

# Book Club *Plus*: A Conceptual Framework to Organize Literacy Instruction

*Finding time for skills instruction without replacing literature discussion and writers' workshop requires a strong organizational framework for literacy instruction.*

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Sit in any teachers' lounge in the United States and it's likely you'll hear teachers talking about the urgent needs of their students and the ever-increasing demands of the curriculum. Teaching today seems far more complex than in the past, particularly in the area of literacy instruction. From public debates to legislative sessions in state and federal congresses, from school board meetings to news articles, and from parent-teacher meetings to conver-

sations in the teachers' lounge, recommendations abound for the question: "How can we teach all children to read?" Experts from many quarters offer teachers a veritable bazaar of solutions—guided reading, early intervention, literature-based instruction . . . the list continues. And yet, more than any other stakeholders in education, teachers know that no single approach, no simple solution will lead all students to success as readers and writers. However, they also recognize that defaulting to an eclectic patchwork of approaches fails to give students or teachers a coherent, shared experience of literacy as a cultural tool for thought and communication.

Effective literacy instruction is complex. Practice must be planned yet adaptable, responsive to learners' diversity and changing needs, integrative across the curriculum, and accountable to many—and these can be competing goals. Given this view of practice, teacher development in the form of skills training and information updates does not afford practitioners the opportunity to learn as flexible, inventive problem-solvers (Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson, & Coulson, 1992). Teachers and teacher educators need to make sense of a dizzying array of problems and solutions. To do this they

need principled, conceptual frameworks to guide their thought and action. Our article describes one such framework, *Book Club Plus*, designed by a practitioner inquiry network called the Teachers' Learning Collaborative.

## WORKING TOGETHER TO DESIGN BOOK CLUB *PLUS*

To learn to read well, all students need to read thought-provoking, age-appropriate books. They also need to respond thoughtfully to these books in talk, writing, and as they read other texts. Ensuring these opportunities was the aim of the original Book Club program (Raphael, Pardo, Highfield, & McMahon, 1997). That framework illustrated ways to organize curriculum and peer-led talk and writing about text. Yet, as important as this learning is, independent, self-regulated readers also must learn and practice a myriad of skills and strategies at their instructional level.

We know that the variation in classrooms is wide, with students reading below, at, or beyond grade level. We also know that struggling readers need intensive instructional support. A dilemma facing teachers is how to engage their diverse readers in meaningful activities around age-appropriate text while also providing

instruction appropriate to each student's individual needs. Our goal in designing the Book Club *Plus* framework was to manage this dilemma (Lampert, 1985) so that all youngsters read with teacher support at their instructional level and practice comprehension skills and strategies in conversation and writing in response to age-appropriate literature. For three years and across social, economic, geographic, and grade-level borders, members of the Collaborative (Dara Bacher, Jennifer Berne, Karen Eisele, Susan Florio-Ruane, MariAnne George, Kristin Grattan, Nina Hasty, Amy Heitman, Kathy Highfield, Jacquelyn Jones-Frederick, Marcella Kehus, Taffy Raphael, Molly Reed, Earlene Richardson, Jennifer Szlachta, Andy Topper, Jo Trumble, and LaToya Wilson) worked together to design and field-test a user-friendly literacy curriculum framework meeting three criteria: (1) it guides rather than prescribes; (2) it addresses a common problem but is open to local adaptation; and (3) it reflects current theory and research on the teaching and learning of literacy. In what follows, three members describe the conceptual background for Book Club *Plus*, its organizational framework and its implementation in one third-grade classroom.

### CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF BOOK CLUB *PLUS*

The Book Club program (Note: capitalized Book Club refers to the program, lower case book club refers to the student-led discussion groups) grew out of two understandings from educational theory. The first is that *language use is fundamental to thinking*, that what is learned by any individual begins in the social interactions in which he or she engages (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978,

Wells, 1999). Thus in Book Club, it is important to provide multiple contexts in which students engage in the language practices that support their literacy work. In some teacher-led contexts, the teacher engages in explicit instruction, modeling and scaffolding. In others, the teacher's role is as facilitator or participant (Au & Raphael, 1998). Some contexts involve students working in student-led groups, from dyads and project teams to book club discussion groups. Some require students to work independently. By means of interactions with teachers and peers, thinking again "goes public," and students have the opportunity to hear the language of literacy and learning. In these interactions learners use language to achieve collective and personal goals.

