *Twilight*) shared common social practices related to that interest. By learning about the particular Discourse groups my students belonged, I was able to teach to the Third Space (Moje et al. 2004). The integration of popular culture Discourses and the formal curriculum merged to create a "third space."

Literature on the topic of popular culture within the context of school has often warned that the risk exists of ruining the pleasures students associate with their out-of-school interests (Buckingham, 1998; Grace, 2002). Proponents of this argument have advised that students may not be receptive to bringing in something that is reserved as their out-of-school pleasure to become part of a formal school curriculum. This fact was observed and noted in the *Twilight* book club discussion about character traits. In order to integrate popular culture with a formal curriculum, interests needed to be validated without being appropriated. Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams (2001) suggested teachers' in-depth observations of students' uses of popular culture texts as a part of their literacy repertoires to help negate this situation. Not only did I need to learn students' interests, I also needed to see the literacy practices related within. For example, since I could not physically bring video games into the classroom, I needed to relate the literacy practices my students engaged in when they played these games to the formal curriculum. In order for students to create a video game to match the plot in the book reading in their literature circle, they had to examine the thinking skills required in the genre of video games. They identified and were able to apply to their own video game the skills of problem solving and deductive reasoning.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Alvermann et al (1999) outlined four approaches to the inclusion of popular culture into a school curriculum. These approaches range from teachers emitting the ideology that popular culture is detrimental, to an approach that is a balance between acknowledging the pleasures attained in popular culture while engaging students in a cognitive learning experience. I attempted to take the latter approach in which students' popular culture interests were validated, the pleasures these texts produced for students were acknowledged, multiple readings produced from the texts were elicited, and a critical analysis of them was required. The first two aspects of this approach, addressing their prior knowledge of and pleasures attained from popular culture, came easily and were met with every form of popular culture with which students engaged. The challenge came in consistently addressing the second two aspects – addressing the multiple readings students produced from the popular culture texts and asking students to engage in a critical analysis of them. Examples in the curriculum where students were challenged to give multiple readings of a particular popular culture text and then look at this text with a critical eye included the examination of music lyrics and music videos for the poetry and Cinemoem unit; examining magazine pictures and the clothing styles of their favorite Hollywood actors and actresses; and the literary elements (characters, symbolism, theme, etc) from the *Twilight* books and movie.

An area that I did not adequately address, as it surfaced during interviews, was the boys' experiences with, perceptions of, and critique of violence in video games. Given the opportunity to develop a critical consciousness of their popular culture texts can translate to critical thinking in other aspects of school and life. The pleasures they

attained from these violent video games were acknowledged, but asking students to critique this violence was left undone.

A common argument against the use of popular culture within a school curriculum is that it is not really a culture, but rather based on consumerism. Students' interests in *Twilight* became an area that forced me to closely examine this argument. With the growing popularity of the series, stores began to sell *Twilight* backpacks, clothes, pins, posters, and dolls of the characters. Students in this study participated in the commodity aspect of *Twilight*, purchasing many of the previously mentioned items. Fiske (1989) proposed that these products are more than a commodity produced by marketers. In light of his argument, the *Twilight* clothing items my students wore served as a cultural resource. The girls who wore these clothes or purchased the *Twilight* products were signifying their membership in a sub-culture. These girls did not like *Twilight* because the products were in the stores; they bought the products because they already identified with the sub-culture of *Twilight*. Suggesting that these students were dupes of marketing techniques underestimates their ability of critical analysis. Buckingham (1998) concurred that children are more aware of marketing ploys and techniques than we often give them credit for. The sub-culture of *Twilight* that developed among the students emerged from within them, not as a result of the marketing of products. Their peers may have influenced their interests in *Twilight*, but the sub-culture created still came from the people that enjoyed this genre.

Outside Influences. In the process of collecting data for this study, I learned from and about my students. I learned their academic needs through a variety of assessments and through individual conferences and observations, just as I have done with all my

students in the past. Notwithstanding, I had a much more comprehensive picture of the students in this study. I knew them for the “whole child,” for who they were. Part of learning about the personal side of my students meant learning about the influences in their lives, and two of these influential groups of people were their parents and their peers.

Parental influence and involvement in students’ popular culture interests varied from having many of the same parent-child interests to parents not being involved or “not understanding” their interests (Noah, FGI). For those that shared common interests with their parents it was generally with the parent of the same sex as themselves, i.e. girls and their mothers or boys and their fathers. Musical interests and MySpace were the two common ways parents connected to their children. The biggest point of contention between parent and child fell with the amount of time students spent engaged in their popular culture interests. This argument occurred when parent and child had different perceptions of how productive the time was that was spent engaged with popular culture interests (e.g. and not physically active). Students reported that their parents disapproved of the amount of time they were “doing nothing” (Chloe, EYI); while students felt they were in fact being productive (editing photos, designing their MySpace pages, chatting, etc...).

In a review of the relevant literature, Chaplin and John (2110) point out that being involved in children’s lives, encouraging autonomy, and providing acceptance and support are some of the important elements of effective parenting. Further, they claim that emotionally supportive parent-child relationships encourage children to “identify with their parents and to adopt their attitudes, values, and role expectations” (p. 177).

Drawing from this literature, one could deduce that students who shared similar popular culture interests with their parents had emotionally supportive relationships that led to the child identifying with their parents' interests. Be that as it may, I am not implying that other parents weren't supportive (e.g. students who claimed parents "don't understand" or are not involved). These parents may have acted based on the negative attention aimed toward television viewing or the concerns about Internet safety. They likely felt they were being effective parents—and protecting their child. In this study, the view provided to me was only one-sided—the students' perspective. Parents were not interviewed and may have reported completely different answers or explanations for their reasoning.

Finding more affinities with their peers, students were often influenced by the preferences of their friends. Although this influence was stronger than the reported parental influence for most, these students were in a constant battle between fitting in with the crowd and being an individual. This internal conflict students faced is common for middle school aged students. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP, 2001), children going through normal stages of development struggle with sense of identity, and their peer group influences their interests and clothing styles.

In keeping with the literature on the subject, student interests in popular culture were shaped by the influences of their family and friends, yet balanced with a need for individuality. Although each student preferred particular popular culture interests to others, there were some common ones that bound these students in shared pursuits. The next theme, "Gender" explored another factor that shaped and defined students' interests in popular culture.

