THE MAGIC OF ROOM 24:

Searching for the Source of Magic

That Occurs When First Graders Share Experiences

with Children Who Have Severe Disabilities

by

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ABSTRACT

This visually rich qualitative teacher-action research focuses on the personal learning experience a classroom of first grade students had as they grew in understanding of difference through daily interactions with young friends who have severe disabilities. Each first grader spent 30 minutes, one day a week, visiting the special education classroom down the hall, which was home to their friends who needed total care and spent a majority of their day in a wheelchair.

During these visits, the first graders enjoyed interacting with their friends using a variety of manipulatives, music, movement, games, books, and art. This experience was loosely supervised by the special education teacher after students were given instructions on stations and activities available that day. Upon returning to their classroom, the students reflected on the experience. Reflection for the first few weeks was through oral discussion to build a community feel and common language. Written reflections were later kept in student-created journals.

Though this experience began in the fall, data for this exploration was collected during the Spring semester of the 2013-2014 school year. The following questions guided the design and implementation of this study: 1) How do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities, and what do their words reveal regarding their understandings about and across difference?
2) What do interactions between students “look like,” and what can “doing” reveal about human interactions?

Data collection and analysis were informed through a critical, ethnographic-like lens with a participant perspective from the teacher-researcher. Photos and video

documentation focused on the hands and feet of the participants to ensure privacy rights. Interviews, journal entries, photo elicitation, and a focus group discussion provided the remainder of the data set after parental permission and participant assent.

Findings are shared visually with an invitation to enter a child's lifeworld via their voice, both written and verbal. Readers are asked to ponder the evidence through the shared voice and visions and consider the impact of the affective realm on learning and understanding and its significance in all of human interactions—all the selves and all the others.

For
Jessica Janeane,
Daniel George,
Matthew Paul,
Elsa Marie,
and Joseph Nathanael

You are the *Other* to my *Self*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

" Little by little, one travels far."
~ J.R.R Tolkien

My 8-year-old *self* traveled in a hot, sweaty car with my family, making the trek from small-town North Dakota to Flagstaff, Arizona. For eight summers in a row, our family of five headed south so my teacher-parents could work on and complete their Masters in Education. My story of thanking the *others* begins there.

To my parents, Edward and Gertrude Anderson: I am grateful to you as the first persons responsible for instilling in me the importance of higher education and showing me the perseverance and work ethic it takes to see it through to the finish line. You gave me the dream.

I attended college and taught for many years while raising my five children. All the while, my dream of a graduate degree remained safely tucked away but not able to be realized until much later in my teaching career—more than 20 years later, in fact. My journey resumed in 2006 as a graduate student at Arizona State University.

Thank you to memorable *others* along the way:

Dr. Karen Smith: You admired my teaching, my work, and noticed "deep thinking" in my writing. Thank you for your endless inspiration by showing me what a *just* classroom looks like and how children can be agents of change at a very young age.

Dr. Sarah Hudelson: You looked me in the eye and asked, "What happens in Room 24?" You encouraged me to go on and find the answer.

Mike Oliver: You provided an environment for me to fully realize "best practice" and the freedom to carry it out.

Dr. Richard Pimentel: Your speech at my district's back-to-school convention was my inspiration to provide an experience of interaction between my first graders and the children in Room 24. My research is largely because of you.

Annie Dutcher-Jones & Candace Kannapel – teachers in Room 24: You allowed the friendships between our students to begin seven years ago (Candace, the first three years) and to continue, grow, and change each year thereafter (Annie).

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To my own children – Jessica, Daniel, Matthew, Elsa, and Joseph: Without all of you in my life, none of this would matter. To the youngest three: You put up with years of mommy needing to save money and my studying, writing papers, shushing you, being stressed, tying up the computer, and being away at class, all the while having to eat left-overs, frozen food, and stay home while others went to Disneyland. I love you and thank you for not complaining too much.

Now at this place in my travels, lastly and certainly not least, I must thank the students in my classroom and their friends in Room 24 for making this point of my journey enduring, by revealing—for all the selves and all the others—the *Magic of Room 24.*

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Though the children in this story spent just 9 months interacting with and getting to know their friends in Room 24, they represent 8 years of first grade students from Room 2 who have had the opportunity to do the same. Each year, as I have stood back and observed my students, I have witnessed the same unique reactions toward the offered experience of making friends with the children in Room 24. I hesitate to try to name those reactions for fear of the audience's lessening their importance by likening them to the reactions of children toward more familiar aspects of the general curriculum. Rather, I invite you to enter the lifeworld of these first graders to see and hear the reactions firsthand. These students are proud to share their journey of understanding in a collective and collaborate manner with their teacher to educate, to inspire, and to be a catalyst for change.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



Photograph 1. Touching

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

~Aristotle

I am a teacher of young children. For as long as I can remember, I knew I was going to be a teacher. I don't know how I knew; I just did. It was never something that I wondered about or that was part of a list of possibilities. I just knew it in my heart, and I *listened* to my heart. It was at peace. As a teacher, it has become more and more important to me over the years to teach toward a peaceful state of being—to nurture the hearts of my students as well as their minds by providing opportunities for them to grow

from the inside out. This dissertation, then, is ultimately about the hearts of children, my first grade students, as they reach out and connect with children who have severe disabilities—children that, though attending the same school, are separated in their own room just down the hall. It is also about their teacher—me—as I document the magical phenomenon that is their shared experience.

A Story Begins

Seven years have gone by since Dr. Richard Pimentel came to speak at my school district's back-to-school celebration. Listening to this gifted public speaker tell his story was nothing short of inspiring and life-changing for me, not just in a personal sense but in the realization that I had the opportunity to teach differently. Richard Pimentel, a Viet Nam veteran, came home from war with severe hearing loss and tinnitus from a close-range explosion and struggled to get back on his feet in the job world where he found it nearly impossible to be hired because of his disability. An incident that occurred when he was out with a friend for a late-night bite to eat, however, spurred Pimentel's advocacy efforts in a way no other could. This very smart friend of Pimentel's had severe deformities from cerebral palsy and was asked to leave the restaurant under the state's "Ugly Law,"[1] which stated that any person found to be disgusting to other patrons would be asked to leave the premises (Pimentel, 2007). It was under these circumstances that Pimentel became a tireless activist, author, and speaker for over the next 30 years. He worked long and hard and is credited for the groundwork necessary for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which only came into law in 1990 ("Dr. Richard

[1] The "Ugly Laws" were in effect in many states throughout our nation from 1867 through 1974.

Pimentel," 2014). He continues to speak out today, teaching and inspiring others just as he did me.

Upon leaving the auditorium that day, my mind was racing. We had children right in our very own elementary school in wheelchairs with severe disabilities; children who were, for the most part, wheeled in a side door unnoticed and not spoken to. Indeed, at the time, my own daughter, who had attended this school for four years, said to me, “I never saw those kids in the halls unless it was time for them to go out to the bus parked out in front of the school.” These children’s teachers had not even been considered to be part of the main teaching staff but were often looked at as a separate entity or group who happened to “share” the building. Oftentimes, I would observe the other children pointing a rude finger and overhear them giggling and whispering or worse stopping to stare, if they happened to be in the hallway at the same time an occupied wheelchair was going by.

Part of me understood the curiosity of a 6-year old as someone who was a young child in the ’60s when one did not see people in wheelchairs out in public very much at all. Anyone with a special need was cared for at home or in a state institution. Children are naturally curious and not always tactful but that is the point where I knew it was my job as an educator to teach more than the basic curriculum. Curiosity was one thing but not being tolerant of differences was quite another. This was not the ’60s. Things were starting to change for the better, and I knew I needed to teach for a more humane world by showing my students how to love these children as people first and to look beyond the differences.

As a follower of John Dewey (1938) and his ideas on constructing meaning through experience, I knew that this sort of learning had to be continuous, occur naturally, and grow organically with my part in it being only the provider of the experience and a listener of their story. All I needed to do to create an experiential opportunity for my students was summon up the courage to present my idea to the special education teacher in Room 24. The following vignette details the moment the idea was shared.

Vignette 1: An Inspired Idea Becomes a Reality

The weeks and months ticked by that fall of 2007 as I contemplated how I was going to provide my students with an opportunity to interact with the children down the hall and around the corner in the room numbered 24. Like most of the staff, I really did not know the quiet, young, first-year teacher who worked hard each day to make life more accessible for her students. Finally, as the first semester was coming to a close, I summoned up my courage and trotted down the hall with my proposition. When I first suggested that I would like very much for my students to have some interaction with hers, she simply stared at me while trying to comprehend my request. I explained to her that I have five tables of students in my room and asked if it would be possible for my kids to each take a day of the week to come to her classroom for 20-30 minutes on their given day. It was my hope that through their time together, my children would come to see her students as people first, develop a friendship with them, and that, by being this example for others, they would make a wonderful and lasting impression for years to come. Indeed, they would make a difference. When the sweet, young teacher understood my request and realized how this learning relationship and friendship would certainly be

reciprocated, she whole-heartedly agreed! It became official; "First Grade Friends" would begin at the start of the next semester in January 2008. Thank you, Richard Pimentel.

Rationale for Research

The story above highlights the events that led to an important realization for me—I can teach differently. My qualitative exploration demonstrates how a teacher making a slight change in practice can have a great impact on a child's learning lifeworld. The change was not difficult to realize even though my students did not share the same learning environment as their friends.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) does not require full inclusion in schools but instead requires that students with special needs be situated according to their unique needs in an environment that is least restrictive. For children with severe disabilities, this generally means being apart from the regular education students. As a classroom teacher, I am dedicated to teaching my students to be accepting of differences, such as special needs, and how, by doing so, they are making contributions to a better world in a problem-posing, "process of *becoming*," manner (Freire, 1993, p. 65). I agree with Michael Apple's (2001) interview comments regarding his ideas about separating out those with special needs and the importance of inclusive interactions for children:

> I think that it's [inclusion is] important not just for the children who are labeled as having disabilities, but it is just as important for children who are not labeled that way. What kind of society are we producing when we separate out and do not have collective responsibilities so that our children don't know how to interact with everyone else? (p.24)

Though the question has been asked about whether or not it is even within a classroom teacher's power to transform society in a significant way, I err on the side of individual personal transformation in my classroom by challenging my students at a deeply emotional and cognitive level and subscribe to the ideal of change occurring "…one person, one learner, at a time" (Burbules, 2010, p. xxvii).

As a follower of Dewey (1938) and his philosophy of constructing meaning through experience, as well as being a critically conscious educator, it was important to me that my students did have an opportunity for the kind of interaction Apple (2001) advocates. Seven years ago, I found a way to give my students just such an interactive critical experience, which is viewed by both my students and their parents as one of the most important parts of their first grade year with me. Each day, a group of my students from one of my five classroom tables (five to six children) spends 30 minutes in another classroom down the hall that is home to eight children who have severe disabilities. This room, numbered 24, is equipped with brightly colored and tactile manipulatives that make sounds and require buttons to be pushed along with computers, musical instruments, books, a ball pit, and rug area—all necessary equipment for the stimulation of the cognitive and physical development of these children who spend approximately 90% of their day in a wheelchair.

My study focused on Room 24 as I analyzed the student interactions and impacts through visual documentation and interviews. I felt it important to explore what happened during those interactions that so positively affected my first graders not only as students in the classroom but also as compassionate human beings with an elevated sense of

understanding, social justice, and agency. The following questions guided me through the process of analysis as I explored the magic of Room 24:

1. How do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities; and what do their words reveal regarding their understandings about and across difference?
2. What do interactions between students "look like" and what can "doing" reveal about human interactions?

During our many classroom discussions, also known as "grand conversations" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), and in sharing children's books about various needs people may have, the emphasis and resonating theme was what individuals *can* do. During her lifetime, activist Laura Hershey worked for many years to change the negative discourse surrounding the annual televised Muscular Dystrophy fundraiser from an event based on a corporation's "greed, deception, and bigotry" (Hershey, 1993, p. 250) and a focus on what people with special needs *can't* do to a positive discourse—one of awareness and changes that can be made in our culture to accommodate those with special needs. Siebers (2011) queries, what if disability were viewed as "central to the human condition…a positive, critical concept useful to define a shared need among all people…?" (p. 180). This is the "can-do" language and attitude I focus on and guide my students toward as they interact with their friends and grow in their understanding of difference (Rogers & Swadener, 2001).

After facilitating this interactive experience for my students for the past seven years, the results of their friendship with the other children are evident in the classroom as they proceed with their responsibilities for the day. This regular event seemed to

positively affect my students in many social, emotional, and academic ways over the course of a year. As a teacher having observed this for many years, there was good reason to refer to the children's interactive experience as a key factor in their growth as students and caring individuals. My class (2013-2014) willingly assisted me in the understanding of this remarkable transformation—a change that was felt to be a phenomenological result of the time spent with their friends in Room 24. The results of this study are appropriate and worthy of sharing with colleagues, parents, school board members, and state senators in our combined effort to inform and inspire during this time of confusion and upheaval in educational reform efforts.

Educators, and the general public, are grappling with the meaning behind the new standardization of the Common Core and the lingering emphasis on testing (Ravitch, 2014). This is the precise time when hearing children speak about important experiences in their learning-filled lifeworlds could make an impact on many others. What is taking place in the educational systems is deeply affecting our youth, yet few are taking time to listen to the children (Roberts, 2000). Young parents, who were for the most part raised during the '90s decade when everyone was "great" and everyone got "the trophy" regardless of skill, need to be educated about the damage that is done when they only look at their child's test scores as a measure of their intelligence or potential to make it in a competitive world. With the new rigorous standards and high-stakes tests, not everyone will get the prize; indeed, many will be retained in the third grade due to reading difficulties (Layton, 2013). This realization has caused parents to put undue pressure on their children and spend hours at homework and skills that result in tears and often a complete shut-down by the child. Just as disturbing is the misconception that a "certain

performance of a skill is a signal of knowledge" (Gardner, 2011, p. 6), but when the circumstances for testing are changed, the "learning" doesn't transfer.

In addition to giving kids voice, this study makes a unique contribution toward informing social policies that profoundly affect children in that these students are indeed collaborators and not research objects. They represent themselves. My students make a case for their own and others' learning needs as they tell about the significance of their year-long relationship with children who have special needs. It is of notable importance how they also become a socially symbolic voice for their non-speaking friends.[2] The interesting thing about this research is that though it does take place in an institutional building we call "school," it actually resides in a space all its own. The experience is not part of any scripted curriculum, nor is it being tested. This is precisely *why* these voices matter. My students do not have a list of objectives to achieve during their time together, and the teachers are facilitators only during the interaction. Because of the unique characteristics involved here, this study does not *look* or *feel* like what is commonly conducted and accepted as educational research (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010). It pushes the boundaries of what is known as *typical* educational research and exists outside the familiar discourses associated with studies concerning children, school, and curriculum. This new space requires and therefore enables researchers to peer with new eyes into the private worlds of children and hear with new ears as they speak out for themselves.

[2] Moser and Law's (2001) work explains how disabled kids' voices are not recognized or are a disqualified narrative. They posit that voices do not exist in isolation; therefore, though my students cannot "give" their friends a voice, through their interaction and ensuing actions they become a collective symbol of voice.

Dissertation Overview

To help in the understanding of and to explain what occurs in Rooms 2 and 24, Chapter 2 provides a closer look at the ideas of the theorists who are referenced throughout this exploration, how those theories applied during the analysis of data, and why they are a good match for this study. Following the introduction of the theoretical background, a literature review of related studies illustrates what has been done prior to this investigation in the areas of peer interactions and inclusion. This review revealed potential gaps in current research with children. Following the studies with children, I have included a section acknowledging work that has been done concerning the critical social aspects of disability and the politics of care.

Chapter 3, a methods section, discusses the qualitative methods that were used to gather the data set for this exploration, complete with an additional literature review of related studies that honor children's voice. The additional review was included for the purpose of clarifying the researcher's choices for documentation as well as bring to light the critical underlying themes in this exploration of voice in the classroom and rights-based research with children (Soto & Swadener, 2005; Swadener & Polakow, 2011). The study design and methods section introduces the participants and a plan for data collection, including the timeline for the school year during which data was collected.

Chapter 4 shares powerful evidence of this teacher/action research through a systematic and visual presentation of the data set. The evidence is categorized by method in the following order: interviews, journal entries, photo elicitation, and finally, the focus group responses with student voice being presented in a relatively unmediated manner in keeping with the teacher/researcher's desire to honor the voice of children.

Chapter 5 concludes the presentation of this qualitative exploration with a discussion of how the research questions answer themselves by viewing the evidence through a theoretical lens of choosing to see as well as an offering of implications and recommendations for future pathways in educational practice and research.

CHAPTER 2: A CONVERSATION OF THEORY AND RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework
John Dewey, Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, Tobin Siebers, and Mikhail Bakhtin

John Dewey

I drew from the work of John Dewey (1938) as a teacher who closely follows his ideas on how meaning is constructed through experiences. Being a teacher at a school that subscribes to a constructivist pedagogy, Dewey's (1938) ideas of the teacher as a facilitator and the learning as a social undertaking of creating knowledge were a good fit for this classroom-based study. Rather than the teacher being the source of knowledge and passing it on to students, an opportunity was provided—interaction with friends in Room 24—wherein students were free to construct meaning. According to Dewey (1944), the democratic society (i.e. classroom) becomes a place of "associated living" through this "communicated experience" (p. 87). This idea aligns with the community-building that takes place in Room 2 through our conversations, reflections, and the actual interactions between the students; the experience being, as Dewey (1938) defines, that which "consists of actual life experiences of individuals" (p. 89). As a teacher of young children, I strive to provide many experiences with a great emphasis on those of a critical nature.