The second understanding is the need to *increase the role of literature in reading instruction*. Used here, the term "literature" includes text genres of literary quality, expository genres such as textbooks and brochures, and transactional ones such as Internet documents.

**We avoid "basalizing" texts, honoring their forms and functions rather than treating them simply as vehicles for instruction.**

Scholars advocate using authentic text to teach a broad repertoire of reading abilities (Galda, 1998; Short, 1998). With this recommendation comes the proviso that we avoid "basalizing" texts, honoring their forms and functions rather than treating them simply as vehicles for instruction.

Using literature invites instruction in literary response and literary elements. Perhaps less obvious, literature provides a vehicle for exploring culture and society, for it is the accumulated understandings of hu-

manity. Literature's content directly relates to a third understanding—foundational to the design of Book Club *Plus*—that *school-based literacy education should prepare students to live and work in a diverse, democratic society* (Hiebert, 1991). Studies of culture and its social, historical, personal, and political dimensions tend to be slighted in the texts and contexts of both teacher education and classroom learning (Florio-Ruane with deTar, 2001). Literature study in the company of others offers a mirror reflecting our own lives and a window into people, places, times, and cultures that readers might never have the chance to experience directly (Galda, 1998). As such, literature can become a powerful tool for critical thinking, helping students and teachers understand their own perspectives as being cultural and therefore limited and, in many ways, different from the experiences of people in other times, places, and groups (Dasenbrock, 1992). Some Collaborative members had opportunities to experience this kind of learning about culture and iden-

tity as participants in graduate courses and autobiography book clubs sponsored by Raphael and Florio-Ruane (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, George, Hasty, & Highfield, K., 2001). These experiences are reflected in a fourth fundamental understanding of Book Club *Plus*—that *narrative plays a central role in understanding and in sharing our understandings with others*. Adapting the Book Club program to teachers' learning, for example, Florio-Ruane found that response to text in book club discussions often took narrative

form. This narrative response to text can be a powerful form of reading in which difficult ideas like culture are explored by way of the literary imagination (Florio-Ruane with deTar, 2001).

## A LOOK AT BOOK CLUB PLUS

Based on these four understandings from research and theory, we designed Book Club Plus to promote all students' learning and incorporate skills and strategies associated with reading acquisition and critical thinking required for living in and contributing to a democratic society. Its structure and thematic content build from understanding self to understanding others, and promote engagement through compelling and personally meaningful texts and activities. As the examples below illustrate, both organizational structure and thematic content help weave a meaningful fabric from diverse activities, texts, and youngsters. The framework helps teachers make literacy learning coherent for students across different instructional contexts and activities.

Reflecting the diversity of the network, we designed the framework to be used and adapted across classroom settings. Variations included grade level (piloted in grades 1–8); school community (affluent and middle-income suburbs, lower-income rural areas, and high-poverty city neighborhoods); and students (from a variety of ethnic, linguistic, social, and religious backgrounds) (Raphael, et al., 2001). We explored the framework's use within different district and school-wide conditions. In some cases, a textbook series for reading/language arts was mandated, while in others, teachers had more choice. Some schools had ample materials, books, and supplies. Others did not. Some classes had more than thirty students, others fewer than twenty.

Though the specifics differed across districts, all teachers needed to consider state and local standards for both literacy and, given our theme, social studies learning. The Teachers Learning Collaborative took these local and shared constraints as opportunities to identify the framework's essential features and assess its usefulness to diverse teachers and students. Next, we describe framework features that applied across settings, then illustrate their local adaptation with

examples from MariAnne George's third-grade classroom.

## Organizing the Year

Teachers organized Book Club Plus instruction within three literacy units, each of which could last from 3 to 8 weeks. The overarching, year-long theme, "Our Storied Lives," built from Unit 1: "Stories of Self," to Unit 2: "Family Stories," to Unit 3: "Stories of Culture." See Table 1 for unit themes, resources, writing activities, and related unit work.