Gender. As previously discussed, students belonged to a variety of Discourse (Gee, 1990) groups in relation to their popular culture interests. The data also showed that within some of these Discourse groups, there were gender specific Discourses. Both boys and girls were similarly interested in many forms of popular culture: music, Internet use, television, and gaming were the common ones. However, the sites visited on the Internet, television shows watched, and types of games played did differ between sexes. The Discourse group that most commonly spanned across gender was music. Genres that boys and girls enjoyed listening to include: Reggae, Hip-Hop, Pop, and Rock.

Although tastes in musical genres were similar across both genders, males and females did have some contrasting interests in their use of other popular culture texts. Most of these differing interests fell into common stereotypes about each gender. Boys gravitated toward action-oriented popular culture interests whereas girls were inclined to participate in more interpersonal activities. The majority of boys favored gaming and the ones boys enjoyed playing were mostly centered on action and violence. Boys freely talked about playing popular games that receive attention as being violent (such as *Grand Theft Auto*) in their focus group interviews, almost as if bragging to their peers. However, of the few that said they did not play violent games, speaking up to admit that fact in front of their peers was not an issue. Girls also shared an interest in gaming habits, however the games they played were mostly concentrated on domestic activities (e.g. cooking, caring for pets, dressing up) and socialization. Girls were less likely in focus group interviews to go against what the majority said. For girls, a common gesture was to agree with the crowd or remain silent. Some games that were consistently popular between both genders included: *Mario Cart* racing, *Rock Band*, and *Guitar Hero*.

Both males and females used the Internet. Outside of gaming, however boys' use declined in comparison to that of the girls. YouTube was popular amongst both genders as was MySpace. When it came to the use of MySpace, however, the girls visited the site more often than boys and also spent more time "designing" their page than their male counterparts. There was also a notable difference in the amount of parent involvement/monitoring of students' use of the site. Boys all gave responses like, "My parents trust me" or something similar when asked if their parents monitor their MySpace use. While many girls also gave the same response, of the students that did say their parents monitor their MySpace use, it was exclusive to girls. This difference could be attributed to girls using the site more often than boys, thus catching the attention and awareness of their parents. Another factor contributing to why parents of girls monitor their daughter's MySpace accounts and not those of boys could be the effects of media. More often than boys, the news reports girls falling victim to online predators. Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, and Ybarra (2008) substantiated this claim in their review of the existing literature on the topic. However, they did argue that posting personal information on sites such as MySpace did not increase one's risk to become victim to an online predator. Rather, they identified engaging in interactive sites where the victim and perpetrator can have direct contact that increase risk, such as talking online about sex to unknown people.

Girl's use of the Internet mostly centered on socialization. From chat rooms and instant messaging, to email and MySpace, girls were primarily looking to socialize. This need for socialization drove their interests in the Internet, magazines, use of cell phones, and with each other. "Talking story" is a colloquial term used in Hawai'i to describe

casual conversations or gossiping. Meaning basically the same thing, “talking drama” was one of the favorite past-times of girls when they were physically together, on the phone, or chatting online. Topics of their conversations would be about people (famous and people they know), “dramas” in their lives and in the lives of the stars, and fashion trends.

Gender differences do exist with the use of popular culture. There have been many debates and much research conducted to determine the extent of this difference, the cause of it, and what exactly these differences are. The way in which these differences impact education and the work of teachers can have a profound effect, depending on how they are handled. As a female teacher, I found it easier to relate to the interests of the girls than of the boys. Gaining knowledge about the interests of the opposite sex can help a teacher know the learner and understand the whole learner. I found this fact to be true when it came to learning about the different video games on the market in order to relate better to my male students. Simply relating examples from video games to the formal curriculum being taught helped to engage the boys, just as relating examples from *Twilight* engaged the girls.

Research Sub-Question (b): Motivation and Learning

This question asked, “Is there an impact on student motivation and achievement when popular culture interests are integrated into the school curriculum?” Dewey (1998) advocated that interests are an important motivational factor to learning. One could deduce then that motivation to learn new things came from being interested in what is being learned (i.e. intrinsically motivated). Having a positive social and emotional classroom environment, as discussed previously, was the foundation for student success.

Built upon that foundation came the cornerstone of learning: curriculum that is connected to students' lives and interests and presented in a way that real world application is foreseen. To address the impact of this curriculum on student motivation and learning, the formal aspects of the curriculum are discussed as well as the critical thinking that students demonstrated, the resulting empowerment of the students, and the pleasures they took in the process. These areas will be tied to the theoretical framework of the study. Finally, emerging theory that came from the data will be presented to address the research sub-question.

Formal Curriculum. Currently, the United States Department of Education, as well as the Hawai'i Department of Education, operates on a product-based curriculum. Standards and benchmarks outline the requirements for student learning in each subject area within each grade level. Students' attainment of the formal curriculum is evaluated based on the results of the Hawai'i State Assessment (HSA), other formal assessments as deemed by the school (e.g. Developmental Reading Assessment, Teen Biz, or Pearson's Learnia test), and on teacher assigned grades (e.g. ME –Meets with Excellence, MP- Meets Proficiency, DP- Developing Proficiency, WB- Well Below Proficiency). The standards and benchmarks that drove the formal curriculum during this study were the Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards III (HCPS III).

In Chapter 4, data were presented on the three reading standards for grade six. These three standards outlined specific benchmarks for the areas of: Conventions and Skills; Reading Comprehension; and Literary Response and Analysis. Overall reading data from the HSA was provided as well as strand (standard) specific data. Supporting the HSA data were examples from student work and Self and Activity Assessments.

During the time of this study, 91% of the sixth grade population met proficiency on the HSA, showing a 34% gain from the previous year. These results coincide with Hobbs and Frost's (2003) findings that a media-literacy curriculum can lead students to higher reading comprehension scores (for a summary see National Council of Teachers of English, 2005). All but four of the students in the grade level demonstrated mastery of the formal curriculum, showing gains from their previous years in school as well as previous sixth grade students. These are likely influenced by their participation in an engaging curriculum where critical thinking was at the center.

The formal reading curriculum outlined thinking skills students needed to master in order to navigate text. The term "text" as used in the reading standards is exemplified in terms of written (print) text, such as literary works or non-fiction. However, the word "text" in the curriculum in this study also applied to the tools of popular culture (e.g. magazines, music videos, websites, and video games). Teaching to the Third Space (Moje et al, 2004) with the incorporation of popular culture into the formal curriculum, students appeared to develop intermediality skills (Pailliotet, et al 2000), meaning they developed skills to critically and actively read and construct meaning from a variety of texts, while writing through multiple media forms. These skills were exemplified in their critical readings of music lyrics and videos before creating their own Cinemoem. Because thinking was stressed over the gratification of "the right answer," students learned how to apply a critical eye to anything placed before them, including, it appears, their HSA assessments.