Michael Apple and Paulo Freire

Michael Apple (2009) states that simply by virtue of being a teacher, we are taking part in a political act. With that understanding, I know that if I only teach reading, writing, and mathematics, I am not fulfilling my duty as an educator to teach for a more humane world as prescribed by Dewey (1938). Critical pedagogy takes the critical

elements of social justice (or injustice) and combines them with education. This results in a classroom where the focus is teaching students to think critically about their education and the situations of oppression in the institution of school and society and how they can act accordingly for transformation. In a first grade classroom, the question, "How can we make a difference?" exemplifies this thinking as my students have the opportunity to challenge the present and dream of a better future. Along with Apple's ideas, Paulo Freire's (1993) philosophy of school as being a place where freedoms can be practiced and a critical consciousness nurtured also complements my desires to create a safe place for my student's development as humanitarians. According to Freire (1993), this human existence is not a silent one but one of dialogue which cannot exist without "a profound love for the world and for people" (p. 70). These ideas were central to my students' relationship with their friends in Room 24 and an important piece in the development of my research analysis.

Tobin Siebers

Love for everyone, regardless of differences, was central to the experience my students had with their friends. A human rights approach identifies "wide variations …as inherent in the human condition" (Pothier & Devlin, 2006, p. 52). Rather than disabilities being viewed as defects, an emerging model takes the stance of exclusion being a "social injustice" and rallies for changes in the current system (Siebers, 2011, p. 3). Tobin Siebers' (2011) work and ideas in disability studies was a good match for this classroom exploration concerning differences and how they are viewed with his critique of what he refers to as the "ideology of ability" (p. 8). He asserts that society possesses a line at which humanness is determined, a place at which individuals become excluded and

discriminated against. These are the themes around which the motivation to provide the interactive experience for my first graders were shaped. It was important to the community created in my classroom that each and every individual be included and valued regardless of ability and that those sentiments reach beyond the classroom walls. In this exploration of interaction between the children in Room 2 and Room 24 there lies the potential for others to see that these children with disabilities have a future, which is what Siebers (2011) states is necessary for ending their "unjust and unrecognized oppression" (p. 211).

Mikhail Bakhtin

How the magic occurred during the interactions was where the mystery lay. The time together was special in that my students' friends were unable to converse and participate in a typical manner. Though none of my students' special friends spoke in sentences, there was indeed a verbal and non-verbal exchange occurring—a dialogue. The importance of this time together centered around Mikhail Bakhtin's (1982) concept of dialogue as an essential ingredient in *all* human interaction, unique to the sender and the recipient dependent upon the socio-cultural experience. The actual source of that interaction is where I believed the mystery and magic of my research lay—a place both inside and out. Bakhtin's (1990) idea of *outsidedness*—Self and Other—is as intriguing as what I had observed in my students upon their return to my classroom: a transformation of self that I had not been able to explain as an outsider. Bakhtin's (1990) notion of *self* and *other* in any human dialogic exchange provided the bulk of the theoretical framework for this exploration as I illustrate a phenomenon of human interaction.

Literature Review

Children's Experiences: Inclusion and Peer Interactions

Inclusion.

I began my initial search for recent studies (2009 to present) related to my students' experience by looking for young children's inclusive/peer interactions in their social world. I used the following descriptors in various combinations: peer interactions/ inclusion/special needs/disability in primary/early childhood /teaching/learning across difference/children's social relationships/friendships in school. The term inclusion combined with education and peers revealed studies that, in my estimation, were not always celebratory and were primarily focused on the difficulties and challenges encountered by teachers and students with disabilities. As a classroom teacher, the following themes during the review were particularly noticeable concerning teachers:

- challenges teachers experienced with mainstreaming
- teachers' attitudes about inclusion
- teacher identification of students with disabilities
- testing/assessing those with disabilities in the classroom
- a need for more diversity training in teacher ed. programs
- teaching strategies for developing disability awareness (to include on-line videos).

Challenges for the students themselves included a lack of peer acceptance for those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) that was explored in a mainstreamed secondary school (Symes & Humphrey, 2010) as well as, in an additional study, a disturbing revelation of bullying and victimization toward those in the special education

population (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2010). Additionally, a group of grown women with cerebral palsy recalled past educational experiences with varying degrees of peer acceptance (Freeborn & Mandleco, 2010). Promise of positive inclusive practice was evidenced in a study of Chinese children with ASD in Hong Kong (Peters & Forlin, 2011), as well as in a university-school district partnership of school inclusive reform (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011). However, the area of friendship appeared limited in the following studies to a comparison aspect of children with/without ASD and the amount of interaction between the two (Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, & Chamberlain, 2010). An additional study depicted a misunderstanding of what friendships mean to children with autism in that sometimes they just want and need to play alone (Calder, Hill, & Pellicano, 2013).

Peer Interactions.

Under the description of peer interactions, research was found concerning how children navigate their relationships and collaborative efforts with others who were felt to have valuable skills or characteristics that might complement them somehow (Kayama & Haight, 2013; Ladd et al., 2013) with the relationship becoming a means to an end and not necessarily one of friendship or caring. Another example of this was an investigation into peers as picture partners where students socially constructed meaning through interaction and negotiated for a consensus as to what they were going to draw (Soundy & Drucker, 2010). Though the negotiating aspects of students interacting was a related theme, I felt the above-mentioned works demonstrated a gap in research in that the peer interactions studied were of children with only typical peers as opposed to regular

education students interacting with those who have severe physical and/or mental disabilities. Also lacking were studies of positive inclusive experiences promoting awareness of difference, fostering friendships, and an empathic understanding of difference as a result of that experience. One alarming but notable detail that surfaced during my review was that those with negative experiences were in adolescence or even in secondary school.

I believe more research to promote awareness in the areas of teacher training and peer acceptance in early childhood could perhaps lessen the difficulties encountered by those with special needs with their peers in later school years. Work in this area may even require a "study up" (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 283) philosophy of looking above children/students to parents, teachers, principals, etc. In regard to the idea of studying up, two encouraging related educational studies caught my attention in the area of critical classroom teaching. In one, young children were striving to make a difference in various ways (Neufeld, 2010), as were my first graders, while another study promoted classroom teacher awareness by taking a critical look at how children's books portray blindness (Hughes, 2012). This area of critical classroom teaching and learning (Sapon-Shevin, 2014; Sapon-Shevin & Zollers, 1999), is the area of possibility and promise in which I felt my research lies.

Politics of Care

Though my study focused on the effects of providing just such a critical classroom experience for my first graders, as mentioned above, the nature of the experience, interactions between my students, and their friends who have severe special needs, required the inclusion of a review of recent literature concerning various

perspectives on the politics of care. The following terms were used during my search for current work: ethics of care/models of disability/politics of care.

The two dominant theoretical models of disability are known as the medical model and the social model. Siebers' (2011) work describes the medical model as embodiment, a property of the body that is in need of medical intervention. The social model, on the other hand, views society, the built environment and language, as the disabling factor for these individuals and one that requires social justice as an intervention (Shakespeare, 2013; Siebers, 2011). As a classroom teacher who desired her young students to gain an understanding of difference, the language I built into our community discourse[3] (Gee, 1990) was of great importance. A people-first stance became our motto as we aimed to reduce (hopefully eliminate) the ridicule, rejection, and fear toward our population of students with special needs by our example of extending hands of friendship, understanding, and loving care through inclusive interactions with them during the school year.

Jenny Morris (2001) takes a closer look at the discourse to describe the variance of need among the human population and the current language when referring to the politics of care. Morris advocates for a reconceptualization of the use of the word *care* to recognize our common humanity. This idea resonated with my teaching goals in this research of basic human rights for all individuals regardless of one's needs or the level of care necessary for accessing a quality life.

[3] Gee's (1990) work describes discourse in a community as big "D" discourse to encompass other social practices such as values, behaviors, and perspectives, whereas little "d" discourse refers to everyday language-in-use.

In her articles on disability studies, Garland-Thomson (2002; 2005) discusses the importance of merging disability theory with feminist theory to illuminate and to enhance the explanation of existing attitudes of disability and negative labeling by arguing that theory should not be viewed as a set of standards to follow or be used to police. Further, Garland-Thomson (2002) claims that when recognizing disability as a category of "identity and cultural concept" society understands that feminist disability studies is for everyone, not only women with disabilities, as we realize what it is to be human through our relationships with others (p. 5). A practical example of such a relationship is the one between my students and their friends.

Following a similar ideology, Ferri (2009) refers to a reimagining of special education and current reform efforts to create a more just educational system, as she discusses in her work that difference needs to be honored, not labeled. Having first-hand experience working as a teacher under today's educational model provides me with a primary source of evidence as a researcher on the deleterious effects of the labeling systems in place in our schools. As I examine my work as a teacher-scholar along with the help of my students, I feel we are participating in what Garland-Thomson (2002) refers to as "academic activism" by challenging the existing pedagogical knowledge and communal attitudes of others (p. 25).

Though my first graders did not care for the physical needs of their friends in Room 24, it is important to mention the work of Silvers (1995) in regard to caregivers. Silvers points out that the affection, admiration, and respect family members feel and display in their caregiving toward a loved one with special needs is difficult to sustain in society with complete strangers. The dilemma here is that with strangers, viewing them

as different rather than equal is often met with forms of mistreatment within institutional settings. As an educator who is conscious of the language used in the classroom—even the possibility that the use of the term difference may create ideas of separateness rather than the knowledge that difference is inherent in the human condition—it is appropriate to refer to a point that Morris (2001) makes and one that I agree with as a goal of my study: care must encompass our common humanity (p.13).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND DESIGN

I have included a brief review in this methods chapter on voice methodology in research with children, in addition to the literature review on inclusion and the politics of care in Chapter 2, to emphasize my desire and to further clarify my rationale for honoring voice in the classroom through the qualitative research methods that I chose for my exploration as well as to justify my style of presenting the findings.

The following section describes studies that have been done with children (as co-inquirers and co-researchers) wherein their views were honored, as well as the methods whereby their voice was included. In the democratic classroom that I strive to create each day, I chose to conduct this research as a collaborator with my first graders. The experience my students had of visiting their friends in Room 24 was an authentic component in their day with no guidelines, no set of specific, identified objectives, and no assessments. This was a self-directed experience for my students—one they owned and could use their voice in as they collaborated with me. To include and bring to the foreground my students' rights/voice concerning their educative, interactive experience, I used the following descriptors to find related studies on methodologies being used in research with children: children's voice/agency in educational/classroom research, methods with children. This informative review greatly assisted me in my methodological choices.

Literature Review of Research Methods Honoring Children's Voice

Listening to Their Voices

I begin by mentioning the work of a few researchers who were moved by some of the injustices that young people endure and thus involved children as co-inquirers and co-

researchers. Tucker (2013) involved young victims, ages 5 through 15, as research partners as they explored together the reasons why people do not listen or believe them when they report instances of abuse. This study was emotionally difficult and pushed the boundaries of research ethics considering age and privacy issues as did a study in 2006 on giving kids a voice on bullying (Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006). In this qualitative research, children gave pictorial and narrative representations of their bullying experiences and expressed their thoughts and feelings in their own voice through the use of open-ended questions about their drawings. An interesting and significant finding in this study was that the children thought it important to include a morals/values component in the school's anti-bullying interventions. This finding is in keeping with Eisenberg's (1992) views that children have an innate understanding of what it means to be a decent human being and to have compassion for each other, which was a related thread in our work.

It seems appropriate that if children are truly research participants in a democratic sense they ought to have a say in the data collecting methods that are used. Though I did not include this step in my research, Malcolm Hill (2006) explored this area as he studied, through using children's voice, the methods whereby they preferred their voice be heard. Children ages 5-15 were put into groups for discussions, and they also answered questionnaires. The fact that these methods of collecting data had to be chosen prior to hearing what the children preferred presented an interesting conundrum for Hill.

During my research, two distinct schools of thought became apparent—those who didn't think children needed any assistance in saying what needed to be said and those who did. The dichotomy in this thinking is demonstrated in the following studies.

Pepukayi Chitakunye (2012) believed that kids, at some age and with some understanding, can participate and be active agents and key informants in matters concerning their own food consumption; by recovering their voices, he showed how they can actually assist their families (in their own right) in the important food decision-making process. On the other hand, some researchers (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Winter, 2012) felt that children needed assistance to help them contribute more confidently or scaffolding strategies, such as the use of "reality boxes," in order to encourage them to participate, though both studies were done under the premise of participatory, rights-based research as outlined by the 1989 United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011).

These studies demonstrate how views in the adult world may differ regarding how much a child can do or say without assistance. As a teacher of young children for many years, I agreed with Perner (1985) that 6 and 7-year-old children have a great capacity for conversational competency. From their vantage point, I felt they were capable and had the right to provide their own perspectives of their lifeworld filled with the hope of being heard. Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy (2004), recognized as a champion for basic human rights such as voice, used these words to explain the discrimination between who is heard and who is not: "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or preferably unheard." Her words can be seen to illustrate how adult ways of thinking about the world may be imposed upon children's words, therefore silencing them.

Drawings as Voice and Method

Something children do best, as a part of their world, is draw pictures. This is an inviting way to create an authentic response while taking a peek from their perspective and is also a way to open up the conversation about various other aspects in the drawing that they might not otherwise bring up during an interview. Sara Elden (2012) pointed out that in the recent debate on how to offer up democratic ways for a child to be given voice in research that the method of drawings in data collection elicits an authentic and powerful response albeit "messy" at times. Children appreciate the chance to draw as a way to communicate and though, depending on the research question, it isn't always the best method to honor their presence it certainly shows both their competence and their vulnerability (Komulainen, 2007) as a seen and heard contributing voice.

Drawings from children can also be viewed as an artistic "experience" that will evoke emotions in viewers (Kuby, 2013) and provide another way to value multiple meanings and interpretations in the research process (Ganesh, 2007; 2011). As a literacy educator, I could appreciate this idea as a subscriber to Louise Rosenblatt's (1982) theory of transaction. Each viewing creates a new meaning for the viewer just as new meaning is constructed between reader and text with each reading. It becomes evident through this viewing and analysis of their art events that children understand issues of power and privilege and, through expressing their understanding artistically, they are taking action against social injustices in a way that they may not always be able to verbalize. According to Sahni (2001), taking action doesn't have to result in a class project or a petition; it can happen in our moment-to-moment interactions and relationships with

others, such as the friendship that is created during the year between my students and their friends in Room 24.

With the surge to bring children to the forefront, Bourdieu (2001) actually cautioned against making the recent move in research all about children's voices at the expense of hearing others. It was around this notion that Michael Wyness (2013) framed his intergenerational study of dialogue and how the move to give children a voice as "sole interpreters" of their own standpoint, at times, left the adults marginalized (p. 1). This "power imbalance" in voice has implications for researchers that require critical and reflexive representation upon analysis (Spyrou, 2011, p. 151).

Along the lines of imbalance, Lynn Nybell (2013) urges research to consider how specific contexts and relationships (i.e. teacher/student) of power may shape utterances of youngsters. In her study of children in foster care on matters that affect them, their views were at times "distorted," "amplified," or "muted" depending on the circumstances surrounding the interactions (Nybell, 2013).

Photography as a Visual Method to Encourage Voice

As a means to counteract the possibility of distorting the views of children, as Nybell (2013) pointed out sometimes happens in power relationships, visual methodologies are continually being created and used. Along with using children's drawings (Elden, 2012; Kuby, 2013), qualitative research often uses photography as a visual representation of a child's reality (Johnson, Pfister, & Vindrola-Padros, 2012; Zartler & Richter, 2014). Photo images have a powerful impact on children and encourage them to speak about things they may not otherwise bring up as was pointed out by Elden's (2012) study of inviting the "messiness" of kids' drawings to spark dialogue.

Photography can provide a method of visualization for children and encourage them to tell stories about sensitive aspects of their life as was seen in a recent study that used this photo elicitation interview method successfully (Zartler & Richter, 2014).

In addition to the drawings and photos used as a visual method for data collection, a team of international researchers added performance to the list (Johnson, Pfister, & Vindrola-Padros, 2012). Vindrola-Padros conducted her study in Argentina using drawings as a means of voice from children undergoing treatments for cancer. In Mexico City, Pfister noticed how combining dance and drama encouraged participation amongst deaf and hearing children, while in Kenya, Johnson used photo voice with children in orphanages to better understand their strategies for coping. This combined qualitative study—written together by all three researchers—made a move away from relying on statements from adults about children's worlds and experiences and shows researchers how to consider statements made by children themselves, which is the approach that I used.

The combined literature reviews show qualitative studies in which children's voice was included and honored. I felt that my research methods would build upon some of the methods used in these qualitative studies in that my students were collaborators and active participants during the entire research process. In addition to their participation in the year-long field work/experience, my students would analyze their experience through written critical reflections and use their voice and images to inform and educate others.