Unit	Stories of Self	Family Stories	Stories of Culture
<b>Theme</b>	Autobiography—Presenting and "representing" our lives	An individual's identity is embedded in family stories	Family stories are embedded within the narrative of our cultural heritage
<b>Selected Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tarantula in My Purse</i> (J. C. George, 1996)</li> <li>• <i>Tell Me Again about the Night I was Born</i> (Curtis, 1998)</li> <li>• <i>26 Fairmont Avenue</i> (dePaola, 2000)</li> <li>• <i>My Life in Dog Years</i> (Paulsen, 1999)</li> <li>• <i>The World of William Joyce Scrapbook</i> (Joyce, 1997)</li> </ul>	Books by Patricia Polacc, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Meteor</i>, 1978</li> <li>• <i>Some Birthdays</i>, 1991</li> <li>• <i>Picnic at Mudsock Meadow</i>, 1992</li> <li>• <i>My Rotten Red-headed Older Brother</i>, 1994</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Molly's Pilgrim</i> (Cohen, 1983)</li> <li>• <i>From Miss Ida's Porch</i> (Belton, 1993)</li> <li>• <i>Grandmother's Latkes</i> (Drucker, 1992)</li> <li>• <i>Pueblo Storyteller</i> (Hoyt-Goldsmith, 1991)</li> <li>• <i>A Birthday Basket for Tia</i> (Mora, 1992)</li> <li>• <i>Journey to Ellis Island: How My Grandfather Came to America</i> (Bierman, 1998)</li> </ul>
<b>Unit Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student timeline of his/her life with one event/year</li> <li>• Personal narrative about critical life event</li> <li>• "Snapshot" autobiography using school photo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview family member from or about grandparents' generation to identify a family story</li> <li>• Learn a family story to share with class</li> <li>• Oral presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare/contrast family stories among texts and students' lives</li> <li>• Interview family about cultural heritage</li> <li>• Create heritage quilt square for class quilt and present to class</li> <li>• Essays on family's journey to USA</li> </ul>
<b>Content Connections</b>	Student & family roles within community		Study native cultures and the immigrant experience

Table 1. Organizing for the Year

## Organizing the Week and Day

During the three units, students participate in the two conceptually linked contexts for learning: Book Club and Literacy Block. In *Book Club Plus*, the two contexts occur in two- or three-day cycles within a given week. As Figure 1 illustrates, these thematically linked contexts provide opportunities for teaching the full range of language and literacy skills students need in order to become literacy users, critical thinkers, and citizens in a democratic society. Each context is described briefly below.

**Book Club.** Within Book Club, four components—community share, reading, writing, and book club—interweave to support students who are learning to read, respond to, and discuss literature in student-led discussion groups (see Figure 1).

These components vary in length of time depending upon students' needs and teacher goals.

Opening “community share” is a teacher-led, whole-group activity introducing students to elements of literature discussion and previewing specific skills, strategies, and knowledge that will be useful as students read, write, and talk about their book club's book. Closing community share reconvenes the small groups to share ideas and issues that emerged in their book clubs discussions. The “reading” component involves students' gaining access to the book to be discussed. Their reading can be independent or supported by adults, buddies, audiotapes, and other resources. What is crucial is that all class members, regardless of reading level, have access to the literature to be discussed in book clubs and that each

student writes in response to and discusses the book. (Note: in early primary grades, book club books are generally read aloud by the teacher. It is rare to find substantive content worthy of discussion and eliciting depth of response at first or second graders' reading level).

The “writing” component involves daily response in students' reading logs to help prepare for upcoming discussions, and sustained writing that occurs when writers' workshop activities connect thematically (e.g., similar genre, theme, content, author craft) to the book club books.