Critical Thinking. Ira Shor conceived critical consciousness as habits of thought that go beneath the surface to understand the deeper meaning (1992). In the curriculum in

the current study, the Third Space (Moje et al, 2004) was taught to when popular culture was used as a familiar entryway to achieve a critical consciousness. For example, students learned about how to determine the theme of a literary work by examining Hollywood stars in magazines, and they learned about how mood and tone are created in poetry by analyzing music videos. In these examples, students learned to analyze and evaluate what was presented before them with a critical perspective and then apply this captious eye to the formal curriculum.

Critical thinkers are self-reflective (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2009). Students in this study practiced self-assessment and reflection after each assignment on the Self and Activity Assessments. Initially, their judgments were at a surface level, providing feedback such as, “I think I could have done better” (Anonymous, Self and Activity Assessment of Technology Report). Over time, though they began to critically examine their work as was evident through later comments (i.e. “My word choice showed depth in my thinking”, Anonymous Student, Self and Activity Assessment of Graffiti Boards). Their growing abilities in metacognition signified they were gaining a critical eye.

According to Carico, Logan, and Labbo (2004, for a summary see National Council of Teachers of English, 2005) online literature discussions can foster student engagement and provide opportunities for students to develop metacognitive capacities. Students can reflect upon their own thinking when provided with transcripts of the online conversation or by reading their blog entry at a later time. This opportunity for further metacognitive awareness was overlooked during the implementation of the curriculum. Although students did have opportunities to participate in online book discussions by

using our class website, and they may have re-read their entries for self-reflection, they were not required to do so.

Proponents of culturally responsive education call for a curriculum that is emancipatory, where there is no single version of the truth (Gay, 2000). In an emancipatory curriculum, students learn that thinking is valued over a correct answer. In our classroom, responses like “explain your thinking” or “tell my why” were common phrases, rather than “correct.” When students were taught to think, and asked to explain their thinking they appeared to learn the qualities of a democratic, critical citizen.

Proponents of the incorporation of popular culture into the school curriculum have pointed out that it can lead to critical thinking when done in a way that balances the pleasures attained and a critical analysis of it (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001). In addition, when students produce their own popular culture texts they are often demonstrating critical thinking. What may seem as if they are mindlessly imitating popular culture may be their own critical take on the subject (Buckingham, 1998; Grace, 2005). Curriculum assignments that allowed for students to create their own popular culture texts such as making iMovies and creating websites provided opportunities for students to problem solve and use critical thinking, as they needed to plan, produce, and evaluate their media.

The critical thinkers this curriculum produced learned to take an active stance by asking questions and analyzing what was before them. As students applied these skills to their overall learning of the formal curriculum the success they experienced gave them a sense of empowerment.

Student Empowerment. Empowerment came from having a positive social-emotional environment, voice in the curriculum and classroom decisions, and choice in assignments. Students' voice was heard as popular culture interests were integrated, their feedback was solicited to help shape future assignments, and the decisions affecting the classroom came about through a democratic process. Students made choices about the format of their writing; in essence they had different paths to get to the same destination. When provided with choices, students perceived improvement in their work, were more engaged, and reported they could concentrate more on the task at hand. The freedom students experienced in the classroom appeared to contribute to their sense of empowerment.

Students developed voice by having an audience for their work. When they deemed their work had purpose and audience, they were motivated toward success. Although they had an audience in their peers, others at the school, and their parents, there was a need for a more global audience. The class website provided this opportunity as did the students' creation of their own website and playlist. In reflecting upon the idea of audience, I think more opportunities should have been available to students to broadly share. In the future, I will aim to provide opportunity for students to air their Public Service Announcements and Cinemoems on Olelo (Hawai'i Public Access Television). Giving students a real world audience for their work, to the extent this happened in the study, gave them ownership and pride in what they were publishing, as research on the topic has proposed (Levy, 2008). Having this sense of accomplishment and knowing their voice was heard contributed to their empowerment.

Giroux and Simon (1989) have argued that the incorporation of popular culture into school curriculum goes beyond motivating students to learn. Instead they say it allows students to define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture, which ultimately leads to empowerment. The students in this study were empowered to make decisions that affected them and knew they had a voice in their education. As one student said, they had *freedom*.

Pleasure. When students found pleasure in school, they were more motivated to learn and in this study, students often used the word “fun” to describe the curriculum activities. Having choices in their assignments brought them pleasure, as did having their popular culture interests integrated into the curriculum. The pleasure they found in the curriculum became synonymous with engagement and students began to equate their high engagement with the next steps of learning.

Goldberg (et al., 2003, for a summary see NCTE, 2005) found that students who use computers when writing are not only more engaged and motivated in their writing, but also produce written work that is of high quality. The findings from this study concurred with Goldberg’s results. Quality of work improved for all students when they were provided with choices as to how they would present information (e.g. PowerPoint, website, email, etc). Students were more engaged in their writing when they got to choose the format, and more often than not, the format they chose made use of the computer.

Students also found pleasure in things that pushed the boundaries, meaning behaviors or activities that went against the norm or rules of school. Examples of pleasure attained from pushing the boundaries of school were the use of cell phones for

school purposes, listening to “their” music in class to make a playlist, and some of the controversial topics they chose for their Public Service Announcement (e.g. anti-abortion and same sex marriage). Pleasures attained in activities simply because they were perceived to be something they were “NOT supposed to use in school” (Anonymous, Final Evaluation) can be explained with Bakhtin’s (1968) notion of the carnival.

The pleasure one finds in the subversive side of popular culture is likened to a carnival where the norms of society are forgone while obscenity and degradation are accepted. Just like a carnival, popular culture finds significance in resistance and subversion (Lambirth, 2003). Aligned with this literature on the subversive side of popular culture, my students found pleasure in things that pushed boundaries of school and also those of society with some of their out-of-school activities. Outside of school, this occurred in violent video games and television shows, and in their use of MySpace when they knew the user agreement of the site required one to be 13 years of age.

Other literature on the subversive side of popular culture has explained how different activities can provoke different levels of pleasure. *Jouissance* (bliss) is a heightened state of extreme pleasure and is related to evading dominant ideology. Occurring more often and with less intense pleasure than *jouissance*, *plaisir* (pleasure) is the enjoyment of a more socially accepted experience (Barthes, 1975). Students experienced both types of pleasure in this study. An example where students experienced *jouissance* was when they listened to *their* music on *their* iPods while creating the playlist to match a book or when they played video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* at home. Examples of *plaisir* that students experienced would be creating their profiles on the class

website, having online book discussions, or taking photos with Photo Booth for their iMovie credits.