The Design: A Good Fit for the Classroom

As a first grade teacher who has the extreme good fortune to be able to teach in a socio-constructivist environment with a reading/writing workshop pedagogy (Dewey, 1933; Eisner, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) and an emphasis on real books (Routman, 2003), inquiry (Awbrey & Awbrey, 1995; Postman & Weingartner, 1971), and critical conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), the design that I chose for this study easily became a part of our day.

My research plan included a participatory visual method of collecting still photos and video in combination with interviews, reflective journal writing, (in which my students wrote after each visit to Room 24 throughout the school year), focus group conversation, and individual photo elicitation for my study with my first graders and their friends. It was important to me to focus solely on *their* voice; therefore, I chose not to include field notes as part of my collected data other than to provide in Chapter 1, above, a detailed description of the setting (Geertz, 1973).

Critically Qualitative Choices

This research, a multi-method qualitative study, combined critical qualitative methods with an emphasis on visual ethnographic and phenomenological input as a means of analysis. I knew that the results of this study were not going to be about numbers or test scores. Ours was a study of a social nature. As a teacher of young children, all aspects in this realm are matters of great importance. Eisner (1991) brought a relevant vision about what matters in schools and how one could go about uncovering, studying, and researching it through various artistic means. I felt this research warranted his words in regard to the qualitative methods I used in that my students and I needed to

"say what cannot be said through numbers" (Eisner, 1991, p. 202). The qualitative/ethnographic-like methods that I used were chosen purposefully and in a way that would honor both my children's voice as well as an important social aspect of their lifeworld through a visual (artistic) means, which, according to Barone and Eisner (2011), is primarily aimed at creating an empathic appreciation.

Ethnographic-"like"

Ethnographic methods emphasize holistic ways of knowing (Wolcott, 2008) and through the use of these visual elements we *see* to know. Therefore, the use of photography was chosen specifically to create a visual representation of the students' interactions and a sense of the place where it occurs (Barone, 2001; Collier & Collier, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), while the interviews, sound bites (from both the focus group and individual photo elicitation), and journal entries would give authentic voice to the images.

Visual ethnography was introduced to me as a research method by Dr. Eric Margolis, sociologist and Professor of Communication at the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. During one of his lectures on visual ethnography, I was inspired to try to snatch glimpses of my first graders' interactions with their friends with special needs through the use of photography. As a teacher, I had always been a bit wary of using this data collecting method considering the privacy issues of photographing children and especially of those in wheelchairs (Margolis & Rowe, 2015). I learned that it was an acceptable practice with the university, for researchers to focus the camera shots on only the hands and feet of children to provide the utmost

confidentiality and was thrilled when the Institutional Review Board (IRB) accepted my proposal for this research.

Letters of consent were sent out to the parents (Appendix B) explaining the project, and my students also gave their assent (Appendix C) to participate. Throughout this process, I explained to them that we were a team, and we had an important thing to share with others through the use of pictures that I would take in combination with their voices. Though I have a great appreciation for the beauty and meaning that lies in visuals, I did not know much about the equipment necessary for recording. I needed to be taught the nuances of how to best capture my students and their friends on film and what equipment to use that would get the job done. Denny Cogswell, good friend and retired videographer, had the equipment to borrow and the time to teach me. Luckily, I had an eye for what I needed to get on film to symbolize my kids' story (Pink, 2001). I used a Canon DSLR camera for the still shots and a Sony digital video camera to tape some interaction and to record my children's voices during the interview process. Though not everyone opted for participating in the photography, all children wanted to tell their story. I understood the parental reservations with agreeing to photo images, especially in today's world of social media, and I think that some parents just did not understand what it was all about and were too busy to ask, despite the letters that were sent out. Nevertheless, there were more than enough of my 26 students (21) who did indeed participate.

The Children Who Participated

My 6- and 7-year-old students (13 girls and 13 boys) from mid to upper-class families (biological) live in a conservative community largely belonging to the protective

generation of parenting. Due to our public school's demographics—86.1% Caucasian/8.7% Hispanic/1.9% Asian/1.5% Black/1.4% two races/0.3% Native American (school website, 2015)—all of my first graders were Anglo American except for one African American/Chilean girl and one Hispanic/Caucasian boy. There was more diversity in Room 24. This classroom had a total of eight children (four boys and four girls). Two of the girls were Anglo American, while the other two were Hispanic and African American respectively. Three of the boys were Hispanic, and one was African American. These families were lower-income, and the children were bussed to our school from outside the school boundaries. Out of the eight children, four were living with their biological families, two were in foster care, and two were adopted (one by a grandparent). These children ranged in age from 6 to 12, and their parents/guardians received the same letter of consent that was sent out to my classroom families with the same options to participate or not without consequence. Even though half of these students were not living with their biological family, I was able to include all but two in the photo sessions.

The Methodological Goal

The goal of taking the photos and video was to create an inside view (through a visual-participatory method) of the unique relationship my students have with their friends in a special education, self-contained classroom. In order to accomplish that task, I had to become a participant observer (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Collier & Collier, 1986) and enter into a social world that up until then I had only experienced through my students upon their return to the regular classroom. My task as a teacher-researcher was to attempt to capture my students' interactions with their friends through visual

documentation, specifically, photos and videotapes of their interactions. Then, through further integration of the interview data, a student-narrated video would be created. Once produced, this video's intent would be to enable viewers to experience through words and images the essence of the children's time together and what it meant to them. The following vignette describes some of the "me as a teacher-researcher" moments as the process of collecting data was mixed in amongst the hurly-burl of the regular school day.

Vignette 2: Snapshot of the Teacher-Researcher

It proved to be a bit of a challenge to figure out how I was going to get down to Room 24 with my students. Data collection needed to take place during the school day. Who would take over my classroom? For the first few photo sessions, I was able to secure my student teacher who still had a few weeks before changing room assignments for her dual major; other times, I slipped out for a few minutes when I could get coverage. As a participant observer, my students knew that we all had something important to do, "a job" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 22), but even so, I didn't want to disrupt the natural flow of their time together. So at first, I stood back a few feet and zoomed in with the camera. The funny thing was that they really didn't even notice me. Even though they knew the reason why I was there, I wasn't part of the actual interaction with their friends. I really think that by now they viewed this as "their thing," so I moved in closer and just let the camera snap away. On alternate days, the video camera rolled. And so it was that I was able to record several days of interactions from 9:50 a.m. until 10:20 a.m. and felt all the while that something very important was occurring just a few feet away from me. I felt that if I tried really hard maybe I could stop time within some of

those fleeting moments with my camera. I was hopeful that it was a long enough pause—just long enough to glimpse the magic.

After several visits to Room 24 with my students, I was ready to begin the interview process. I used a semi-structured approach for ease in comparing their responses later on during the process of data analysis. As mentioned earlier, conversation plays an important role in my classroom. My children are accustomed to dialogue of a critical nature as I try to incorporate Dewey's (1933) ideas of how thinking "that result in beliefs….leads to reflective thought" (p. 5) and to develop an attitude in my classroom of thinking reflectively about experiences as Edward Glaser (1941) points out. To keep the interviewing dialogue conversational and flowing I had in mind several open-ended questions to ask each of them. They were eager to be invited to come sit behind the piano with "Mrs. Struble" to share their views and to have, clipped onto their shirt, the lavaliere microphone that would record their important words. As you can well imagine, it was no small feat to run a classroom of first graders from behind the piano! From my vantage point, however, I was confident about the trade-off of a few mornings of a loosely run classroom for what my ears were hearing and what was being reflected in the eyes of my children upon being given a voice about a school-time experience—one that was mostly of their own design. Being the novice that I am, there were of course the days where I recorded a whole tape of the backside of the piano and no voices, save typical classroom background noise, but over the course of two weeks, I was successful and regarded the result a priceless gem.

From this point on I began the process of building their story by text editing together sound bites of different children's voices from the interview process and then

editing the still images and video clips over the sound bites. This pairing of the narrative with images allowed me as a researcher to honor the self-representations and to symbolize the story of the participants (Pink, 2001), which in this case were my students. In my best estimation, the process from pre-production to finished product took approximately 50 hours, including the shooting time. It was time well-spent on telling a story for these children who were now the voice of over 150 students of mine who had gone before them to Room 24 to experience this special space tucked between all other spaces and places of the school day—a story waiting to be told.

A Closer Look at the Methods Used to Capture the Magic

In an attempt to capture and hold on to just a moment of the magical interactions, I needed to have a visual of the participants and the space where the interaction occurred to help me explain and show what happened there. Just as children draw pictures to verbalize and make sense of what they, at times, are not able to do adequately with words alone, the act of drawing aids in the meaning-making process (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). Therefore, to help in my documentation, assist my students in saying what needed to be said, and allow others to better see into their world, I chose to collect my data visually through the use of still images mixed with video footage, an effect made popular by American Documentarian, Ken Burns.[4] The use of photography in this manner, to gather "selective" and "specific" information, allows researchers to render the photos meaningful to the investigation and assists them in accurately observing phenomena that is not understood (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 10). As their teacher, I needed to understand. The next step for me in the process was to edit the children's actual

[4] Kenneth Lauren "Ken" Burns is an American director and producer of documentary films, known for his style of using archival footage and photographs.

voices (from transcribed interview text) over the visuals and produce a video that would then become a major part of my data set (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). Interviewing as a method for data collection ensures that participants provide their voice and point of view as it pertains to their world (Brenner, 2006; Collier & Collier, 1986). I had created a general list of interview questions to guide the direction of the interviews along certain lines, (Wink, 2000); however, after the initial opening question, the process often took on the form of a more open-ended, interactional process of meaning making (Kvale, 1996; Spradley, 1979). Though using a video recorder to tape responses, I made sure to turn it away from my students during the interview sessions to reduce any potential for self-consciousness and to encourage a more natural flow of this critical conversation occurring between us.

Another important aspect of my classroom, in addition to reflective and critical conversation, is reflective writing (Boud, 2001; Dewey 1933; Schon, 1983). My students are often seen writing in their writer's notebooks about their observations, events in their lives, and experiences that are a part of our days together. My decision to use written journal entries/drawings (Ganesh, 2011) as a method for data collection was due to the authentic nature of the critical whole language writing practices already in place in the classroom (Goodman & Goodman, 1981; Harste & Woodward, 1984). From the very first year of friendship interactions, during the 2007-2008 school year, I have had my students respond in what I always refer to as their "reflection journals" as soon as they come back into the classroom from their visit down the hall. I teach them to date the page, but, at the same time, I point out the difference between reporting the events, as in a diary or a log, and thinking critically about the experience. This practice of writing

reflectively after an experience nurtures critical thinking in the broader social sense and gives students a chance to express themselves and to record their thoughts (Boud, 2001; Dewey, 1933; Graves, 1985; Schon, 1983). A chart of prompts hangs in my classroom to help my students learn this type of writing and thinking and reminds them to focus their thoughts with phrases like I noticed, I wondered, I felt, I saw, I discovered, and so on. With the wide range of development in a first grade classroom, some pick it up quickly and adopt it as their natural way of conversing while others continue to need the prompts for assistance as they work toward the level of their peers (Vygotsky, 1978). These journals provided an additional source of data from the minds and hearts of my students that detail in their own words some of the sought-after secrets that lie within their experiences with their friends.

Along with the interviews and journal writing, I conducted a focus group and several photo elicitation sessions with my students during the last remaining month of the school year as a third source of "voice" to provide a measure of reliability to this study. I loved the fact that not only could I use images to evoke meaning for viewers, but I could also use them as a tool to obtain knowledge for my analysis (Collier & Collier, 1986). Conducting a focus group as a method for data collection provides the participants (my students) an opportunity to discuss a viewing (which in this case was the video I produced of their interactions) while in a group setting as opposed to the one-on-one interviewer and informant method that took place behind the piano in the classroom. In a group setting (such as a focus group), the natural interactions between participants often produce additional insights and data that would otherwise be inaccessible (Morgan, 1988).

I gathered the last piece of data through photo elicitation by showing my students several still images that I had taken during my visits and asking them to tell me what was happening in the pictures while I recorded their responses. This qualitative research method relieves the participant of any potential stress of being the *subject* of the interview process and provides an opportunity for a "spontaneous flow of information" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 106). Through these final two methods, I was able to achieve the triangulation of my data set that offered validity to the voices.

Table 1 illustrates the timeline for this project beginning with obtaining site access, through the charting of the data collection—which took place during the school year 2013-2014—to investigation completion. All of the data for this teacher-action research was collected with IRB approval having been negotiated and granted by Arizona State University (Appendix A).

Table 1

Research Timeline

Month	Task Description
September- 2013	Obtain site access from building principal
	Send out parental letters of consent/students sign assent
October - 2013	Video tape segments during peer interaction in Room 24
	Video tape segments from Room 2
	Record individual interviews from students in Room 2
	Take still photos from both Room 24 and Room 2
October/Nov.- 2013	Create a video of student interactions/student voice
January- April 2014	Collect data from student journal entries/research/writing comps
May - 2014	Show class the video/conduct taped focus group discussion
	Conduct taped photo elicitation
	Research/Writing

Data Analysis

During the process of analysis, the visual data served as evidence of the researcher (myself) as having been present (Geertz, 1985). The audio recordings of interviews, photo elicitations, and the focus group discussion were carefully transcribed. What was said by the students during the interviews was then compared/contrasted with what was said during the focus group conversation, as well with what was said of the photos during the photo elicitation sessions. The written reflection journals were coded by common themes. I searched for patterns in this data that tied back to the spoken words (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Figure 1 provides a visual of the triangulation that I employed for assessing trustworthiness of my analysis and assertions (Denzin, 1978).

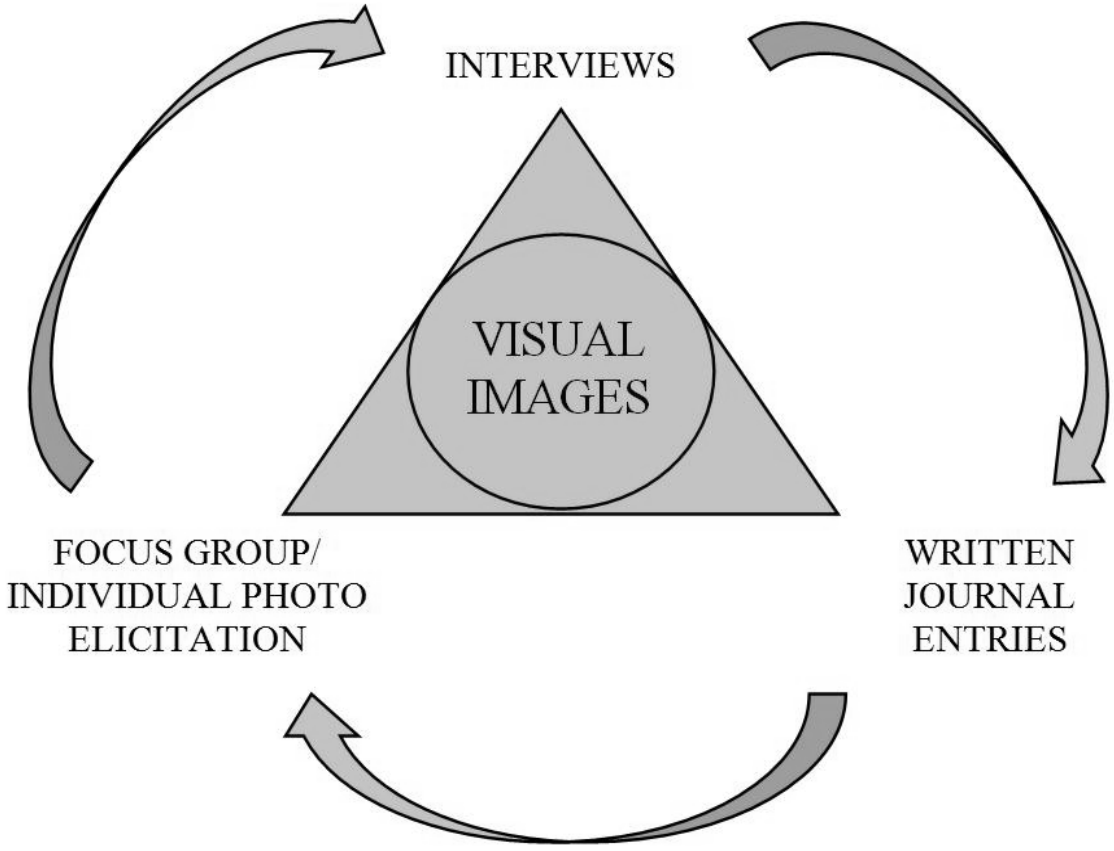


Figure 1. Triangulation of Data

CHAPTER 4: VISIONS OF DOING, VOICES OF REFLECTION

Commonality in Conversations: Verbal and Written

There are several important layers that make up this study of children and experience. First and foremost, this exploration occurred through a classroom teacher's need to understand the noticeable impact displayed by her students after their experience of interacting with children who have severe disabilities. As a teacher, I drew from a knowledge of experience and its link to learning, as well as a personal desire to teach for a more just and humane world. In order for a just world to happen, I needed to model that kind of world in my classroom by providing a climate of mutual respect through not only listening to my students but also actually hearing what they were saying. In an effort to honor my students' voices in this collaborative study, I have provided an opportunity in this chapter for readers to immerse themselves into the world of 6- and 7-year-olds by employing an untraditional method of presenting data, with an invitation to be one who not only listens, but one who also sees (Pink, 2009) and hears.