“Book club” is the student-led discussion group for which the program was named. Students are divided into heterogeneous groups of four to five, varying in reading level, gender, classroom status, verbal abilities, and so forth. Students remain in their book clubs throughout a unit. On some occasions, all book clubs read and discuss the same book. On others, each club reads different books encircling the shared theme. In all cases, the books are theme- and age-appropriate and sufficiently complex to warrant and support in-depth discussion and a range of responses. Within book clubs, students discuss ideas that emerged from their reading and log responses, airing questions, confusions, and related personal experiences. Students are taught norms for appropriate behavior such as listening with respect, building on others' ideas, debating and critiquing ideas, assuming leadership, and following another's lead. Thus learning to read, write, and talk in book club embodies democratic processes and learning within community.

**Literacy Block.** Literacy Block is the second key site. Here, the focus is instruction and practice of skills and strategies. This occurs in guided reading groups (Fountas & Pinnell,

Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
<b>Teacher Daily Read-Aloud</b>				
<i>Book Club</i>	<i>Book Club</i>	<i>Book Club</i>	<i>Literacy Block</i>	<i>Literacy Block</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening community share [5–15 minutes]</li> <li>• Reading [10–20 minutes]</li> <li>• Writing [10–15 minutes]</li> <li>• Book clubs [5–20 minutes]</li> <li>• Closing community share [5–20 minutes]</li> </ul>			Guided Reading Groups Skills Centers WWW searches Journaling Unit Work/ Writers Workshop	
<b>Social Studies connection</b>				
Figure 1. Organizing the Week				

1996) where students are placed at one of three levels—at, above, and below grade—and read thematically linked literature at their instructional level with extensive instructional support.

When not meeting with the teacher, students work independently to practice subskills (e.g., spelling, grammar, handwriting) and work on theme-related writing assignments. Some classrooms organize these different activities using “centers,” some have an area for guided reading while other students remain at their desks, going to areas of the room only to pick up needed materials. Some use a combination.

### BOOK CLUB PLUS IN ONE THIRD-GRADE CLASSROOM

In the remainder of this article we draw on the “Family Stories” unit used by MariAnne, who organized the week to include a balance of Book Club and Literacy Block days; a daily read-aloud from Polacco books students may not have the opportunity to read on their own; and writer’s workshop. In addition to the language arts contexts, MariAnne used social studies to further develop connections among history, family, and community.

Book Club activities (in contrast to Literacy Block) centered on *Chicken Sunday* (Polacco, 1992a). Mini-lessons during opening community share over a three-day period included dialogue use as a beginning focus on authors’ craft, vocabulary concepts related to family and to sensory words, and how to search the World Wide Web for information on authors and illustrators (e.g., Polacco). Students read the book club book independently or in one of the support contexts, wrote individual reading log entries, and met to discuss the book. During students’ book clubs, MariAnne observed one

### On the Web: Tips for Organizing for Literacy Instruction

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/LiteracyFramework/>

Organizing for Literacy  
Instruction

Dr. Jill Kerper Mora  
San Diego State University

<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/2821/index.htm>

28 Takes on 21st Century  
Literacy Instruction  
Managing Literacy Activities  
with Technology

—Karen Smith

group at a time, keeping notes on individual students’ and the group’s progress. She audiotaped groups she could not directly observe, tapes she could listen to and assess later. MariAnne ended each day’s Book Club events with closing community share. She followed the pattern of first asking students to share substantive ideas from their book clubs. Students discussed Polacco’s craft (e.g., how her illustrations tell part of her story, how she builds suspense) as well as story content (e.g., stories told from the two sides of her family—Russian immigrants and Michigan farmers). Following the book discussion, MariAnne asked students what they thought had gone well in their book clubs and, “What was hard for you today?” Thus, students began with a focus on content and discussion strengths before examining problems.

On Literacy Block days, MariAnne spent approximately 15 minutes with each of the three guided read-

ing groups, using a Polacco book written at, above, or below third grade, depending on the group level. She focused on areas of reading instruction from her district’s reading/language arts curriculum guide and the scope and sequence chart from the district adopted commercial reading program. While MariAnne met with the guided reading groups, students worked at their desks on a variety of tasks: (a) handwriting practice sheet, (b) spelling, (c) journal entries, (d) dictionary skill—using guide words, (e) writers workshop and the family story preparation, and (f) internet searches related to authors and illustrators.