Pleasure in popular culture is individually defined (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001), so I had to be careful to include a variety of texts and interests. Relating everything to *Twilight* may have suited the girls in the class, but it was not until I found ways to integrate video games and movie making that the boys' pleasures were validated. Because popular culture is based on one's pleasure, it was no surprise that students enjoyed a curriculum where pleasure was validated and at times critiqued. From the literature, it was expected and the results pointed to the fact that the pleasure students found in this curriculum led to greater levels of motivation and learning.

Research Sub-Question (c): Impact on Teacher

Transforming Practice. Research sub-question c asked, "What is the impact of integrating popular culture into a standards-based curriculum on the teacher/researcher?" The answer to this question is that I became a better teacher. Through systematic reflection, this happened with increased confidence in practice and led to empowerment. Through this empowerment came an evolution of my pedagogical approach. I shifted my belief system to value my students' opinions, voices, and input above all others. My students were at the center of the curriculum. Every lesson taught and decision made in the classroom was done with the input from my students. Classroom practices were founded in a constructivist, student-centered approach. In essence, the impact on me paralleled those of my students.

Two big ideas emerged in the transformation of my teaching practices: teacher empowerment and teacher evolution. A contributing factor to my empowerment as a

teacher was having the support of my critical friends/co-workers (the 6th grade Math/Science teacher and Special Education inclusion teacher with whom I shared students). We shared the same philosophy of teaching and learning which gave me confidence to know the changes made in my classroom (to schedules and curriculum) were founded in a constructivist approach. Having them as my critical friends not only validated my teaching practice, but also helped to validate the research. As Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) propose, the use of a critical friend helps the researcher come to new levels of understanding by questioning the researcher's thoughts and preconceived notions. My critical friends served as critical colleagues in my teaching and critical friends in the research.

Literature on the subject of the role of a teacher in a constructivist classroom has proposed that the teacher be a guide for students as they build their own learning, rather than the holder of all knowledge (Dewey, 1916; Morgan, 1998). Reading and believing this philosophy are at a basic level, however truly living this aspect of a constructivist approach is another. I became more empowered as a teacher when my students were successful in learning opportunities where they took the lead. I clearly recall the moment this happened – during the Cinemoem project as described in Chapter 4. My students were empowered because they were able to apply their digital literacy knowledge (downloading music, editing photos, etc. to create the IMovie). Through their empowerment and success, came my empowerment. Student test scores on the Hawai'i State Assessment further validated the benefits of this approach to teaching.

Systematic reflection upon my teaching also served as a tool for empowerment. The act of reflecting as a part of my researcher role became an integral part of my

practice as a teacher, with the two working together harmoniously. As presented in Chapter 3, some of the benefits associated with critical reflective teaching include having a strong philosophy of teaching, having a more democratic classroom, and discovering teacher voice (Brookfield, 1995). Reflection helped me internalize and align my teaching practices with my beliefs; the metacognition helped me value student input, thus functioning in a democratic manner, and empowered me with a strong voice. This alignment between theory and practice aligns with the Third Space theory (Moje et al, 2004), where the third space represented a student-centered pedagogy centered on students' popular culture interests.

With empowerment, came an evolution in my teaching practices. I came to value my students voice over others. My researcher's journal shed light on the importance I placed on relationships with students from my beginnings as a teacher, however the change occurred when the curriculum became student centered. Rogers (1983) has described a student centered approach as one in which there is a climate of trust; a participatory mode of decision-making; self esteem and confidence are built as student achieve results in which they consider worthwhile and thus appreciate; and students are excited in the intellectual and emotional discoveries made with new learning. In this study (and classroom), each of the qualities applies as discussed in previous sections (Social-Emotional Classroom Environment, Student Empowerment, Formal Curriculum, and Pleasure respectively).

The impact this research had on me as a teacher was two-fold. I became more empowered and transformed my practices. My beliefs and practices aligned to facilitate a constructivist approach and created a democratic classroom environment. A cognitive

shift occurred in my realization that thinking skills and knowing how to access knowledge are more important than specific content. I became a better teacher and as a result my students achieved great success.

This discussion has been presented in order to demonstrate how the theoretical framework was connected to the findings. For some findings, results aligned with what may have been expected based on the literature and for others, areas where I could have made changes based on the recommendations in the literature became evident. Next, the findings of the study will be addressed in practical terms. An explanation of how these results can be applied to the broader field of education will be presented.

Emergent Theory

The results obtained here align with existing sociocultural, constructivist, and culturally responsive theories. The positive social and emotional classroom environment that was achieved in this situation came through a concerted effort to change the nature of relationships to be one where all members of the classroom (including the teacher) were learners. With this change in power relations, came a sense of trust in the democratic principles the class was structured upon. I found that a classroom where there is a positive social-emotional environment, is a classroom where students will take risks.

Getting to know each student holistically allowed for a more positive social and emotional classroom environment and provided direction for the integration of popular culture into the formal school curriculum. The responsive nature to student's Funds of Knowledge (Gonzales et al, 2005) allowed a merging of their informal Discourses (Gee, 1990) with the school curriculum to reach the Third Space (Moje et al, 2004). Taking the time to know students for more than their academic ability helps to build the "thick,

multi-stranded” relationships that Gonzales et al (2005) report are the types students have with their family. These multi-faceted relationships contrast to the typical student-teacher “thin, single-stranded” ones seen in school and can serve as a powerful springboard to a curriculum where both students and teachers are empowered from the other.

This study has shown that when a positive social-emotional and democratic classroom environment is developed, students’ out-of-school funds of knowledge can be integrated within a standards-based curriculum in a third space where both student and teacher learning and empowerment is fostered. The results obtained demonstrate that a standards-based curriculum can be addressed while incorporating students' out-of-school interests. When students are actively engaged in meaningful and relevant learning the need for extensive "test prep" to meet AYP is decreased. At the same time, teacher empowerment and professionalism is enhanced,

There was a parallel between the impact this curriculum had on my students and on the impact the study had on me. We both learned to take risks, learned to think critically about what was placed before us, found pleasure in pushing boundaries of society (or the system in my case i.e. making changes as I saw fit in my classroom even if they were not aligned exactly with school expectations), and most importantly we became empowered. Before this study, I was the type of teacher that felt confined by a product-based, test-stressed curriculum and now I am a teacher that knows that my beliefs about teaching and learning can be upheld in standards-based education, and that students can and will respond favorably to a curriculum in which they have a voice.