Throughout Chapter 4, I share my students' relatively unmediated voices in words and pictures through a systematic categorization of thematic findings that emerged during analysis. As per my rationale for methods used (see Chapter 3), I have chosen to withhold excessive interpretive comments in this chapter by using the children's voices to frame the findings and allow the data to "speak for themselves" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 10) and gently nudge readers to begin to see with new eyes how this study answers the following questions that have guided this research: 1) How do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities, and what do their words reveal

about their understandings about and across difference?, and 2) What do interactions between students "look like," and what can "doing" reveal about human interactions?

It is important to reiterate that the photos taken were authentic shots of actual interactive moments between my first graders and their friends. The images shared throughout Chapter 4 were not prompted or staged but were collected and are now being displayed with the knowledge that the sense of seeing is essential, as humans, in making sense (Pink, 2009) of our (*self*) actions within the material world, as well as our interactions with others (*other*) (Bakhtin, 1990).

After the visuals (photos), the majority of the data I collected from my first graders focused on their words (voice). The close community that we were combined with the fact that ours was a sociocultural environment created a natural place for the children to talk about their experience. The interview portion will be presented with each question's responses listed in a bulleted format providing a purposely anonymous aura of speaker identity intended to begin to draw the audience deeper into the words and the possibilities therein. Each question is preceded with a contextual and theoretical rationale for its inclusion. The written journal selections have been reported under a categorization of findings by themes that emerged during the process of analysis. Finally, I share two sections (photo elicitation and focus group) of data where the spoken words are echoed in new and different settings to illustrate the triangulated responses of my first graders. Photos and student drawings have been included as visual evidence to enhance readers' interpretation of the meaning behind the words as well as to support data by helping to communicate findings. I invite you to "…think with and to think about" (Coffey &

Atkinson, 1996, p. 153) the data while focusing on and imagining the world of the individuals, my 6- and 7-year-old students.

Sharing the Spoken Words

Interviews

To begin, I have included the original interview questions I had in hand in the event that my students needed a prompt to share about their experience. Though not all children needed the same amount of prompting, the direction of the interview conversations flowed along similar lines.

Interview Questions for my First Graders
"The Magic of Room 24"

1. At the beginning of the school year, how did you feel when you first learned that you would be going to Room 24 to work with students who have special needs?

2. How do you feel now that you have visited many times?

3. What do you do with your friends in Room 24?

4 What do you enjoy most about your visits?

5. Do you feel this experience helps you or your special friends in and out of school? Explain.

6. Who should have this experience? Why?

7. Do you feel that you have changed after having had this experience? If so, how?

Figure 2. Interview Questions

Data Set: Individual Interviews

Below, I address each question with various children's responses for the purpose of pondering the evidence. Out of the 21 students who assented to participate in this research in some capacity, 17 agreed to be interviewed. The following examples reflect a variance of direct answers, thus the difference in the number of examples for each question. I spent a proportionately greater amount of time in the interview data as this area became the story (voices) behind the pictures.

The first question assumes that the critical "school-time" experience of walking down to Room 24 and spending time in the special education classroom during a portion of the day was new and different (Apple, 2009; Freire, 1993, 2013). The most important fact was that, for the majority of my first graders, the interaction during this time with children who had severe disabilities (unlike themselves) was an event that created a measure of uncertainty and challenged their socially constructed idea of what they perceived as normal body representation (Siebers, 2011).

Interview Question #1.

At the beginning of the school year, how did you feel when you first learned that you would be going to Room 24 to work with students who have special needs?

- *"And the first time that I went down there I kinda thought, 'Okay, this is kinda fun. I can't believe I'm gonna see people that have disabilities.' I didn't know what people were in charge there, but I kept getting used to it so I started to act around and be with them."*



Photograph 2. Hand

- *"When I first went down to Room 24, I was a little bit nervous; I didn't know what to do when I went down there."*

- *"Um, I was, kinda scared."*

- *"When people go down to Room 24, when, the first time when I went down I was like, um, 'What do you do?'"*

- *"I—hoped—they'd feel better and I, I was nervous about going down there."*

- *"I wondered what happened, what we were going to do."*

- *"At the beginning of the year, I felt a little shy, and I feel like the first time that I went down there I felt a little weird."*

- *"When I first went down I felt kinda nervous."*

- *"When I was, uh, in first grade, uh, it felt like, I was kinda nervous about going down to Room 24 and, like, I don't know, it felt like a feeling, like, 'Am I gonna like this or no?'"*

- *"I was embarrassed. When I first went down to Room 24, I was nervous because I really didn't know what to do."*

- *"The first time I went to Room 24, I was nervous."*



Photograph 3. Shoes

- *"Um, in the beginning of the year, I was a little nervous."*

Question # 2 relays the idea that a new experience requires "the old self to be put off and the new self to form" (Dewey, 1958, p. 245). Dewey (1958) discusses the necessity of an alteration in any inquiry or discovery in order for an individual to arrive at new truths and vision. During the course of the school year as my students' visits to Room 24 became a regular part our days together, it was my hope that a change was indeed occurring within the minds and hearts of my first graders as their friendships with the other children grew and that even though I was not present during the interactions a deeply experiential process of learning was taking place (McDermott, 1981; Kolb, 1984).

Interview Question #2.

How do you feel now that you have visited many times?

- *"I feel happy, and I'm really glad that we go to Room 24."*
- *"I was really happy that I get to know someone who's different than us. I really thought that it was fun there."*
- *"When I go down there, I think it's good for me. We do a lot of fun things."*
- *"It's fun and I'm, like, learning like different things."*
- *"I feel glad because I get to help people. I'm happy that I get to do stuff with them and so they can be happy too."*
- *"I felt good when I went to Room 24, and I thought that if we don't go into Room 24 then they won't learn."*
- ***"**Happy— and I'm not nervous anymore about going to Room 24."*
- *"Um, I felt like peace, in my heart. Um, there were some other feelings, um, love— joy. It feels like— goose bumps."*

- *"After a few more days, I felt more comfortable. After a couple times going down with my table I felt better. I look forward to it because you're playing, and you're helping other people.*

- *"Now I come down I'm not nervous because I'm more used to going. I feel—good."*

- *"Yes, this experience— I really, really like it. It just feels great."*



Photograph 4. Soft Toy

- *"Now I know what to do. It's just easier."*

- *"When I go to Room 24, I feel really good about working with the kids in Room 24."*

- *"I felt kind of better and, um, it was fun."*

- *"I liked it once I got in there, 'cuz the people, our friends in Room 24, they like us too."*

The third question addresses the "doing and undergoing" (McDermott, 1981, p. 566) part of the interaction. It was expected that some of the answers to this question would center around the actual manipulatives that were available for use during the time that my students were visiting; however, as is evident, many children extended their

responses to include their role in the doing part of this human interaction as it was perceived by them (Bakhtin, 1990).

Interview Question #3.

What do you do with your friends in Room 24?

- **"***We go to stations with them, and we can help them push the buttons, and we can go in the ball pit and help them say colors and do all that stuff. We're helping others that have disabilities, and we can show them what something that they can't—we have other things that we can that they can't be able to do."*



Photograph 5. Toys in Bins

- **"***Um, when they make arts because they are, they're learning how to do stuff. If they don't have anyone to help them learn, like, make books and stuff, they keep, they can't; they don't know what to do. You're kinda like helping them to do stuff that no one can help them do sometimes."*

- **"***The kids, um, when we do a lot of fun things and, when, and you show 'em the ball and sometimes they talk and sometimes they say, "blue" and "red." Like they learn new stuff, they know, they watch you do different things; they watch you."*

- **"***Um, we get to, um choose what wheelchair I wanna push and then we go outside and we'll play something with the kids that are in the wheelchairs."*

- **"***I thought that if we don't go into Room 24 then they won't learn, like to touch something, and, um, feel."*

- **“***We’re teaching them. We are helping them learn. In the ball pit sometimes there are kids, and we teach them colors and stuff. And we can, we could, like, a little computer that we hold up, like a big, red button, and we show it to them, and they get to press it and that plays the computer. There’s also a rug where we play music to ‘em and there are also color boxes and stuff. The colors are green and blue and red, and in the red box there is a crayon in each one, and a ball in each one, and an animal in each one, and it’s a green pear in the green one and there’s a red apple in the red one, and there was…” – (trails off).*



Photograph 6. Ball Pit

- **“***And sometimes when I go there, we go outside in the courtyard to play Go Fish or read books to ‘em and we kinda push ‘em out to the courtyard and sometimes we push them to lunch and…” – (trails off).*

- *“We play Go Fish there— helps them listen a lot— and makes them learn— and teaches them how to play.*

- *“They were happy when we play with them, and when we be kind to them. We help them be happy.”*

- *“Sometimes I go outside and play in the courtyard with them, and we play with these balls and it’s rings that we throw. We pick the ball up, and we show it to them— we do stuff, so then we keep on doing that. Mmm— we help them with their wheelchairs.”*

- *“Uh, they’re different by, like, they’re in wheelchairs and we’re not, and we’re kinda teaching them so they can do kinda half of what we can do.”*

- *"We (long pause) kinda fix damages in their brain, by talking to them and stuff. We, um, move them around and stuff. Some of the things we do are like, play drums and—(long pause), and, um, show them the colors and go in the ball pit."*



Photograph 7. Drum

- *"I help them learning about, like things like, hold things and they're learning about, like doing stuff and all that."*

- *"Go to help them, like, and talk to them and we sing."*

- *"I go in the ball pit, and there's like these little boxes—yellow, green, red, and blue—and there's like a little animal in them, and there's like a little crayon. To have them, like, feel it and they, like, see it."*

- *"I did Go Fish with them. I read a story to one of the kids."*

- *"We did Go Fish. We show them the ball and tell you what color and feel it for a second."*

Due to the open-ended nature that the interviews took on, question #4, which could have been interpreted by my students as having to do with personal taste toward an activity, was not always directly asked/answered. As their teacher, the excitement that was exhibited on each day they visited their friends, as well as the smiles on their faces upon returning to our classroom, was an indication of enjoyment. As a researcher, the inclusion of this question was my attempt to get deeper inside, and, as I soon discovered, this area of mysticism was not one that was so easily divulged. Of the children who

answered this question directly, my inquiry into their enjoyment was met with lots of thinking and hesitation. It is apparent that the magic of their interaction was as hard for them to name as it was for me— perhaps even harder.

Interview Question #4.
What do you enjoy most about your visits?

- *"I look forward to it because you're playing and you're helping other people."*
- *"I like Go Fish, and I like the ball games and try to hit the white ball."*
- *"I liked playing with the color boxes with "J" and she was trying to hold the ball and then she dropped it, and I like doing I-story to, um…" (trails off).*
- *"I like, so far, the ball pit because there's lots of balls in it, and we get to go into it with the special needs kids."*



Photograph 8. Cards

- *"It's like a whole new place, like another journey. It's really fun, it's really like; I like it."*

The purpose of question #5 is related to question #2 in that it offered an opportunity for my first graders to voice their opinions and reflect on the effects of the experience of interacting with the children in Room 24. From the moment the implementation of this experience became a reality for my students, it was of utmost importance to me as an educator that one of the outcomes would be to raise their level of

critical consciousness. I wanted them to see from within their own lifeworlds how an enhanced awareness of themselves and others in the world, and how their actions because of this knowledge, could result in change (Apple, 2009; Freire, 1993, 2013).

Interview Question #5.

Do you feel this experience helps you or your special friends in and out of school? Explain.

- ***"****I think that this is a great opportunity for us to go down there because some people don't get to experience the happiness and love that's down there."*

- *"It's important because we're helping kids that can't do things—very much stuff on their own so it's good for other people to help them."*

- *"I feel glad because I get to help people, and I think that the people that are in the wheelchairs are happy 'cuz they get to do stuff so they just don't have to stay in one room and do things just in a wheelchair and, hang in a room with only like, the teachers and wheelchairs, and I'm happy that I get to do stuff with them and so they can be happy too."*



Photograph 9. Hand and Wheelchair

- *"I felt good when I went to Room 24, and I thought that if we don't go into Room 24 then they won't learn and they'll, um, not, feel in their heart, um, they will, they won't know, like, what we do and, and if we don't go to Room 24 then they think that we just don't care about them. And, if they don't know about us then they'll just have to go home and sit around and not learn anything."*

- *"I feel important to them that, that they are learning from us."*

- *"Helps them— sing, and helps them— see nature. And helps them see flowers, like nature and trying to see the sun."*



Photograph 10. Stitched Ball

- *"Yes, it's helping them out. When you make a difference it's not like in this room, it's like in the other room doing new stuff instead of stuff in our room."*

- *"Yes, this experience— I really, really like it and they're learning; they're getting happier—learning— learning. It just feels great."*

- *"When I go to Room 24, I feel really good about working with the kids in Room 24."*

- *"I think making a difference makes them smile, and it helps them learn a lot, and whenever someone comes in their room to help them, they have a smile on their face."*

The following question (#6) provided an opportunity for my first graders to think critically about their experience not only in terms of efficacy and change agent potential (Cowhey, 2006; Edelsky, 2006; Freire, 1993) but also about its appropriateness, its place in the lives of others, and *which* others should be included. Dewey (1958) assists in the clarification of this idea when he points out that in an experiential phase the importance is not in the "having and enjoyment" but in the "sensations, ideas, beliefs or knowledge" of the experience (p. 84).

Interview Question #6.

Who should have this experience? Why?

- *"I think other people in Arizona and all over should have this, uh, have at their school to be able to do this. It's important because we're helping kids that can't do things, very much stuff on their own so it's good for other people to help them."*

- *"I think that everyone should have this experience so they can understand love for other people."*

- *"I think that everyone should go; to have fun and play with them, and make them happy."*

- *"Helping them is important; it's important for everybody."*

- *"It's fun to do, and it's good for everyone."*

- *"Um, lots of people should do it because you learn about Room 24 and you like, help them move around—and be happy."*

- *"Mmmm— uh, everyone should know—because they should know what they're,* [the students in the wheelchairs], *doing in the hall."*



Photograph 11. Showing Card

- *"Mmm, lots of kids should, because if we have lots of kids; lots and lots of kids helping them that kids can, that they're helping, can learn more than they're just learning right now."*

- *"Um, I think that everybody should have the experience and learn and learn how to do things and…" (trails off).*

- *"Yes, every single (inaudible), in every single grade, in every single school."*

Question #7, though related to question #2 when referring to feelings and change, goes beyond being more comfortable with the occurrence of the experience by focusing on an individual's perception of the "doing and undergoing" (McDermott, 1981, p. 566) aspect and how it could potentially alter previous ideas of difference.

Interview Question #7.
Do you feel that you have changed after having had this experience? If so, how?

- ***"****I feel happy, and I'm really glad that we go to Room 24."*

- *"I was really happy that I get to know someone who's different than us. Their worlds aren't different than any one's else's because they're still children."*

- *"When I go down there, I think it's good for me."*

- *"Happy— and I'm not nervous anymore about going to Room 24. Um, I learned— (long pause)— to help. And show them, like, stuff. Um, I learned that they were happy when we play with them, and when we be kind to them. We help them be happy."*

- *"Uh, I learn that I, uh, we're learning about other kids that need help and we can help, that I can help them. It's okay to have differences because if we were all the same it would be very hard to do kind of— stuff— together. Um, because— I— because I would get better at, like, being with other kids and getting to know other people."*

- *“I feel— good, ‘cuz— you’re kind of making a difference.”*

- *“Like you’re a person and then you don’t know what to do or something, and you can practice and be prepared.”*



Photograph 12. Interaction

- *“I think I’ve changed because, um, because I really like going over there. I wanna keep going to Room 24 because it’s really special for me to go down there.”*

- *“I think I’ve changed— (long pause)—mmm— because I used to be like kinda scared the first time, and now I’m not that scared because, uh, going down there I’m used to it now on Thursdays.”*

- *“I liked it once I got in there, ‘cuz the people, our friends in Room 24, they like us too.”*

- *“I am learning about peace— and— hope.”*

Sharing the Written Words



Photograph 13. Reflection

Data Set: Written Journal Entries

The following section is being shared through samples that are listed under the repeating themes identified through the process of analysis. Three distinct and balanced categories emerged for "*self*" (my students), as well as three for "*other*" (friends in room 24). Bakhtin's (1990) ideas of *outsidedness*, needing the other to complete the self, are evidenced throughout these journal entries as the children write (Boud, 2001; Dewey, 1933; Graves, 1985; Schon, 1983) and draw (Kuby, 2013) to reflect on the interactions with their friends.