Writer’s workshop focused on developing a family story. Students prepared for and interviewed a family member from their grandparents’ generation (or, if not available, someone with stories from that generation). From the interview, they chose a family story to share in class. They wrote notes, developed an oral presentation of the story, rehearsed, then presented their family stories. The home connection involved parents in sharing family stories, facilitating connections to family members, and helping to identify or—if needed—recreate an artifact around which the story was based.

Each week, under the umbrella of Family Stories, all students engaged in meaningful work with age-appropriate literature and had opportunities to learn and practice skills with text at their instructional level. Visiting the classroom, an observer would be hard pressed to find the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer. Each student met at least twice in a guided reading group, engaged with peers in two to three book clubs, participated in whole class instruction two to three times. Daily, they read independently,

engaged in whole-class book discussion, engaged in a variety of writing, and practiced skills—some related directly to reading and discussing books; others to reading, writing, spelling, and grammar sub-skills. Every student used literate practices to learn and communicate about the theme of family.

### LEARNING IN BOOK CLUB PLUS

To illustrate how Book Club Plus supported diverse students' learning, we close with sketches of three students in MariAnne's class: Rikki, Patrick, and Nami. Rikki and Patrick represent two kinds of struggling readers, both poorly served by a diet of drill and practice or by a laissez faire approach that slights instruction. Rikki reads below grade level, so MariAnne's challenge is to design a learning experience rich in both skill instruction and opportunities to use literacy in meaningful practice. Patrick, on the other hand, while able to read grade level materials, is disengaged. He has not enjoyed reading during his first few years in school. Re-engaging him in written language is an essential problem to be solved if he is to progress at his grade level. Nami is a high achieving student exceeding grade level goals, functionally bilingual in English and Japanese. She challenges the teacher to support and extend her literacy development.

#### Rikki: A Struggling Reader Succeeds

Rikki, the youngest student in MariAnne's third-grade class, entered third grade reading on a beginning 2/2 level (using the Scholastic Placement Test, which accompanies the district adopted reading program). Labeled as a "transitional reader," she had worked with the school's learning consultant since first grade. She had summer tutoring after first and second grades. By the end of

third grade, Rikki scored 80 percent on the Expanding Level Scholastic test (70 percent is passing), so she was reading on grade level when she left grade 3. Her writing showed similar growth, though—as writing samples will reveal—she still struggles with language conventions such as spelling and punctuation.

To see what she was learning in Book Club Plus, we analyzed several samples of Rikki's writing. The writing samples come from Rikki's sustained writing during Literacy Block's writing workshops. Changes in content, structure, and conventions can be seen over the school year and are linked to the Book Club Plus activities and themes. In the fall, Rikki typed the following final draft (note that her typos have been preserved):

#### My Bird

*My bird is friendly. He does not have a crown. His name is Aber. He likes to play with the next door neighbor's bird. He is vary neat. he is good at work, and he is a roben. He is king of all the robens in city. But he is not the king of all the robens in the world. But he inangs it. & I love him.*

MariAnne had read Paulsen's (1999) *My Life in Dog Years*, conveying the author's autobiography through his

relationship to his dogs. At this time some students in the class were independently reading J. C. George's (1996) book, *There's a Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets*, in which the author uses the same convention of telling her life story through her pets. Both books were very much a part of whole-class discussions in community share, and thus may have influenced Rikki's writing about a pet bird.

The sample in Figure 2, written in February, describes a car trip taken by Rikki's family, during which older siblings, especially her brother, terrorize her.

Again we can see Rikki learning to use a literary device found in her study of literature. This time her theme and text structure are influenced by her hearing Polacco's (1994) *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother*. A bit later, in March, Rikki writes of a family ski trip, but this time she is very much a part of her sibling's fun and games (see Figure 3).

Here she seems ready to step outside the literary models and develop her own family story theme.