Effective pedagogy that produces critical thinkers comes through teacher empowerment rather than teacher compliance. In this study, empowerment and

transformation of teacher practice occurred through having a democratic classroom, knowing students holistically, the integration of popular interests, teaching to the third space, empowering students, implementing best practices (i.e. adjusting pedagogy and content as needed), and encouraging as well as taking risks.

Practical Implications

Aligning theory and practice is key in promoting quality education. As previously discussed, the theoretical implications of this study were presented, however, a discussion on how this translates into practice is imperative. The need to translate theory to practice will be presented for audiences of lawmakers, schools/school districts, and teachers.

Lawmakers

The past decade has brought about significant changes to the field of education with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Law (2002). Curriculum models are based on a product view, where standards and benchmarks provide a clear idea of the outcomes so that content can be organized around the objectives. With this law, schools must have ever-increasing percentages of students pass standardized achievement tests until the year 2014 when 100% of the student body must achieve proficiency. With such high-stakes placed on the performance on these standards and benchmarks, the voice of the individual learner and teacher are taken away. Educators and schools are judged by whether or not “pre-specified” changes occurred according to the behavioral objectives (Smith, 1996 & 2000).

During the time that lapsed between conducting this research and presenting the information, more legislation that has impacted education was passed – federal funding

behind the Race to the Top initiative. Four pillars uphold this initiative and are used as criteria to determine if states are awarded the federal funding:

1. Adoption of the Common Core State Standards
2. Building data systems that measure student growth
3. A plan to recruit and retain effective teachers and principals in areas that are in need the most
4. A plan to turn around low achieving schools

(<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop>)

The initiative is still in the beginning phases of roll-out with only a handful of states slated to receive funding (Hawai‘i’s proposal was approved, but pending based on negotiations between the state and teachers’ union).

The area of this initiative that has currently received the most attention in Hawai‘i’s public schools is the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). On their website, it is stressed that the CCSS were not a national curriculum because the federal government had no part of their creation; standards are a states- led effort (<http://www.corestandards.org>). However, in order to receive the federal monies attached to Race to the Top, states were required to adopt these common standards. The standards lay out requirements for English Language Arts, literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, and mathematical thinking. They are based on “rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order thinking skills” (Retrieved July 22, 2011 from <http://www.corestandards.org>).

The website further states that,

States that adopt the standards may choose to work together to

develop instructional materials and curricula. As states join together ... publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards.

It is with this statement and the section on the site titled “Publisher Criteria” that I am concerned. Having nation-wide standards that are common across states can help in developing rigorous curriculum across the country. However, publishers are in the business to make money and schools/states that are sanctioned for not meeting Annual Yearly Progress (as a part of the NCLB law) are forced into curriculum and programs as part of their mandates. I am very skeptical of a national initiative that encourages publishers to mass-produce curriculum, schools to purchase curriculum from approved lists, and teacher and student voices to be silenced.

Other indicators that the Common Core State Standards could involve nation-wide adoption of the same curriculum are the list of book titles in the section titled, “Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality, and Range of Student Reading” (with grade level bands – e.g. 6-8, 9-10, 11-12). This list of book titles could be problematic in that it could pigeonhole school/school districts to add these texts as mandatory parts of curriculum. Furthermore, the books on this list all fall within traditional literature, none of which take into account local and popular literature of today or popular culture texts.

The adoption of Common Core State Standards and a common assessment nationwide certainly has pros and cons. Taken that the standards present thinking skills as applied to each content area and do not specify content, I see value in having common expectations and rigor. However, if these standards are the first stepping-stone to mandated curriculum nation-wide, I worry.

If we want a curriculum that our students can relate to, then there can be no national curriculum. This research set out to prove that a standards-based curriculum could be addressed while incorporating students' funds of knowledge from popular culture (Moll et al, 2005). Curriculum needs to be student centered and the development of such necessitates giving schools, districts, and individual teachers the freedom to design and tailor curriculum that validates the lives and experiences of the students it serves.

Having a data system that measures student growth is the second pillar of Race to the Top, and it is here that lawmakers are urged to amend the NCLB law. I propose, as many others before me, that Adequate Yearly Progress be determined on a growth model, not on meeting a set proficiency. The ineffective policy that over-emphasizes testing does not support practices that promote student learning and school improvement. In the accountability model, schools that are showing growth should not be forced into choosing curriculum or programs off mandated lists rather left to continue their efforts of improvement. It is with this change in policy that a curriculum integrated with student interests can occur. I believe this is one way to prevent the spread of a national curriculum.

I would also like to call for a comprehensive literacy policy that endorses the many texts with which students engage. Schools have been using tools of technology for years, but may fail to fully integrate the multi-media texts of the 21st Century. By redefining and changing the beliefs that written text is the only acceptable form of literacy, we are better meeting the needs of our students. A curriculum that includes popular culture or media literacy is not a new idea, however a shift in thinking that these are integral

components of any literacy curriculum rather than separate or something you “do” as a unit of study is not as widely accepted.

The CCSS can be an asset to our educational system, providing equity in expectations and rigor across the country. However, I believe this holds true as long as the standards within this initiative lay out critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and concepts rather than specific content knowledge. A learner that can analyze and critique what is placed before them (in any content or context) and draw their own conclusions is the type of student this study showed successful. With these foundational skills laid out, the specific content and curriculum should be left up to the people that know the students best – at the local level.

Schools and/or School Districts

Although I am a proponent of having common expectations for all students, it must be remembered that there are multiple paths to take to get to the same outcome. During a time of accountability, many schools face sanctions under NCLB to overhaul school curriculum and programs. I would like to urge schools to use caution in selecting curriculum that seems to have a “one-size-fits-all-approach” or claims to produce tremendous growth. Textbooks and programs do not teach students – teachers do. Teachers need the autonomy and flexibility to tailor and design curriculum to serve the needs of the students it serves.

Prescribed, scripted curriculum cannot and does not serve the needs of students in promoting 21st Century learners. How can a teacher be expected to teach students about critical thinking and problem solving when she is not allowed to demonstrate these skills herself? Mandated curriculum content can teach isolated skills and strategies, but without

the broader context in which the skill/strategy was taught students will fail to transfer this knowledge. There needs to be a connection to their interests, to the real world, and the content needs to be engaging to the learners. Students can learn to become critical thinkers in a curriculum that uses popular culture, if done so in a manner that is emancipatory.