Examples of my students' evidenced traits— *self*: 1) "teaching, showing, helping," 2) "liking, loving," and 3) "feeling good, great, happy"— are followed by a section outlining the three specific categories of direct references in the writing regarding their friends—*other*: 1) "friend is thinking," 2) "friend is doing," and 3) "friend is liking." Photos of my students and their friends are interspersed throughout to provide a visually

heightened experience for each reader. Photos offer a goal of reaching greater depths of personal interpretation of the many possible symbolic meanings hidden within the images that make this place (Pink, 2008), Room 24, as well as those in the children's drawings and descriptions of their experience.

The first theme for my students—s*elf* (Bakhtin, 1990)— that was evidenced is how they referred to themselves and what words were used to describe their role during the interactions with their friends in Room 24. The journal entries[5] were written after returning to the regular classroom immediately following their interactive experience; thus, it is appropriate for my first graders to write about their roles using word forms in the past tense. The entries in this section are sprinkled with the past-tense words: taught, showed, and helped. One who teaches views themselves or is viewed by others as teach-"er;" therefore, the same could be applied to the word choices of showed and helped. It appears that, during the interactions with their friends, my students view themselves as someone who teaches, shows, and helps, therefore, as a teach-"er," show-"er," and help-"er." Looking at the word choices my students used to describe themselves from the perspective of noun status rather than verb becomes key in understanding the importance of the children's time together and why the impact was so profound for my students (Bryan, Master, & Walton, 2014).

[5] Names within the journal entries are blocked out/removed for the purpose of participant confidentiality.

***Self* Theme #1: "I taught, I showed, I helped."**

"That's where we go!"
"You go!"



Figure 3. Journal Entry 1.1.1



Figure 4. Journal Entry 1.1.2

"Me and _____ taught _____ colors and how to read."

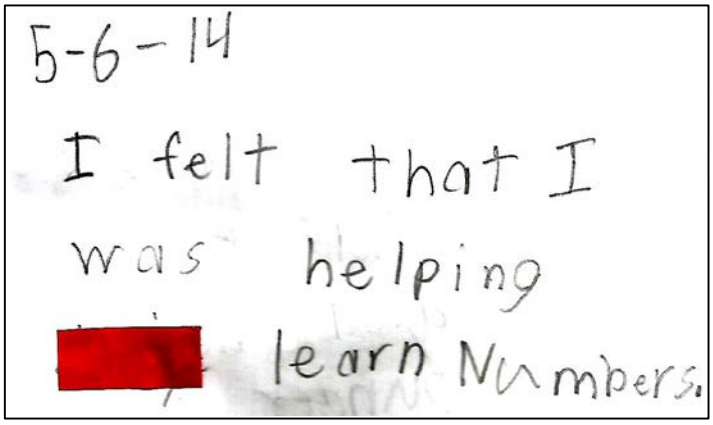


3/14/14
"I did puppets with _____. I also showed _____ colors."

Figure 5. Journal Entry 1.1.3



Photograph 14. Duck



5/6/14
"I felt that I was helping _____ learn numbers."

Figure 6. Journal Entry 1.1.4



Photograph 15. Numbers

9/10/13
"I helped _____ with color boxes, and she grabbed almost everything and every crayon."



Figure 7. Journal Entry 1.1.5

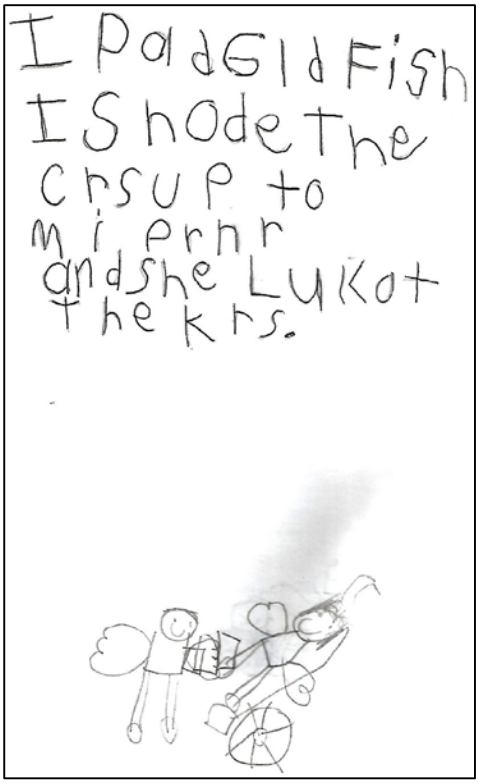


Photograph 16. Book



"I loved helping _____ read."

Figure 8. Journal Entry 1.1.6



"I played Go Fish. I showed the cards up to my partner, and she looked at the colors."

Figure 9. Journal Entry 1.1.7



Photograph 17. Looking at Card



Photograph 18. Go Fish

11/13/13
"Today my table mates played Go Fish, and when I showed the card to _____, she pointed to the card she wanted."

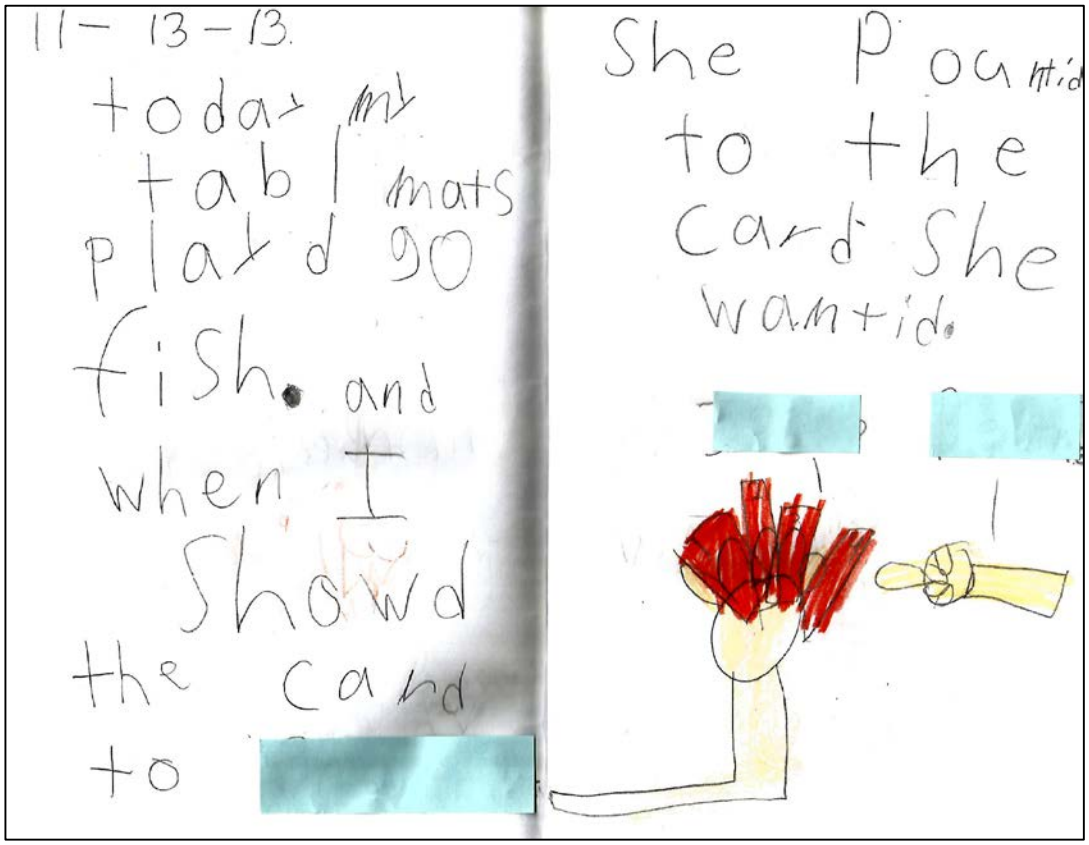


Figure 10. Journal Entry 1.1.8

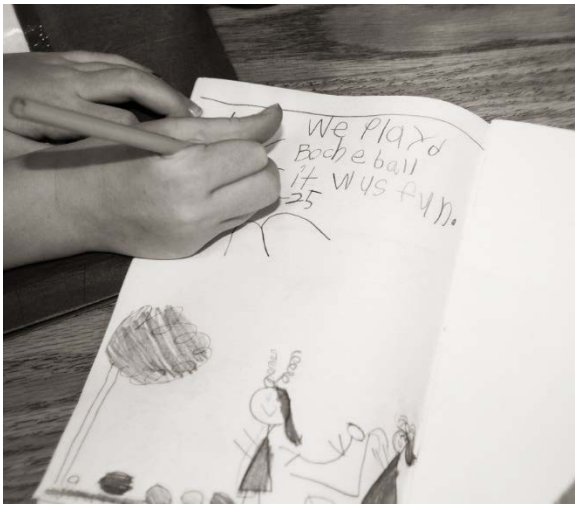


Photograph 19. Holding Ball



Figure 11. Journal Entry 1.1.9

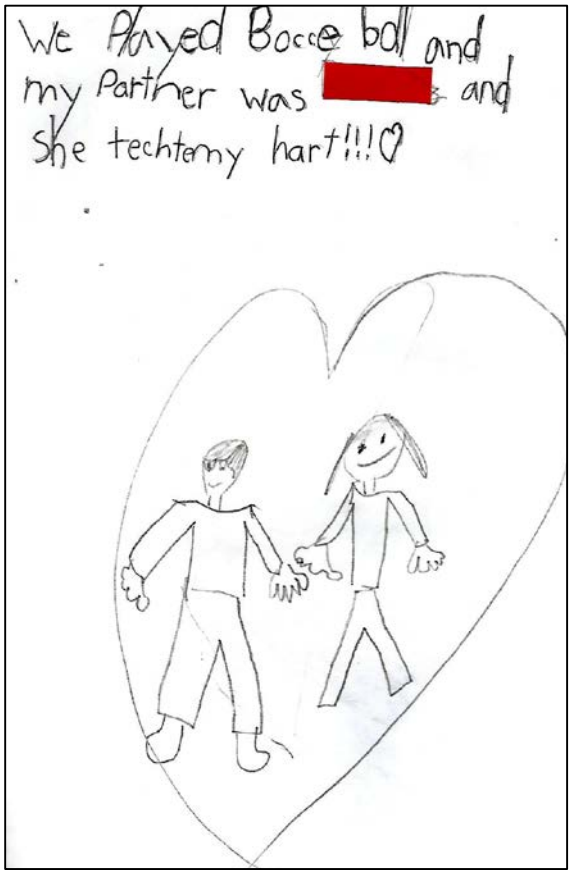
12/13/13
"Me and _____ played
Bocce ball. I felt helping."



Photograph 20. Writing

The second theme that emerged under *self* (my first graders) was evidenced by the repeated use of the words *like* and *love*. It is apparent that the hesitation and uncertainty experienced by my students earlier in the year (see student responses to Interview Question # 1 on page 41) have been replaced by enthusiastic expressions of liking and loving complete with exclamation points for the ending punctuation. As a researcher, I feel it important to note that these word choices in the journal entries are directed toward their friends/the place containing their friends (Room 24), not the experience itself.

***Self* Theme #2: "I like. I love."**



"We played Bocce Ball, and my partner was _____, and she touched my heart!!!"

Figure 12. Journal Entry 1.2.1



Photograph 21. Playing Cards

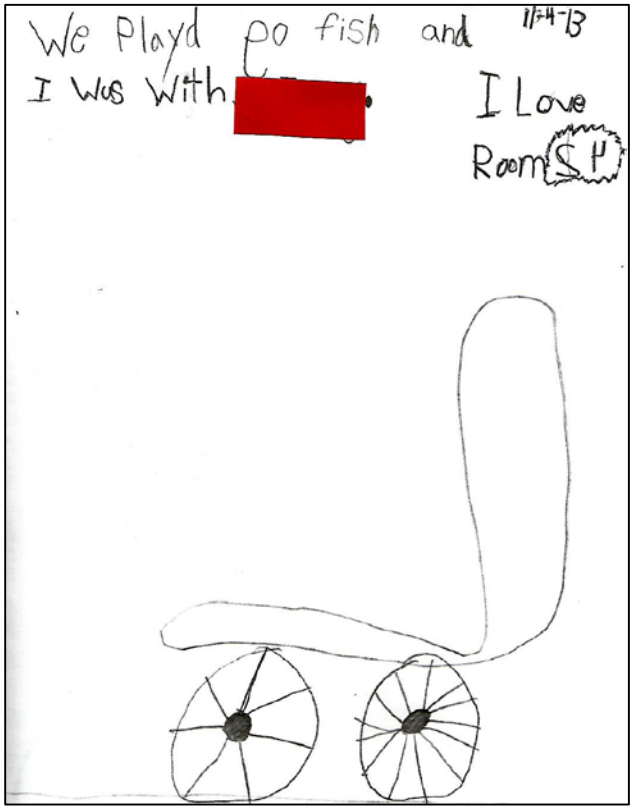


Figure 13. Journal Entry 1.2.2

"We played Go Fish, and I was with _____. I Love Room 24!"



Photograph 22. Rabbit

1/7/14
"I liked that _____ was pointing at the card."

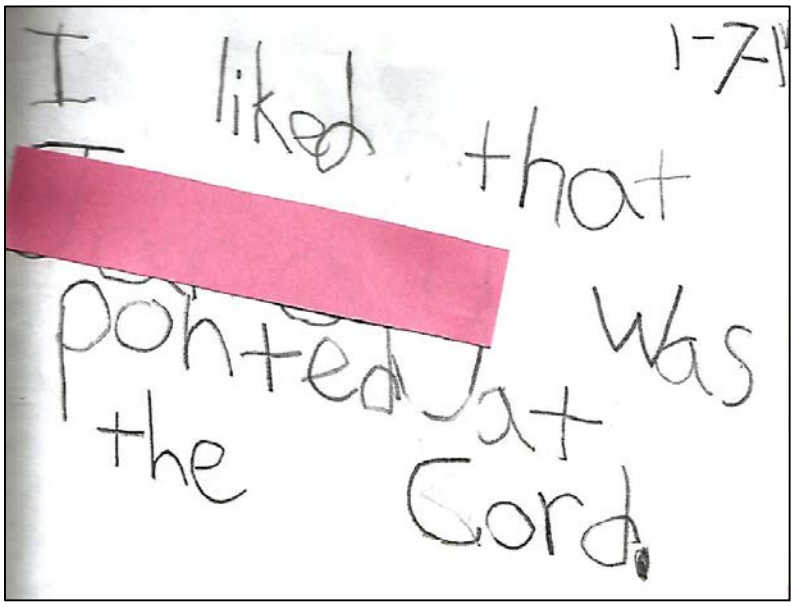


Figure 14. Journal Entry 1.2.3

"We read books to ____, me and _____. I love room 24."

1/22/14
"I went in the ball pit with _____ today. He kicked me. I love them."



Figure 15. Journal Entry 1.2.4



Figure 16. Journal Entry 1.2.5



Photograph 23. Showing Ball

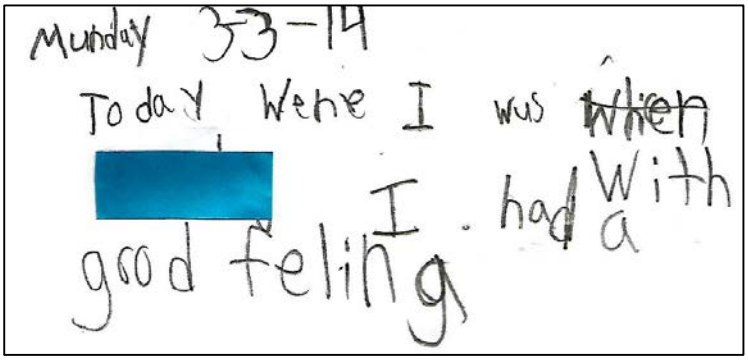
The following entries that provide the written expressions of my students, accompanied by the visuals (photos and student drawings), show examples of the emotions felt by the children during the time that they had just spent with their friends in Room 24. The written word choices of *good*, *great*, and *happy* echo the words my students used when they spoke of their experience during the individual interviews (see student responses to Interview Question #2 on page 43) I conducted during the data collection process. The words *good*, *great*, and *happy* have replaced the words *scared*, *nervous*, and *embarrassed* that my students used during their interviews (see student responses to Interview Question #1 on page 41) to describe how they felt early in the year about going to Room 24 to interact with the children there.

***Self* Theme #3: "I feel good, great…happy."**

10-3-13
"I felt great when I pushed _____."



Figure 17. Journal Entry 1.3.1



Monday 3-3-14
"Today when I was with _____ I had a good feeling."

Figure 18. Journal Entry 1.3.2

12-19-13
"I was happy when I (was) standing by _____."