Across these three pieces we see her texts become longer and her sentences more complex. Further, applying the school district's

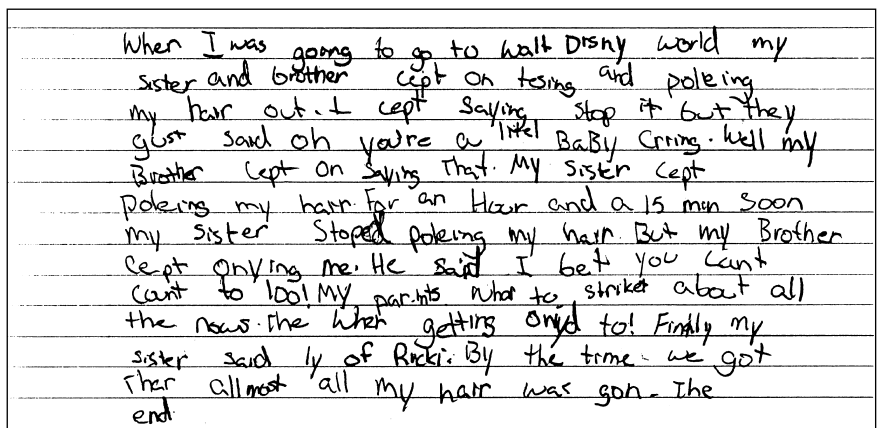


Figure 2. The Car Trip

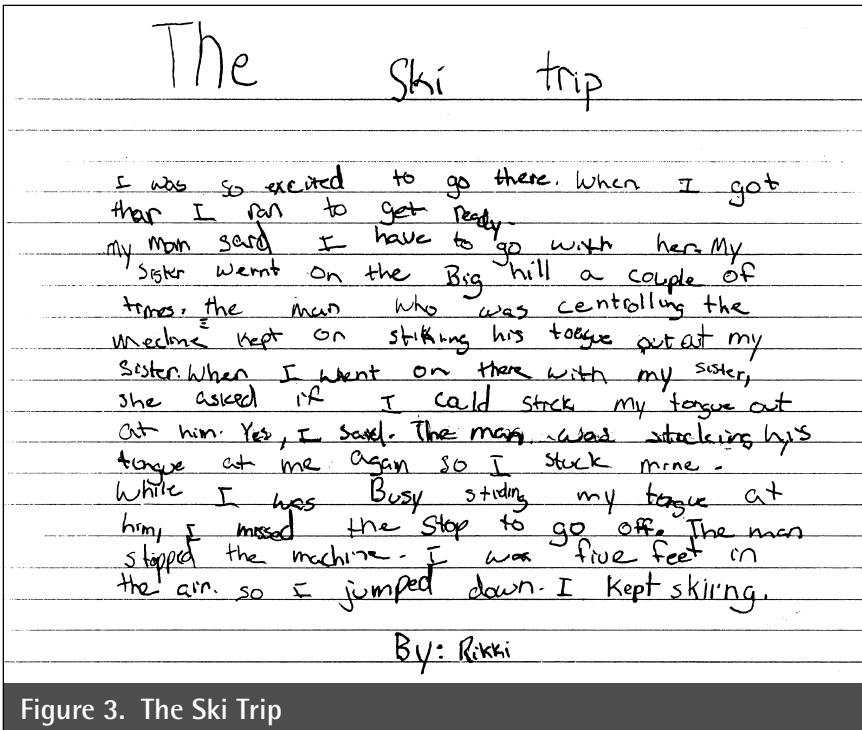


Figure 3. The Ski Trip

benchmarks and standards to these samples revealed growth in Rikki's knowledge and use of authors' craft, including voice, theme, character development, and elements of narrative structure.

### Patrick: An Unenthusiastic Reader Becomes Re-Engaged

Patrick entered third grade reading on grade level, though according to his mother's report at fall conferences, he showed little interest in reading in or out of school. While very inquisitive, during the fall, Patrick was easily distracted. He showed difficulty focusing on reading and written work whether working independently, in small groups, or in whole-class activities. By the end of the year, however, the picture of Patrick's learning and engagement had changed. In MariAnne's end-of-year reflections, she noted:

*I saw a dramatic change in Patrick throughout the year. He loved the autobiography literature and the group*

*discussions. I saw him become engaged in reading both during structured reading time and independent reading time. He really blossomed in March with the culture focus—this brought in his deep interest in science and history.*

For Patrick, success came through his engagement with school literacy activities related to autobiography and culture, themes he found compelling.