I was fortunate enough to have freedom within my curriculum. I had guidelines (the HCPS III), but there was no prescribed textbook or novel to be “covered” (Even the traditionally prescribed America’s Choice Author Study on Katherine Paterson was negotiable. It is the thinking skills behind the author study that was to be stressed rather than the specific books). I had no script to follow and had freedom to integrate students’ interests and experiences into the curriculum in a way that honored and engaged them while providing opportunities to problem solve, critically analyze and reflect, and produce text. They were successful in this curriculum, being held to the accountability model of NCLB.

A second recommendation I offer is to enable teachers to become empowered. Informed decision making on all aspects of the curriculum and running of the school should be guided by teacher input. If teachers are expected to operate on democratic principles in the classroom, they should be experience them in their professional lives and communities as well.

Teachers

This study taught me a lot about teaching through reflective practices. I learned about my students and myself as I reflected upon my interactions with students and my pedagogical approach. One of the biggest foundational factors of this study was that I knew my students. By knowing my students, they flourished. This suggests the benefits

when teachers make the effort to know about students both academically and in their out-of-school lives. However, I learned to be aware that what one student finds pleasurable, another might not. This is why knowing each student can help in planning curriculum in which all are honored.

Sometimes these interests may not fit one's idea of "what's proper" or what is acceptable in school, but I realized through this study that my commitment and responsibility is not to police student interests or silence their voice; it is to help them develop a critical eye towards anything put before them – whether that be a literary novel or the video game *Grand Theft Auto*.

Secondly, students need to feel as if the work they do in school has a larger purpose and audience. Motivation increases when they are engaged in the learning process and know that someone other than their teacher will see what they produce. Collaborative approaches to problem solving and having a global audience are key components of 21st Century literacy practices. Technology and popular culture served as vehicles that promoted the collaboration and global audience. However, at times the "red tape" of the system and my own fears as a teacher stopped me from allowing this to happen.

Something I believed in but experienced first hand after the fact was that taking time to do "test prep" wastes valuable learning time. I believe we should prepare our students for standardized tests by teaching them the genre of a standardized test format, but the idea of taking weeks away from regular instruction to "test prep" is not needed. As a teacher in a Title 1 school that must work very hard and still barely passes state set proficiency scores, I understand the fears teachers have with this suggestion. My

researcher's journal reflected the fears that I was doing my students a disservice by not spending time doing traditional "test prep." I did not spend time doing this in the curriculum with these students.

If we teach our students to have a critical eye on any form of text placed before them, we are in fact doing "test prep" already. My students had daily practice in analyzing, critiquing, evaluating, and synthesizing what was placed before them. We did not need to spend countless hours practicing multiple-choice questions or constructed response questions that were not related to our daily work in the curriculum to prepare for the Hawai'i State Assessment.

Curriculum Changes. Knowing what I know now, there are areas of the curriculum that I would change when implementing in the future. However, I do caution that the curriculum should not be implemented exactly as was done here because the philosophical beliefs it is founded on are that student interests drive the curriculum. If done with similar students in a similar setting, I would incorporate photography more, have students write/produce their own song during a poetry unit or use a poem they wrote to create a cinempoem, analyze violence in video games, and use mobile devices to create learning opportunities such as podcasts.

The suggestions I have made for teachers from my experiences in this study are aligned to the National Council of Teacher's of English 2011 Education Policy Platform. Some of the ways in which they define effective teachers are the practices that connect students' in-school and out-of-school learning, incorporate appropriate technologies, and sustain reflection upon learning and teaching.

Practical recommendations were presented in light of the theoretical implications from the study to advise Educational Lawmakers, Schools and/or School Districts, and Teachers. Recommendations for education policy call for a growth model to determine Adequate Yearly Progress and leave curriculum decisions at the local level. Recommendations for schools/and or school districts include empowering teachers by involving them in decision-making and allowing for flexibility in the curriculum. Recommendations for teachers include self-reflection, knowing the learners to have a student-centered, constructivist curriculum, and making the most of the learning time in school (make it relevant, use a collaborative approach, and teach critical thinking skills instead of “test-prep”). I also provided several specific examples of how I would have changed the curriculum if given the opportunity.

Implications for Future Research

This study attempts to demonstrate that the inclusion of popular culture in a formal school curriculum can promote greater student engagement, produce critical thinkers, empower students, and transform teaching practices. Keeping in mind the theoretical framework of this study and the research question helped in maintaining a lens to view data, however many other facets of teaching and learning appeared in the findings. Future studies using a similar curriculum are needed to explore dimensions of collaborative learning, student-centered curriculum, and project-based learning. It would be enlightening to learn more about the perspective of parents. In particular, I am referring to parent’s view on their child’s use of popular culture and the amount of time spent engaged on the Internet, video games, watching television, and using a cell phone. For the students that said, “my parents trust me,” I was left to wonder if their parents

would have provided the same response or if they even knew of their child's Internet habits.

Another area worth investigating would be similar action research studies in different contexts, with other sixth grade students, other grades, or other content areas. For example, could scientific and mathematical thinking, or historical understanding be taught by using students' Funds of Knowledge of popular culture interests? It would also be helpful to conduct further research to know how the group of students in the study performs throughout the remainder of their school careers.

The academic side of social networking in a K-12 system needs further exploration. Even with the ease of accessibility to the Internet and the onslaught of mobile devices available, social networking is still an area that is slow to gain support in the realm of education. Within our state system, many of the popular sites that cater to social networking are blocked by the departments' firewall. The website I created for this group of students did have many of the features students liked, such as avatars and blogging capabilities, however I am almost certain that the site would have been used more often had it been a MySpace page.

The daily practice of teachers needs to be informed by research not by mandated curriculum. Policy research can help guide decisions in the classroom about pedagogy, research done by other teachers can be replicated to promote sound teaching practices, and research done by teachers on their own teaching can promote critical reflection. Going through the systematic inquiry approach of research helps promotes a stronger alignment with teaching beliefs and practices.

Limitations

Limitations of the research design and how they were addressed in this study were discussed previously in Chapter 3. After going through the entire process of analyzing and discussing data, a few other areas came up that should be pointed out. The biggest challenge was assuming the dual roles of researcher and teacher. The year this curriculum was implemented was my first year teaching 6th grade for the entire year. For the most part, I was developing curriculum and conducting research on it simultaneously. It may have been beneficial to try out a similar curriculum for a full year before collecting data and conducting research on it. In analyzing the data and writing the report I see areas that I should have further explored with students during interviews and surveys (e.g. students perceptions of the violence they encountered in video games). I see this as an area where more utilization of my critical friends would have helped guide me to topics that needed further investigation.