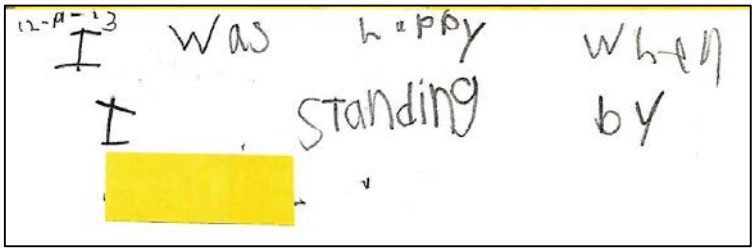
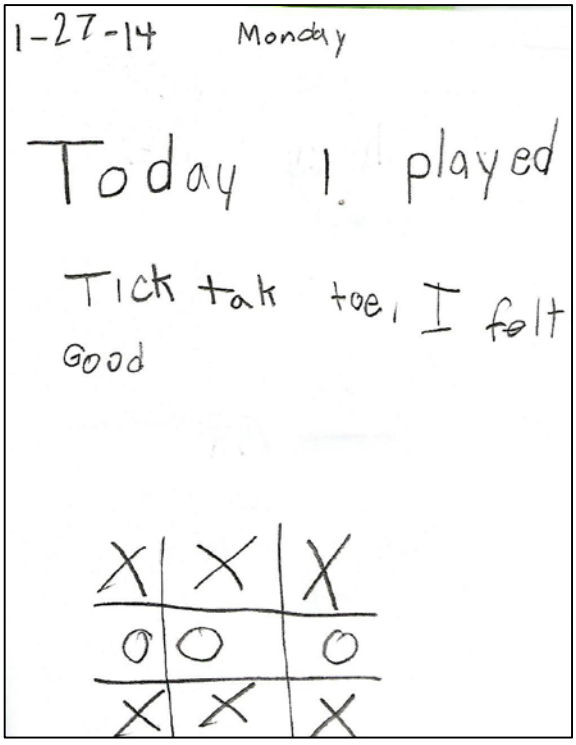


Figure 19. Journal Entry 1.3.3



1-27-14
"Today I played tic-tac-toe. I felt good."

Figure 20. Journal Entry 1.3.4



Figure 21. Journal Entry 1.3.5

12-19-13
"I felt good when _____
touched the parachute."

4-30-14
"I felt happy when I walked into room 24. I wonder(ed) who was going to be my partner."

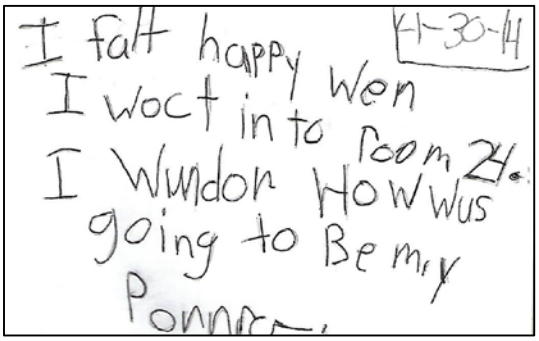


Figure 22. Journal Entry 1.3.6

1-9-14
"I felt good when I played Bingo with _____."



Figure 23. Journal Entry 1.3.7

The following three themes, "Friend is thinking," "Friend is doing," and "Friend is liking," refer to my students' friends in Room 24 as o*ther* (Bakhtin, 1990). The first theme, "Friend is thinking," is of great importance when one considers that these children from Room 24 are severely intellectually impaired. This appears to be of small significance to my first graders as the writing below portrays my students' friends as having highly intellectual abilities of thinking, feeling emotions, making choices, and reasoning. Rather than view this evidence as a child's naiveté, one could posit that my first graders view their friends with respect and afford them the human dignity of having conscious feelings and the mental ability to make choices and reason even though they are non-verbal and are indeed severely impaired both mentally and physically.

***Other* Theme #1: "Friend is thinking."**

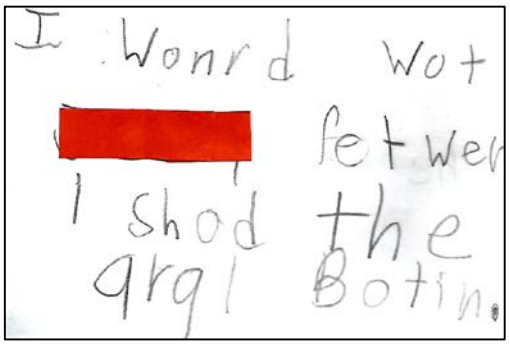
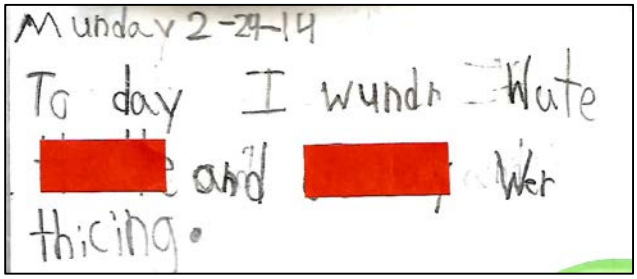


Figure 24. Journal Entry 2.1.1

"I wondered what ____ felt when I showed the purple button."



Photograph 24. Button



Monday 2-24-14
"Today I wonder(ed) what _____ and _____ were thinking."

Figure 25. Journal Entry 2.1.2



Photograph 25. Friend

2-21-14
"I wondered if _____ likes rocks."

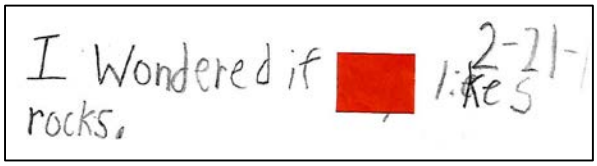


Figure 26. Journal Entry 2.1.3



"I noticed that _____ can think."

Figure 27. Journal Entry 2.1.4

The second theme for *other* (Bakhtin, 1990), "Friend is doing," provides evidence of my first graders not only referring to their friends' actions as deliberate (which is difficult considering their stiff and/or spastic limbs) but also consciously participatory. By using the collective pronoun "we" when describing activities that were done with their friends, such as "putting ornaments on the tree" or "putting balls in the parachute," it appears the fact that their friends from Room 24 are severely mentally and physical impaired is of little or no consequence to my students, who view their friends as active participants in the doing part of the interaction. Also noteworthy is the celebratory way in which my students describe their friends' efforts and successes achieved during the activities.

***Other* Theme #2: "Friend is doing."**

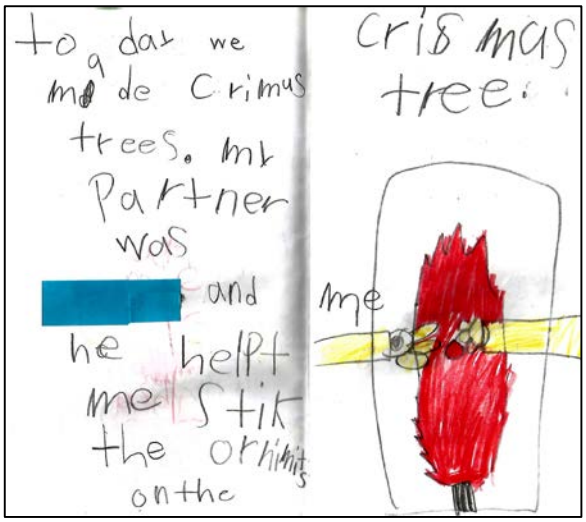


Figure 28. Journal Entry 2.2.1

"Today we made Christmas trees. My partner was _____, and he helped me stick the ornaments on the Christmas tree."

"Today we did parachute[s] and rockets. _____ put his head down, but I bet he had a ☺ (smile) on his face."

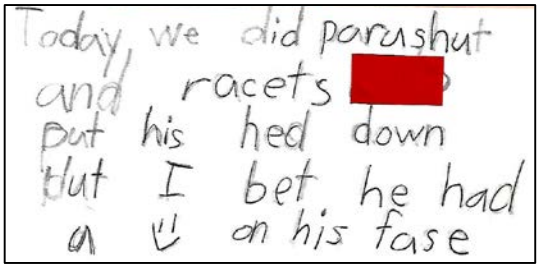
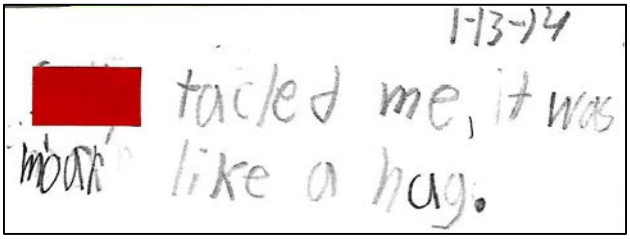


Figure 29. Journal Entry 2.2.2

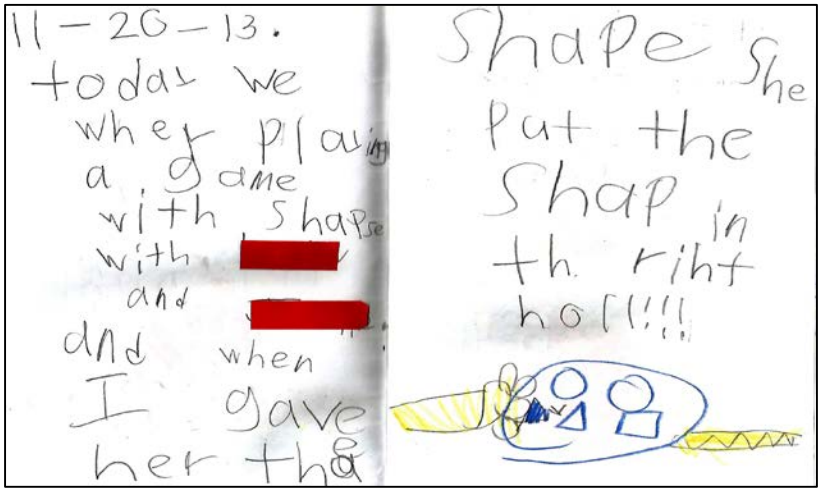


1-13-14
"_____ tackled me, it was more like a hug."

Figure 30. Journal Entry 2.2.3



Photograph 26. Ee



11-20-13
"Today we were playing a game with shapes with _____ and _____, and when I gave her the shape she put it in the right hole!"

Figure 31. Journal Entry 2.2.4



Figure 32. Journal Entry 2.2.5

12-17-13
"I was doing the parachute with _____, and we put the balls in it."

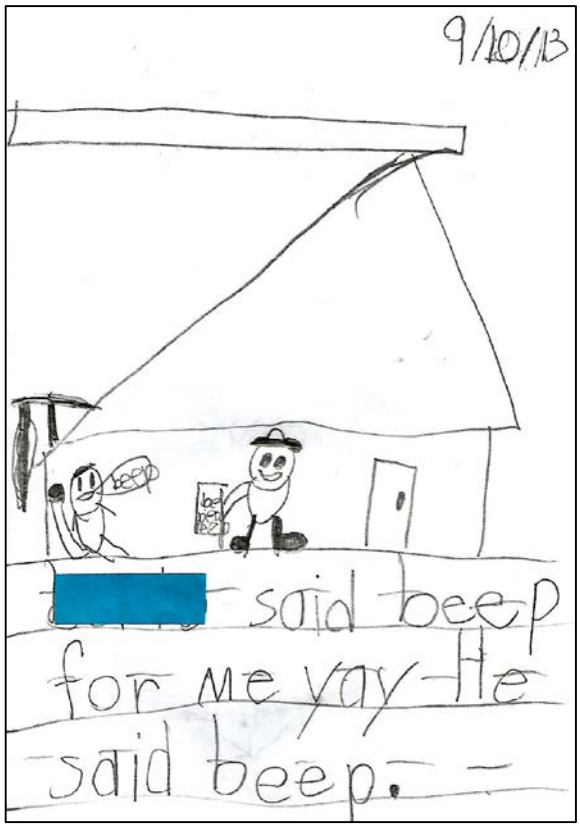


Figure 33. Journal Entry 2.2.6

9-20-13
"_____ said beep for me. Yay, he said beep."

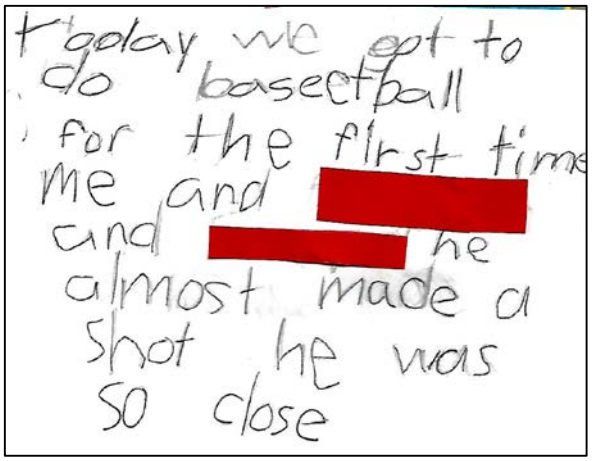


Figure 34. Journal Entry 2.2.7

"Today we got to do basketball for the first time. Me and _____ and _____. He almost made a shot. He was so close."

By their belief in the importance of their role, as well as the fact that they know these children as people and friends, my first graders, in the final theme for o*ther* (Bakhtin, 1990), "Friend is liking," write about knowing how their friends "like" something or are "happy" about it by noticing it, feeling it, and seeing it in their faces and in their movements. Though evidence here is much more difficult to pinpoint and interpret, I suspect that my students, through knowing their friends so intimately, could *feel* the liking of their friends much the same way a mother senses happiness/contentment in her infant. According to Bakhtin (1990), silence is broken in the presence of others: "The voice can sing only in a *warm* atmosphere of possible choral support…" (p. 170).

***Other* Theme #3: "Friend is liking."**

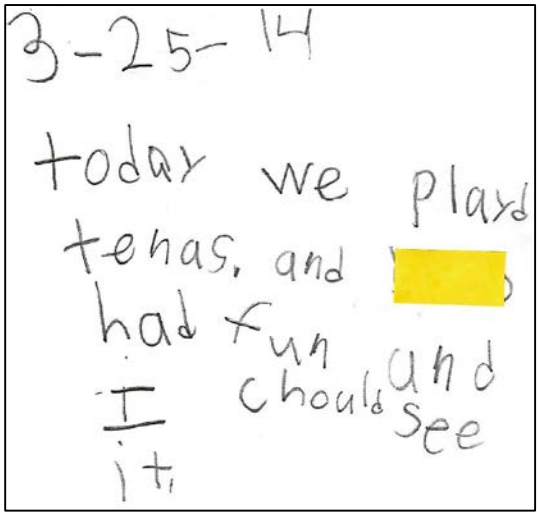


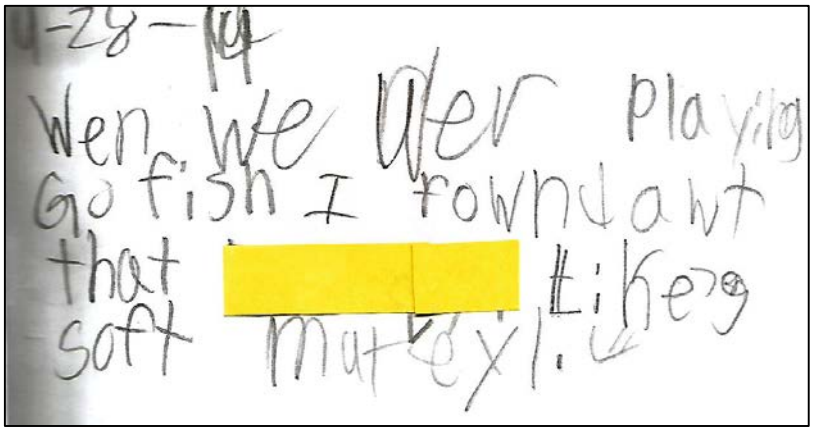
Figure 35. Journal Entry 2.3.1

3-25-14
"Today we played tennis, and _____ had fun, and I could see it."



Figure 36. Journal Entry 2.3.2

"I thought that _____ likes the number 2."

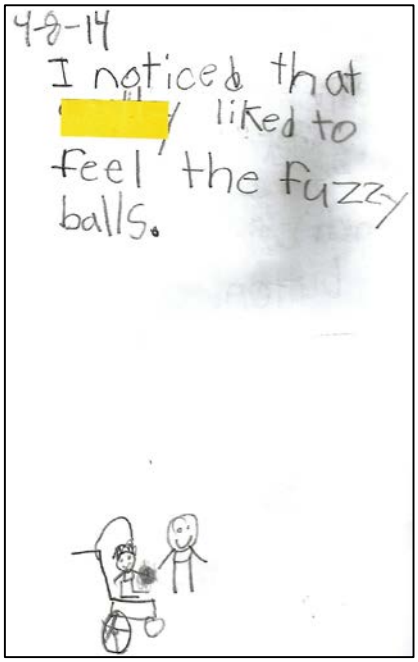


4-28-14
"When we were playing Go Fish, I found out that _____ liked soft material."

Figure 37. Journal Entry 2.3.3

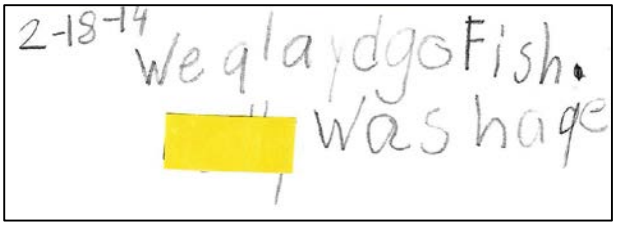


Photograph 27. Looking at Toy



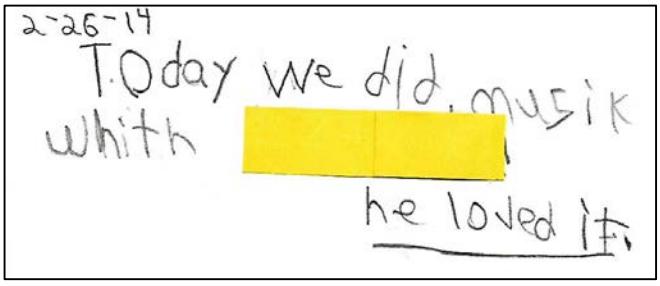
4-8-14
"I noticed that _____ liked to feel the fuzzy balls."