Patrick eagerly wrote stories about his own life and grew increasingly interested in his ancestry and in cross-cultural connections within families and among people. For example, as one of the culminating activities of the year, students were asked to create a quilt square that

conveyed their cultural backgrounds. Patrick's square, shown in Figure 4, captures his mixed ancestry—German (the autobahn, beer, and the peace symbol reflecting the Berlin wall's demise), English, and Irish (sheep, mountains, and the potato famine that led his ancestors to immigrate to the United States).

His opening line for his end-of-year essay was "Hi! My Name is Patrick. I like culture and I'm German and English mostly."

When a visitor entered the classroom, Patrick proudly announced that the students represented over twenty-seven different cultures and their classroom community showed how cultures connect and change. His March 16th log entry conveys his engagement with texts as sources of cultural information, as he contrasts his own cultural background with those of the characters in *Chicken Sunday* (Polacco, 1992a) (see Figure 5).

On another occasion, his interest in others' cultural backgrounds came through in his writing a story of a bullfighter. During writers' workshop, Patrick asked one of his Spanish-speaking peers for assistance. He wanted his characters' names and

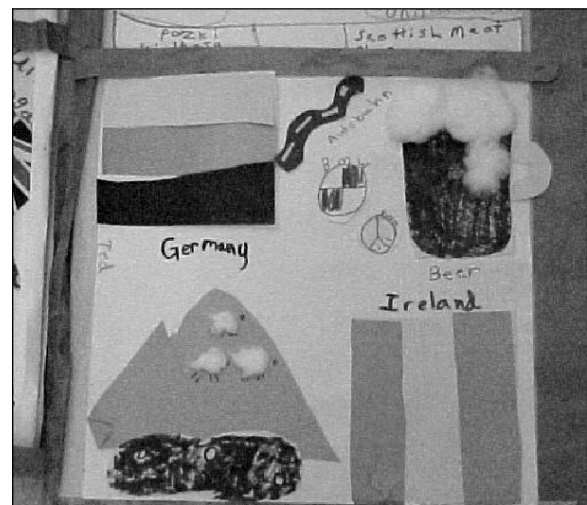


Figure 4. Patrick's Quilt Square

My culture to Mrs. Cloud's is  
 that I have a different religion  
 I'm catholic and he's Jewish  
 he's been to Russia and Europe  
 and I have not  
 My culture to Mrs. Cloud's is she's  
 from Russia and I'm not we have  
 very different religion and she  
 makes meat paste eggs see all  
 cultures are different cultures  
 have a lot of different traditions  
 I always go up north for  
 the birth of July.

By:

Figure 5. Patrick's Log Entry, 3/16/99

important parts of their dialogue to be written in Spanish and thus authentic to the language they actually would speak.

Patrick's end-of-year Scholastic Expanding Level reading test score was 93 percent. However, Patrick's success, as measured by his scores, conveys only part of the picture. More important is his growing interest and excitement over literacy and about culture. In his writing, his oral presentations, and his choice of reading, he demonstrated the power of the unit themes for re-engaging not only readers who struggle with skills, but also those who may have turned away from the joy that literature and literacy can bring. He left third grade telling his teacher he was going to become an anthropologist and study cultures. He told his young neighbor, Adam, that he was fortunate to be able to be in *Book Club Plus* the following fall.