Establishing Validity

Ensuring credibility of a qualitative research study requires careful attention to detail and to validity criteria. Internal validity was sought in this study by repeating systematic patterns of data collection over an extended period of time (2008-2009 school year). The classroom in which the data were collected was the naturally occurring setting, which also strengthens the internal validity. Perhaps the main criteria, however, to establish internal validity comes through the detailed description of the research setting, researcher's background, and researcher's journal entries.

Action research is held to its own validity criteria, as presented in Chapter 3. The results of this study are held to dialogic validity because of the reflective nature of the

study. Dialogic validity seeks to promote critical and reflective dialogue. These characteristics were evident in my researcher's journal, conversations and feedback gained from my critical friends, and the subsequent transformation of my teaching practices. This transformation of my teaching practice is the goal of catalytic validity in action research. There was a marked change in my identity as a teacher and of my beliefs aligning with my practices. Democratic validity was established because of the collaborative nature of the study. Students' voice, interests, and experiences were at the center of this study. Democratic validity ensures that the research was done collaboratively with all parties that have a stake and in the case of this particular study; stakeholders included students, my critical friends, and myself.

Conclusion

This study explored what would happen when popular culture was integrated into a 6th grade language arts curriculum. Having a broad research question helped in keeping an open perspective on this big picture. Three specific sub-questions helped in gaining specific details in the areas of students' interests and experiences with popular culture, student learning and motivation, and the effects of this curriculum on the teacher/researcher. Results from the study showed that a more positive social and emotional classroom environment was built, and teacher and student relationships shifted as student interests in popular culture were integrated into the curriculum. Students had an increase in motivation and engagement with their schoolwork while demonstrating critical thinking skills. The knowledge they gained from the curriculum that included popular culture was applied to the formal curriculum where they did exceptionally well on the Hawai'i State Assessment. Data also showed that gender differences exist with

students' interests in popular culture, mainly being that girls were drawn to popular culture interests that revolved around socialization whereas boys' interests focused on action. Finally, the effects of this study have forever changed me as a teacher. I am a better teacher because of the critical self-reflection that became a part of my teaching practice while conducting research. I was empowered by my students' engagement in their learning and their academic success and achievements.

This study was transformative to my teaching practices and redefined the possibilities for a traditional English Language Arts curriculum. It proved that in an age of standards and high stakes testing, popular culture does have a place in the curriculum. This curriculum was grounded in real world knowledge of the students that were served and in the things of interest and of concern to them. A curriculum that includes popular culture must be a place where students and teachers learn from and with one another and empower each other in the process. A pedagogy of popular culture requires careful balance between validating the pleasures involved and promoting critical analysis. When this balance is achieved, students will be able to think critically and problem solve in all content and contexts and will be prepared for all the future holds.

APPENDIX A CONSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate in Research Study

Stephanie Buelow
Primary Investigator
689-1271

This research project is being conducted as a component of a dissertation for a doctoral degree in education from the University of Hawai'i. The purpose of the project is to learn how students react to an English Language Arts Curriculum that incorporates popular culture. You are being asked to participate, because you are a student in my class and I will be incorporating the class' expressed interests in popular culture during your English Language Arts class.

The research project will span the duration of the 2008-2009 school year. Participation in the project will consist of filling out an interest survey, participating in a focus group interview, which will have a small group of your classmates, completing surveys and self-assessments after class projects, and a short interview with me, another teacher at the school, or another student in the class. The interest survey will ask about your interests in popular culture and the focus group questions will be to follow up on the interest survey. Interview questions will focus on your thoughts about using your expressed interests in popular culture in our English Language Arts curriculum and surveys and self-assessments after projects will focus on you assessing your own work and also assessing the projects themselves. Data from the interviews and surveys will be summarized into broad categories. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. Completion of the interest survey and after assignment surveys/self assessments should take no longer than 10 minutes each. Each interview will last no longer than 15 minutes. Approximately 30 people will participate in the study. Interviews will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription.

The investigator believes there is little or no risk to participating in this research project. However, there may be a small risk that you will experience psychological pain when closely examining your views of our English Language Arts curriculum, which integrates popular culture.

It is believed that participation in this study will be of direct benefit to you. It is believed that the results from this project will help teachers in the future use popular culture in the classroom to motivate and connect their students' lives to the school curriculum.

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the primary investigators' classroom for the duration of the research project. Audiotapes will be destroyed immediately

following transcription. All other research records will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty. Your grades in English Language Arts will in no way be affected whether you choose to (or not to) participate in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher, Stephanie Buelow, at 689-1271.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007, or uhirb@Hawaii.edu

Participants' copy

Participant:

I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time and understand that my grades in English Language Arts will not be affected either way.

I hereby give my assent to participate with the understanding that such assent does not waive any of my legal rights, nor does it release the primary investigator (Stephanie Buelow) from liability or negligence.

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
ASSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate in Research Study

Stephanie Buelow
Primary Investigator
689-1271

This research project is being conducted as a component of a dissertation for a doctoral degree in education from the University of Hawai'i. The purpose of the project is to learn how students react to an English Language Arts Curriculum that incorporates popular culture. Your child is being asked to participate, because he/she is a student in my class and I will be incorporating the class' expressed interests in popular culture during English Language Arts class.

The research project will span the duration of the 2008-2009 school year. Participation in the project consist of your child filling out an interest survey, participating in a focus group interview which consists of a small group of students, completing surveys and self assessments after class projects, and three short interviews with me, another teacher at the school, or another student in the class. The interest survey will ask about your child's interests in popular culture and the focus group questions will be to follow up to the interest survey. Interview questions will focus on your child's thoughts about using his/her expressed interests in popular culture in the English Language Arts curriculum and surveys and self-assessments after projects will focus on your child assessing his/her own work and also assessing the projects themselves. Data from the interviews and surveys will be summarized into broad categories. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. Completion of the interest survey and after assignment surveys/self assessments should take no longer than 10 minutes each. Each interview will last no longer than 15 minutes. Approximately 30 people will participate in the study. Interviews will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription.

The investigator believes there is little or no risk to participating in this research project. However, there may be a small risk that your will experience psychological pain when closely examining his/her views of our English Language Arts curriculum which integrates popular culture.