Figure 38. Journal Entry 2.3.4



2-18-14
"We play Go Fish. _____ was happy."

Figure 39. Journal Entry 2.3.5



2-26-14
"Today we did music with _____. He loved it."

Figure 40. Journal Entry 2.3.6

Spoken Words Echoed in New Settings

Data Set: Photo Elicitation

The next set of data being shared is the result of the photo elicitation session where six photos were shown to my students selected from those I used to produce the video. Photo elicitation or image elicitation (IE), a reflexive approach to qualitative/ethnographic methods (Finkelstein, Imamura, & Tobin, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2011), provides a measure of control for participants that I found ideal for my first graders who appeared comfortable and knowledgeable as they readily commented on each image in turn. Out of the 21 students in my class who assented to participate in this research, 16 volunteered to view the pictures and give their response. As I showed each photo, I simply instructed each child in turn to "Tell me what is happening in this picture." The video camera was placed behind them so as not to be a distraction as I recorded their words within this new setting. Though the images provide a

visual record of the interactive experience between my students and their friends, the photos do not describe themselves (Arms, 1999); therefore, below each photo are individual narratives from various students (labeled by letter and photo number). The bolded phrases echo the data documented above under the six themes evidenced in the student journals (see Chapter 4: Sharing the Written Words).

"Tell me what is happening in this picture."



Photograph 28. Clasped

Photo Elicitation #1.

Self: teaching.

C1 "They're like holding hands, like trying to get them to touch; feel something. Feel how soft and fuzzy it is and stuff. I like the picture because they, like hold, **you hold their hand and do stuff with them and they get smarter and smarter every day**."

C8 "It's, um, someone in our class holding, uh, J.'s hand and **they're trying to make her either feel something,** or they're holding onto her hand and talking to her. It kind of makes her more comforted when you hold her hand when you talk to her."

C9 "J. is touching someone's hand and **feeling."**

Self: helping.

C2 "It makes me feel like **people are helping** special needs and a, the person who is touching J. will like her, to be her new friend, and I think it just touched my heart when someone touches another person and makes them feel *hope* and *joy*."

C10 "They're touching and feeling and they're **helping them out**. Looks like they're just, probably just wanting to feel them and see what they are. It's the first time there to see them. Because J. she had those things on (arm braces) and now she doesn't to rest her arms."

C11 "They're holding hands, and they're doing stuff with them. **They're helping them**—like they feel different hands."

Self: feeling happy.

C3 "People are holding hands and they're touching each other. Touching each other, **it makes people feel happy."**
"I think that touching is important because they wouldn't get the feeling of your hand if we didn't get to touch."

Self: liking, loving.

C14 "This picture, I think, is S., um, this kid I don't know who it is but he's holding S.'s hand, um, 'cuz **he's friends** with him and **he likes** Room 24".

C15 "There's one brown hand and one white hand holding each other, 'cuz **they're sharing sunshine**."

C16 "Someone's holding hands with someone 'cuz **they love each other**."

C5 "It looks like J. and someone from our class are holding hands. Because it's **having friendship and friends**".

C6 "It looks like the hands are reaching out and they're touching, because **Room 24 touches our hearts**".

C7 "J. and someone are holding hands because **J.'s part of our class.**"

C12 "They are **touching each other's life**."

C13 "They're **touching hands. It's nice.**"



Photograph 29. Wheelchair

Photo Elicitation #2.

Self: helping.

C2 "I think it makes me feel like **someone might be unplugging their brake and helping them be happy and moving them** around, and it makes me think that he is trying to help it get fixed or pull the lock back or something."

C10 **"We're pushing the wheelchairs** to lunch probably— they're pushing theirself by rolling (makes pushing circular motions with arms/hands)."

C8 "Well, the hand is, um, it's putting the brake off the wheelchair, and **somebody in our class is going to push somebody** in Room 24."

Other: friend is doing.

C1 "Um, they like, they sit in their wheelchairs and they like let their arms hang and they touch; like they touch their wheels and they let their, they like— (trails off). It makes me feel like when we push 'em to lunch and they let their arms hang around and—I feel like **they're trying to touch stuff and feel**."

C2 "I think it makes me feel like someone might be unplugging their brake and helping them be happy and moving them around, and it makes me think that **he is trying to help it get fixed or pull the lock back or something**."

C3 "Someone's arm is laying against the wheelchair. Probably, they're like sleeping. Probably they wanted to touch the wheel. **That hand wants to touch something** because they don't get to touch as much things."

C4 "It looks like **someone is reaching down to the wheel and trying to feel like the motion** of how it's going (moving his hand around in a circular motion as he talks) and feel the vibrations. To feel what they're riding on."

C5 "I think it was B., and she **was trying to touch her wheelchair and push it**. She's **trying to push her wheelchair**."

C6 "I think **it's reaching out**. Reaching to one of the children, maybe. There's **a hand and it's reaching down to the wheel.** It wants to push the wheel by itself."

C7 "One of the Room 24's and another kids are pushing. **(The hand is) trying to feel the tire**."

C8 "Well, **the hand is, um, it's putting the brake off the wheelchair**, and somebody in our class is going to push somebody in Room 24."

C9 "Someone's touching, it looks like a wheel. **It's touching the wheelchair**."

C10 "We're pushing the wheelchairs to lunch probably— **they're pushing theirself** by rolling (makes pushing circular motions with arms/hands)."

C11 "It's putting his hand down and it looks like **it's (the hand) is trying to touch the wheel**."

C15 "Riding a wheelchair. **(The hand is going to) move the chair.**"

C16 "Like someone in a wheelchair is going to sit on the bike, and someone might push them. (**The hand) it's touching the wheel."**



Photograph 30. Balls

Photo Elicitation #3.

Self: teaching, showing, helping.

C1 "The picture means that they're holding a ball and they, **so they learn their favorite color and they say** their favorite color and you hold them up and it's fun to hear them talk and say their favorite color."

C2 "It might be E. in the ball pit with someone playing with him and **helping him learn** the color of the ball. I can see some balls in there—yellow, blue, pink, red—and I think the person who has the ball in his hand is going to give it to E. I think they might play some games in there and I don't really know who that is in there but I'm just guessing it's E. 'cuz he's mostly in the ball pit. I like that we can jump, play, give people the balls, and **help** special needs."

C3 "Someone's getting a ball to somebody, and **they're sharing** the balls together."

C4 "Um, it looks like **someone is helping** one of our friends, like picking up a ball to look at it—to feel how it feels and see what kind of color it is and shape."

C6 **"They're showing the color and they're asking, "Can you say the color?"** They're saying it *in their own words*, and **they're trying to touch it** for the texture of it."

C7 "The hands are holding balls 'cuz they're in the ball pit. **For the kids to hold on to and say colors."**

C8 "One of our kids in our room are **holding the ball, and they're trying to ask you what color and see if they'll respond** to what color the ball is."

C10 "**We're helping them** hold the balls. It's probably B. in there, or S. They like to lay in there; it's comfy."

C11 "They're in the ball pit, and they're **helping them feel the balls** and **helping them say colors**. The hands are holding the balls."

C12 "They learn the colors—red, blue and yellow—because **they can't really learn by theirselfs."**

C16 "The kids are **helping them touch and feel** the balls."

Self: liking.

C2 "It might be E. in the ball pit with someone playing with him and helping him learn the color of the ball; I can see some balls in there—yellow, blue, pink, red—and I think the person who has the ball in his hand is going to give it to E. I think they might play some games in there, and I don't really know who that is in there, but I'm just guessing it's E. 'cuz he's mostly in the ball pit. **I like** that we can jump, play, give people the balls, and help special needs."

Other: friend is thinking.

C12 **"They learn the colors—red, blue and yellow**—because they can't really learn by theirselfs."

Other: friend is doing.

C9 "B. is **touching a ball, and he's feeling it."**

C11 "They're in the ball pit, and they're helping them feel the balls and helping them say colors. The **hands are holding the balls."**

C13 "They're **holding balls from the ball pit**. It has tons of balls in it for like playing."

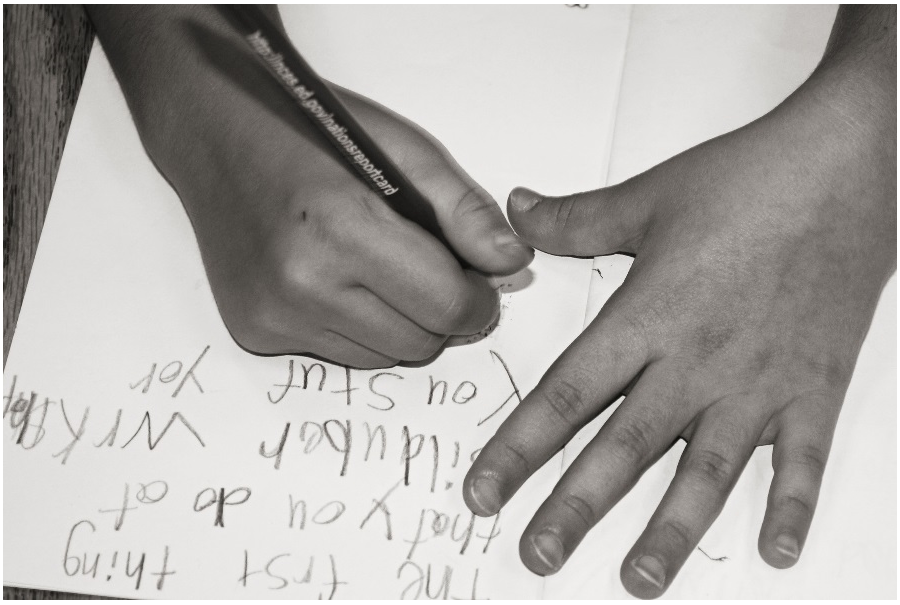
C14 "Someone's in the ball pit. The **hands is reaching out to another hand** to **put the ball in his hand to do stuff with the ball and say what color it is,** er (trails off)."

C15 "They're **holding the ball and playing** inside it. **They're holding; they're putting** their balls together."

Other: friend is liking.

C5 "Someone's giving, I think B., a ball to hold. Just like they are— a blue ball. **B. likes blue**; he says, "Boo, boo." The hands look different. The other one's curvy, and the other one's straight. **B. likes being in the ball pit—** just laying—and **he likes to play in there."**

C10 "We're helping them hold the balls. It's probably B. in there, or S. **They like to lay in there**; it's comfy."



Photograph 31. Journaling

Photo Elicitation #4.

Self: teaching, showing, helping.

C2 "Somebody writing in their reflection journal. We do that so we can remember all the moments that we been in there, so we can write about them and so we don't forget what days it happened. I think it would be really hopeful to **help them.** I think it's important to write it down so you can remember it and do other stuff, and it might touch your heart and their heart. We're thinking that, 'What should we write of and draw a picture of?' 'What should we do when **people need our help**?'"

C10 "We're writing about Room 24 when we come back, in our reflection books: I noticed, I felt…because we experienced them and **help them learn** and we write

about them in our reflection notebooks so we can remember back then when we did that stuff."

C12 "We are writing our thoughts about how we felt when we went down there. **We helped them** and we went down to their room—so we can remember."

C15 "Writing about Room 24 because we share sunshine. For getting their books to them, so it's all done. Because we need to **write for them so they can learn**."

Self: liking.

C14 "These are some hands that are writing about Room 24 in their reflection journals. Okay, they were at Room 24, then they got back and they write in their reflection journals what they did and what they felt and what happened. Because **we like them,** and we wanna go there and make a difference."

Self: feeling good.

C3 "Somebody's writing about Room 24. When we come back, um, we write in reflection journals because we tell what we did and we **tell what we felt. I feel good** because we write about them because they're our friends."



Photograph 17. Looking at Card

Photo Elicitation #5.

Self: teaching, showing, helping.

C1 "Um, oh um, whenever we go down to Room 24, we play Go Fish, and **we hold the card up for the kids,** and they reach out their hands, and they touch the ones that they want us to say to the other person. We hold them up to their face, and they look, and they touch the card with their hands."

C2 "It looks like someone is **trying to give the Room 24 kids a hand** or making them like touch the card and then, so then they could feel it and kind of know what it is and see if it is bumpy or flat. **We hold it up** and one of the Room 24 kids, our friends, put their hand on it and feel if is bumpy and animals."

C4 "Um, looks like they're touching—it looks like they're touching the card you'll like and maybe there's like a different feel to the card, like if it's flat or big (trails off). **They're holding a card for them** so they can touch it."

C5 **"Someone's holding a card so someone in Room 24 can touch it** and feel how it feels—if it's soft, smooth, bumpy, spikey. Because **they're learning** how to feel and if it feels smooth, bumpy, soft. **We're holding the cards so they can feel it."**

C7 "**Someone's holding a card,** and someone's putting their finger up on it. **For them to feel**."

C9 "One of our friends is touching a card, and, **so that he can learn** to feel stuff."

C12 **"We are teaching them the number** 5 or the number 6, and **we're teaching them how to count** and their numbers."

C16 **"The kids are helping them** touch the card."

Other: friend is thinking.

C3 "Somebody's touching the card because they are playing Go Fish, and somebody has the right card. **He's touching it because he wants to**— he's trying to show the person who's holding the card—to show him that's the right one."

C6 "They're touching for the texture, and it's not only what they look like on the, it's not only that they cannot talk—on the inside they *can feel and talk*. **They reach out on their own."**

C10 "They feel the card and stuff. They never felt stuff before, and **they want to feel stuff** and feel what it feels like, and they don't know what it feels like."

C11 "**They're trying to say the color,** and they're touching the picture 'cuz they're trying to say the thing (on the picture)."

C14 "These are hands that are touching a card, like a card that says a word, **they wanna like see and feel it**—interact with it, touch."

Other: friend is doing.

C1 "Um, oh um, whenever we go down to Room 24, we play Go Fish, and we hold the card up for the kids, and **they reach out their hands and they touch the ones that they want us to say** to the other person. We hold them up to their face, and **they look and they touch the card** with their hands."

C2 "It looks like someone is trying to give the Room 24 kids a hand or making them like touch the card and then, so then they could feel it and kind of know what it is and see if it is bumpy or flat. We hold it up and one of the Room 24 kids, **our friends, put their hand on it and feel** if is bumpy and animals."

C3 **"Somebody's touching the card** because they are playing Go Fish, and somebody has the right card. He's touching it because he wants to— he's trying to show the person who's holding the card—to show him that's the right one."

C6 **"They're touching for the texture,** and it's not only what they look like on the, it's not only that they cannot talk—on the inside they *can feel and talk***. They reach out** on their own."

C7 "Someone's holding a card, and **someone's putting their finger up on it.** For them to feel."

C9 **"One of our friends is touching a card**, and, so that he can learn to feel stuff."

C11 "They're trying to say the color, and **they're touching the picture** 'cuz they're **trying to say the thing** (on the picture)."

C13 "Um, **touching and feeling."**

C14 **"These are hands that are touching a card**, like a card that says a word, they wanna like see and feel it—interact with it, touch."



Photograph 32. Pushing Button

Photo Elicitation #6.

Self: teaching, showing, helping.

C1 "Um, they have like these computers and they have like this green button and you hold it up to them and if they don't do it, they **you like grab their arms and put 'em on the button** and it goes, it changes like songs and then some can do it by theirselfs, like B. and H."

C2 "I think they're trying to press the button. It's for the computer so it could go and **it's teaching them how to reach down and press** and so they don't have someone, like, take their hand and shove it into it and 'cuz that might be hurting

them and you don't know if— and sometimes they'll cry and you don't know what you're doing to them and you don't know what they want. Like when you take their hand and push it on it, I think they're afraid 'cuz people maybe are grabbing it. If you just give it up to them like that, then they're not afraid, but usually H. she just reaches just like slowly down, she's going for it and then she presses it."

C4 "So— they were doing computers so they need, they use a button to turn on the video. So **we were holding the button for them** and then some of them can't kind of reach out to it, so **we kinda help them reach out** to press it so they can listen to the music. When they listen to the music, after they press the button they kind of like get all happy and then like, they like the song, and they like, If You're Happy and You Know It. They kind of like move around and kinda do some squeals (to show happiness)."

C5 **"Someone's holding the red, green button so they can push it** and then stop it for the computer to keep going and stopping with the video. So the first time they push it, they turn it on, and the second time they push it, it pauses. They stop pushing it and they start, like, giggling and they smile (moves her body to show how kids move)."

C6 "**They're holding the button out so they can press it** so the video will work. That means that they reached out and touched the button. The purpose of that is so they can stretch their bones—like therapy."

C10 **"We're helping them push buttons** so we could watch videos, shows, yeah, and sometimes when they're on they laugh."

C11 "They're touching the button, and they're, um, **being helpful** and a thing comes on like a video."