### Nami: A Successful Reader Moves Beyond Classroom Literacy Practice

A good reading program for diverse learners addresses all students'

needs. Rikki illustrates the power of such a program for struggling readers and Patrick reflects success for those students who are able to read and write, but are not particularly interested in doing either. But what of the already successful and engaged reader? Nami, our third focus student, suggests that when students see literacy as a powerful tool, they seek to use literacy abilities beyond the confines of the classroom and curriculum. Nami was a high-achieving girl who, at three-and-a-half years old, had moved to the

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United States from Japan with her family. Successful in her language and literacy learning, she was in the top reading group and ended the year scoring 96 percent on the Scholastic Expanding Level test. In addition to her academic work in public school, she also attended Japanese school on Saturday and was becoming literate in both languages. Nami could easily have

been bored in a conventional literacy program. Yet, as she read many published autobiographies, Nami began to consider publishing her own story. She crafted a fictional account of the life of a short pencil, perhaps a metaphor for not being swayed by superficial physical traits:

### I AM COOL TOO!

*I am a short pencil. Everybody calls me short head and teases me. Grandpa said, "A short pencil can be loved more than a long pencil." But if I think hard, I'm just laying in a corner of a desk without anyone using me. When I was long and handsome, I was in a backpack and people took me to school. But now nobody uses me. Why does everyone always use long and good pencils? I don't mind if I get very short so, I want to be used more. "I am cool too", even if I am short.*

Using the Japanese she had been learning in Saturday School, she translated her story (see Figure 6) and submitted it to the Japanese American newspaper where it was published on April 16, 1999.

In school, Nami used the reading and writing opportunities within

the unit to explore both her own immigrant experience and her feelings about returning to Japan. In February, she heard *Picnic at Mudssock Meadow* (Polacco, 1992b) in which the main character, William, suffers from constant teasing when he fails to win any of the contests at Mudssock Meadow's annual Halloween picnic. Following this, she wrote of a



recent experience when her parents took her back to Japan for a visit. She sees her friend who she describes as “pretty mean” because she “always teased me.” Sadly, Nami was unable to tease her back because “nothing popped into my head.” Through her writing, she understands her natural desire—like William’s—to tease back, her frustration and, in the end, her sense of being special because “I had something that makes me be nice. My friend had none of that.” Like William, she gains self-esteem as she reflects back on the experience.

Not surprisingly, her end-of-year writing sample reflects some of her ambivalence about returning to the land of her birth. In this essay first draft, she states that “I was born in Japan and I moved to America. That is my life.” She defines her life in terms of place, an idea woven throughout her essay. Through her literacy activities within this unit, she was able to use literacy as a tool for many different purposes: extending her school activities into her Japanese community by publishing in the newspaper and becoming a published writer in the process; exploring her feelings as an immigrant who, in some ways, has become more familiar with her adopted country than her homeland; and coming to terms with this experience because “This place, Michigan, was so great . . . even when I go back to Japan, I won’t forget about my life in Michigan.”

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

A framework is only as good as the learning it affords. In Book Club *Plus*, our goals for students’ learning included growth in literacy knowledge and skills that can be demonstrated on traditional tests, as well as on informal assessments (e.g., reading logs, process writing samples).

We were committed to promoting students’ engagement and ownership of literacy processes. And, because of the nature of the unit content, we encouraged students to develop their “voice” and “identity” as shown through their family stories. While we were particularly interested in how this framework facilitated the literacy learning of struggling readers, we believed that an effective curriculum should sustain the interest and promote the learning of students across all ability levels. We believe that our network’s development of the Book Club *Plus* framework gives us a new tool for working on the pressing question, “How can we teach all children to read?”

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ほくはちいさなえんぴつ。みんなに「ちびっこ」つてよばれて、ばかにされかけてかっこよかったんだ

井上 愛美  
まなみ

ミシガン州デトロイトりんご会補習授業校小3

「ほくだつてかっこいいんだ」

それにおじいさんだつて、こう言つてたんだ。「小さなえんぴつは、長いえんぴつより、人にあるじや。」  
 長かったころは、ふでばこに入れられて学校にも行つてたつて。でも、今は使われるどころか、じゃま者あつかい。ほくは、つくえのすみっこに追いやられたまま、わすれられていた。まだまだ使えるのにどうして、てなんだらう。どうして、みんな長くて、きれいな方ばかり使つた。ほくは、こなこなになつてもいいから、もつともつと使つてほしい。ほくは、自信をもつて言うよ。「ほくだつてかっこいいんだ。」  
 (滞米8年)

Figure 6. Nami's Japanese Newspaper Story

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