It is believed that participation in this study will be of direct benefit to your child. It is believed that the results from this project will help future teachers use popular culture in the classroom to motivate and connect their students' lives to the school curriculum.

Your child will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the primary investigators' classroom for the duration of the research project. Audiotapes will be destroyed immediately

following transcription. All other research records will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your child from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty. Your child's grades in English Language Arts will in no way be affected whether you choose to (or not to) consent for your child to participate in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher, Stephanie Buelow, at 689-1271.

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007, or uhirb@Hawaii.edu

Participants' copy

Participant:

I have read and understand the above information, and give consent for my minor child to participate in this research project. I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from this study at any time and understand that my child's grades in English Language Arts will not be affected either way.

I hereby give consent for my minor child to participate with the understanding that such consent does not waive any of my child's legal rights, or mine. Nor does it release the primary investigator (Stephanie Buelow) from liability or negligence.

Parent's Name (printed)

Name of minor child (printed)

Parent's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
INTEREST SURVEY

1. Do you listen to music? How often? Where? (For example...in your bedroom or in the car) and When?
2. If so, what type of music do you enjoy listening to? Does anyone in your family like the same type of music you do?
3. Any particular radio stations you listen to? Genre of music? Favorite artists or band? (Genre of music means rock, pop, reggae, church, etc...)
4. What is it about the music that makes you like a particular song, artist, band, or CD?
5. Do you have a favorite song or songs? What are the names of the song/songs? Do you have a favorite band or singer?
6. How do you think we could use your favorite music in school?
7. Do you have a computer at home? If so, how much time do you spend on the computer per day?
8. What types of activities do you participate in on the computer?
9. What are some of your favorite TV shows?
10. How much time do you spend watching TV a day?
11. Do you have a cell phone? If so, what features do you use on your cell phone?
12. What genres do you enjoy reading?
13. Do you play video games? If so, what are the titles and what are they about?
14. When you want to find out something you don't know, what do you do to find the answer?

APPENDIX D
SELF AND ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

Name of Activity: _____

Standards addressed on this activity: _____

Student Self-Assessment: For this project, my work (circle one)

Exceeds Proficiency Meets Proficiency Working Towards Proficiency Well
Below Proficiency

Explain why:

My work could be improved by:

Did you like this activity/assignment? Why or why not?

Do you think this activity/assignment incorporated your popular culture interests? Why or why not?

How could this activity/assignment be improved?

Is there another way I could have incorporated popular culture into this activity? If so, how?

In your opinion, what was the best part of this activity/assignment? (Explain)

I would like my answers to this survey to be used for research purposes: YES NO

APPENDIX E
FINAL ELA EVALUATION

1. What was your favorite thing about Reading Workshop this year? (e.g. Guided Reading, Literature Circles, Independent Reading, Centers during rotation time, K. Paterson author study, etc...) WHY DID YOU LIKE THIS ACTIVITY?

2. Of all the assignments we did with the literature circles (graffiti board, post-it-to-talk, text message, vocabulary boxes, on-line discussion, or final project: soundtrack or video game), which did you like the best? WHY?

3. Is there another assignment you would have preferred to do with the literature circle books? If so, what is it? Please describe the activity.

4. If you could describe your favorite activity we did in ELA this year....Think hard....we did a lot....What would it be and why? (Think about writing, reading, and skills)

5. How could I make ELA better for the 6th graders next year? Are there any assignments I should change?

6. Which assignments should I keep the same? Why did you like this assignment?

7. If you had to give me a report card grade as a teacher, what grade would you give me and WHY? (ME, MP, N, U)

APPENDIX F
PROTOCOL FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. Can you please talk a little bit about your favorite type/types of music? What is it about that type of music or particular song that you like (e.g. lyrics, beat, background music, musician)
2. Have you ever read the lyrics to some of your favorite songs?
3. Who do you think influences your tastes in music more – your parents, your friends, or your siblings?
4. Do your parents approve of the type of music you like?
5. What activities do you engage in on the computer? (e.g. MySpace, You Tube, Photobucket, Email, Instant Messenger) How much time do you spend on the computer per day? Do your parents monitor what you do on the computer?
6. Do you have a cell phone? If so, how do you use the phone?
7. Do you play video games? How much time do you spend per day playing video games? What type of games do you typically play?
8. What television shows or channels do you like to watch (e.g. MTV)
9. Do you look at magazines or comic books?
10. If you had to pick one thing that you are the most interested in, what would it be?

APPENDIX G
PROTOCOL FOR FIRST INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

1. What is your favorite thing to do when you leave school?
2. Asked follow up questions related to their interests in the following areas:
 - computer/internet
 - video games
 - television
 - music taste
 - electronic devices (iPods, MP3 players, phones)
 - *Twilight* books by Stephenie Meyers or other books,
 - magazines
 - comic books
3. How can I incorporate the things you do outside of school into the school day and particularly the English Language Arts curriculum?

APPENDIX H
PROTOCOL FOR SECOND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

1. Of the activities we have done in ELA so far this year, what activity did you like the best and why?
2. What are your thoughts on having choice for the way in which you present the information for your report writing assignment? (comic book, video game book, brochure, website) Response to Literature assignment (choice in author: Stephenie Meyer or Katherine Paterson and choice of presentation)
3. What did you think of the cinempoem unit? What new things did you learn as a result of this unit?
4. What were your reactions to watching the music video as part of the cinempoem unit? Looking at music lyrics?
5. What were your reactions to using magazines pictures to study theme?
6. What were your reactions to the text messaging activity?
7. Do you have any suggestions for future activities we could do that incorporate popular culture?

APPENDIX I
PROTOCOL FOR THIRD INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

1. Can you tell me how you would define popular culture? Can you give some examples?
2. What are your favorite forms of popular culture? (e.g. music, video, video games, magazines, television, etc...)
3. How often do you engage in forms of popular culture each day? Each week? (for example: 2 hours per day on the computer)
4. What do your parents think of the amount of time you spend on your popular culture interests?
5. Did your popular culture interests get integrated in school this year? If so, how? (Please give specific examples)
6. What was your favorite popular culture activity done in English Language Arts class? (i.e. making PowerPoint's, IMovies, creating playlists, developing videogames, graffiti boards, text messaging to name a few)
7. What are your thoughts on the class website?
8. What part did you like the most on the website? What part could be improved or added to the website?
9. Do you think the use of popular culture in the classroom engaged you in your learning? If so, how? Why?
10. Do you think the use of popular culture in the classroom helped you understand the content in English Language Arts better? If so, how? Why?

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