C12 "Um, **we are helping them press things and touch things**. It makes the computer turn something up."

C15 "Pressing the button. They like the computer and when they push it they press it and then it makes sounds and stuff. They like it because when they press it there's all kind of stuff making sounds and stuff and **they learn**. Sometimes they play."

Other: friend is thinking.

C2 **"I think they're trying to press the button.** It's for the computer so it could go and it's teaching them how to reach down and press and so they don't have someone, like, take their hand and shove it into it and 'cuz that might be hurting them and you don't know if— and sometimes they'll cry and you don't know what you're doing to them and you don't know what they want. Like when you

take their hand and push it on it, I think they're afraid 'cuz people maybe are grabbing it. If you just give it up to them like that, then they're not afraid, but usually H. she just reaches just like slowly down, she's going for it and then she presses it."

C7 "Someone and one of the Room 24 kids are pushing the button; it plays music and tells stories,'cuz you get to choose which one you want to do. **You let them choose.** A kid picks two for them to choose from, and **they have to choose one** of those."

Other: friend is doing.

C1 "Um, they have like these computers and they have like this green button and you hold it up to them and if they don't do it, they you like grab their arms and put 'em on the button and it goes, it changes like songs and then **some can do it by theirselfs,** like B. and H."

C2 "I think they're **trying to press the button**. It's for the computer so it could go and it's teaching them how to reach down and press and so they don't have someone, like, take their hand and shove it into it and 'cuz that might be hurting them and you don't know if— and sometimes they'll cry and you don't know what you're doing to them and you don't know what they want. Like when you take their hand and push it on it, I think they're afraid 'cuz people maybe are grabbing it. If you just give it up to them like that, then they're not afraid, but usually H. **she just reaches just like slowly down, she's going for it and then she presses it."**

C9 **"One of our friends is pushing a button** to start the computer, and it sings a little song for them so they could hear it and be happy. They smile."

C13 "Um, **pressing a button**. Um, it like changes like to another video and they smile."

C14 "So— **a hand pressing a button**, like a computer or something, because it's fun to press and see the thing; something happens. Then they smile."

C15 **"Pressing the button**. They like the computer and when they push it **they press it** and then it makes sounds and stuff. They like it because **when they press it there's all kind of stuff making sounds** and stuff and they learn. Sometimes they play."

C16 **"Pressing the, pressing the thing** that makes the computer do something. They have a smile, and they like to make a little noise that lets us know they're happy."

Other: friend is liking.

C4 "So— they were doing computers so they need, they use a button to turn on the video. So we were holding the button for them and then some of them can't kind of reach out to it, so we kinda help them reach out to press it so they can listen to the music. When they listen to the music, after they press the button, they kind of like get all happy and then like**, they like the song**, and **they like,** 'If You're Happy and You Know It'. They kind of like move around and kinda do some squeals (to show happiness)."

C5 "Someone's holding the red, green button so they can push it and then stop it for the computer to keep going and stopping with the video. So the first time they push it, they turn it on, and the second time they push it, it pauses. They stop pushing it, and they start, like, **giggling and they smile** (moves her body to show how kids move)."

C9 "One of our friends is pushing a button to start the computer, and it sings a little song for them so they could **hear it and be happy. They smile."**

C10 "We're helping them push buttons so we could watch videos, shows, yeah, and sometimes when they're on **they laugh**."

C13 "Um, pressing a button. Um, it like changes like to another video, and **they smile."**

C15 "Pressing the button. They like the computer and when they push it they press it and then it makes sounds and stuff. **They like it** because when they press it there's all kind of stuff making sounds and stuff and they learn. Sometimes they play."

C16 "Pressing the, pressing the thing that makes the computer do something. **They have a smile, and they like to make a little noise** that lets us know **they're happy**."

Data Set: Focus Group Transcription (T = Teacher/C = Child)

The following set of data presents the voice of the final piece of my data collection and provides a collective perspective of my students' critical dialogue. The conversation below is the complete recorded session, which took place in the regular classroom moments after my first graders viewed the video that I had created from

footage of their visits to Room 24 and the recorded interviews regarding their experience. According to Moser and Law (2001), voices do not exist in isolation; therefore, I have included a transcription of the entire taped session as it also beautifully illustrates how each "self" responds to each "other" in the way the thoughts and words ping-pong around the group to intensify and verify their understanding of what they have just visually experienced as it relates to their actual lived interactions. Inclusion of the following session hopefully also translates to researcher transparency as my dual role of classroom teacher/researcher may unconsciously inhibit some in the attempt to see, hear, and understand the children's voices. Including this primary source of transcribed narrative enables readers not connected to the research or data collection process to more easily view and acknowledge the patterns that I have detected and made note of throughout Chapter 4 (Brenner, 2006).

Each "C" below represents a different child as I pointed toward the hands raised to speak. Though I prefer it when students speak into the silence[6] during reflective, grand conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), it tends to be a difficult task for young children. Therefore, I employed a classroom conversation strategy called "fists and fingers"[7] (Mills, O'Keefe, & Jennings, 2004), which explains some of the teacher (T) prompts in the dialogue. I have referred to different children by their first initials to keep participant identities secure.

[6] "Speak into the silence" is a strategy to use during conversation where, rather than raising a hand and waiting to be called upon, a student listens for a pause and then interjects accordingly. This method fosters genuine dialogue.

[7] In the "fist and fingers" strategy, students hold up a fist if they have not made a comment yet during a group conversation and would like to. If, after making a comment, they wish to speak again they hold up one finger (or two if they have spoken twice already). Fists are given first priority. This strategy is useful for distributing talk and creating equity among the class.

The focus group conversation meanders from child to child as I interject with questions, re-phrasing for the group's clarity, and directions as to type/length of response. What begins as tentatively as the first few droplets of rain ends with a poetically triumphant and jubilant shower of voices, though individual, which come together in the final minutes of the recording through a common understanding of this visual and verbal reflection of their shared experience.

The reflective conversation.

T: What did you think A.?

C: I thought— thought that it's a really special experience that we do, and by helping them, we_____ (trails off).

T: Be really loud, because this has to pick up ____ K.?

C: I felt happy to help them, and help them learn.

C: Well, I think it's a good experience for everyone, for other people to not just think about themselves.

T: I agree; it's a good experience. Can you speak up as loudly as you can, P.?

C: I feel very, very happy.

C: I felt goosebumps.

T: You felt goosebumps— yeah.

C: When we were watching, I was trying not to cry, cuz it was really, really sweet.

T: Were you holding back tears? (Child nods, yes.) Why do you think you felt that way, emotional?

C: Because people were saying really nice things about Room 24.

T: Yeah, A.?

C: Um, I'm glad that I could help them.

C: When I was watching the video, I felt, um, really good and happy that we get to go there.

T: P.?

C: If we didn't go down there, we couldn't help them learn and feel stuff (voice goes up as in a question.)

C: I like it because I never did it at school, and I like holding "blue" for them so they can say what they like.

T: What do you mean you never did it at school? Can you explain?

C: Like I never went and taught anyone, like_____ (trails off).

T: It's an experience that you never had before? Like you never did it in Kindergarten?

C: Yeah.

T: Okay, S.?

C: I learned that if we didn't go down there that we couldn't teach them colors and teach them, and when I went down there, I learned that they could say their favorite color and other words.

T: Yeah, do you think you had anything to do with that? Do you think you helped them?

C: We should go down there— well, I go down there on Fridays.

T: Good. L.?

C: I thought that when I went there I lighted up their day.

T: You lit up their day? I like that. Fists—shout. (Trying to get children to speak up.)

C: When I first went there, um, I filled their buckets.

T: What kind of evidence was there that you did that? What did the kids show, that…?

C: Smiles.

T: Yeah, lots of smiles. M.? Big voice.

C: I noticed that A. and B. kind of were the same.

T: What do you mean, “the same?”

C: Like the black hair, yeah. (Nods head yes.)

T: Similar features? R.?

C: Having a good time with them, and when I first went there I was like, “what are you supposed to do?” Were you supposed to do things with them, cuz I didn’t know what to do.

T: A.?

C: When I was down there, I thought, I felt like we were having “sunshine.”

C: I feel good about going down there, and I think they do too.

C: I learned that, um, that when we go down there and do stuff with them, that they get smarter and smarter every time you go down there. And they learn to say colors and numbers and___(trails off)

T: Any more fists? Fist, L.?

C: I felt good, um, I felt good when I went down there, um, because I was helping them and would never learn if we didn’t go down there.

T: Fingers now. Now think if you have something on your mind, if you’re**, think about what you “noticed” in the video. Not like how you felt so much now, think about what you noticed**. A.?

C: I, like, they just were, like the same as us, they just look different on the outside. They’re the same on the inside.

T: Okay… J.? Big voice.

C: Um, I noticed that each of them like a different song. Like J. likes “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” and H. likes “Ten Little Monkeys Jumping On the Bed.”

T: So they have things they like different just like you kids, yeah. J.? Big voice.

C: I, um, I learned that when we go there, we’re making their brains stronger and their bodies stronger.

T: Brains stronger and bodies stronger? (Child nods head in agreement.) P.? Big voice.

C: I noticed that, um, when I go over there they’re trying to learn really, really hard.

T: You can tell they're working hard? (Child nods in agreement.) H.? Big voice.

C: Um, I noticed that we're making a big difference in the world.

T: You think so? (Child nods yes.) Yeah, right here.

C: I noticed that we're born different, and if we go down there we can help them, we can help them with their brains, um, because we wanted to help them.

T: Right, big voice, E.

C: Um, I noticed in the video that it was important to go there or else they wouldn't feel like, to be around more children that are different and that can walk and talk, so____...(trails off).

T: Children that can talk should be around them, you think? (Child nods, yes.)

C: …and that children that want to go see them should go push them and play with them.

T: Exactly. L. big voice.

C: I thought they were going to be the same as us, um, they're just a little bit different than us. They're the same on the inside, but a little different on the outside.

T: Right. Who else has a finger up, P?

C: The first time I went down there, I was a bit scared, but in time, I started to like to play with them.

T: It was a new experience, wasn't it? B.?

C: I know when I'm filling their buckets cuz whenever I play the drums for S. he laughs and tries to play the drums with me.

T: C.?

C: I noticed that they're actually smarter than they look on the outside.

T: Why do you think they don't look smart on the outside?

C: Cuz they're kind of have, their arms kinda move around uncontrollably.

T: Uncontrolled, right, and so people tend to think that they're so different that they can't possibly, uh, be like us, right?

C:…not as smart.

T: But they have feelings too, don't they? K.?

C: I noticed that if we didn't, weren't going there, then they would not learn about us, and we would not learn about them.

T: Well said. I like how you twisted those words around to come up with that thought. Big voice.

C: I, um, I noticed that all of us are different, even um, that, um, people that don't look like them are different. We're all different.

T: Right, exactly. We're all different. Um, one finger, right here.

C: I noticed that they're like getting comfort, like having them come, they're happy when we surprise them and come into the door, they seem to have a smile on their face.

T: Do they smile when you walk in the door?

C: Yeah, and like when they see us they like smile and they like us coming.

T: Right. I'm looking for one finger, any others? Okay, big voice, K.

C: They look different, but they're really the same on the inside.

T: Thank you K. Any one fingers, K.?

C: Um, that, just because their outside looks different doesn't mean you have to treat them different.

T: Thank you for that big thought you're making; that is a good connection. M., one finger?

C: Um, they're like different on the outside, but they're like the same on the inside.

T: Uh-huh, thank you. Any more one fingers? Okay, back there, go ahead.

C: They're smart in the inside, but they don't look smart on the outside.

T: They just are different than we are in how they look, but that shouldn't be the judge, should it? Okay! Are you thinking about different things that you noticed on the video? What did you notice about on the video? I want you to think about *things you saw.* What did you see? Okay, think like that for a minute. What did you see on the video?

C: I noticed that, um, there was a lot of different kids and they were all happy, and they were smiling and they were able to have that experience at school because kids like that they don't have that experience at school and I thought that, um, it is a really great experience.

T: Thank you. Two fingers, B.?

C: Um, I saw on the video someone was holding blue out to, um, the Room 24 kids and, um, they really like saying their colors when you hold it out to 'em.

T: Uh-huh, speak bigger. Sit up and talk really loud.

C: The first time I went down there I was, like it didn't feel familiar. Then the second time it felt like, all the kids felt like, family.

T: Okay, big voice.

C: It looked like all the hands were communicating.

T: Okay, I really liked how you put that. Can you talk some more about that. It looked like their hands were communicating...

C: …and their…

T: With who?

C: …the Room 24 children.

T: Your hands were communicating with them? (Child nods, yes.) Okay. What did you see?

C: I saw that like the people were drawing them and that they like them, like____(trails off).

T: You like them. You wanted to draw them? (Child nods, yes.)

C: We have these reflection journals that we draw pictures in them, cuz we like them, and we draw and reflect and have happy thoughts about them.

T: Thank you, G. What did you see in the video?

C: In the video, I see them. They can't hold the ball, but we could hold the balls for them and throw them when they need to.

T: Thank you for your smart thinking. What did you see, J.? Really big.

C: Um, I saw J. and another person, um, they were like holding hands.

T: Somebody in here was holding hands, thank you. What did you see in the video?

C: Um, I saw the, that we were helping the kids feel the stuff before we did something with them.

T: Yes, letting them get aware of it and then— I saw that too. Go ahead.

C: I saw that they liked doing all the stuff with us and things.

C: On the video I saw their arms were different than ours, and their fingers were moving a little bit different than ours.

T: Thank you. What did you see, A.?

C: That, they were helping each other.

T: Thank you for saying that so nice. What did you see, A.?

C: I saw that we were making a big difference.

T: Do you feel that way, from what you saw? What else did you see? Think really hard as a group. Just holler out if you saw something. What did you see? I don't need any more fists and fingers. Holler, speak into the silence. What did you see?

C: I saw that they were, (trails off).

T: Don't give me sentences. Give me one word.

C: I saw that they were out in nature with us.

T: Okay, we saw nature.

C: I saw that they were like pushing people, like playing with people in the ball pit.

T: Kids playing. What did you see? Just say the words. What did you see?

C: Ball pit.

C: Happy.

C: Pushing them.

C: Throwing.

C: Love.

C: Hope.

T: Did you see hope?

C: Nature.

C: Care.

C: Peace.

C: Grateful.

C: Important.

C: Balls.

C: Beautiful.

C: Trees.

C: Leaves.

C: Grass, butterflies.

T: Think of the interaction; think of the interaction.

C: Friends.

C: Sunshine.

C: Wheelchairs.

C: Moving.

C: Getting together.

C: Music.

C: Birds.

C: Holding hands.

C: Rocks, pushing.

T: We already said that.

C: Hands!

C: Feet!

C: Touching.

C: Connecting.

C: Wheels.

C: Bodies.

C: Teaching.

C: Toys.

C: Colors.

C: Animals, balls.

C: Friends.

C: Musical instruments.

C: Peace.

C: Sunshine, love.

C: Hope for the Flowers.

C: Reading the cards.

C: Helping.

C: Learning hard.

C: Love.

C: Feeling.

C: Touching.

C: Filling buckets.

C: Dance.

C: Movement.

C: Quiet.

C: Socks, arms, talking.

C: People.

T: Okay, if you had ONE word to say about the video, the whole video, about the experience, say that. What is it? If you were going to tell a friend what the video was about in ONE word, what would you say?

C: Peaceful.

C: Room 24.

C: Beautiful.

C: Hopeful.

C: Connected.

C: Helping.

C: Each other.

C: Friends.

C: Friends forever.

C: Getting connected.

C: Teaching.

C: Learning.

T: Last chance— the video is going off.

C: Beautiful.

C: Wonderful.

C: Art and sunshine.

C: Reflection journals.

C: Experience.

C: Peace.

C: Amazing!

CHAPTER 5: TEACHING, DISCUSSING, CONCLUDING

Through my qualitative study, I have sought to show, through visuals and voice, evidence of what happens during an exchange between two groups of children who are separated, not only by classroom walls but also by physical and intellectual differences, yet experience a powerful event. By answering the questions 1) How do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities, and what do their words reveal about their understandings about and across difference? and 2) What do interactions between students "look like," and what can "doing" reveal about human interactions?, I now provide a practical application of theory to a phenomenon of human interaction with a goal of inspiring others in the field of educational research as well as those with whom I come into contact daily in the schools and surrounding communities.

As both a teacher and a researcher (my *self* and *other*), I found that in telling this story I have felt the need to deviate occasionally in my style of writing. Due to the complex layers of Bakhtin's (1990) ideas and my natural desire to teach in a way that can reach as many as possible in their understanding, the first part of Chapter 5 is written to explain in a perfunctory manner the intricacies of the interactions between my first grade students and their friends. This chapter begins with a brief review for readers of my first grader's experience and includes my rationale for choosing Bakhtin's theories as a lens for analysis. Thereafter, I address my research questions, expository-style, under the following three headings: Finding the Source of Magic: Part 1, A Brief Interlude: Shaping the Source (a section discussing how writing brings physical shape to the experience), and Seeing the Words: Part 2. Following Part 2 is a section titled *Voices of Understanding*, wherein readers will view photos and journal entries to further illustrate

students' growth in their understanding of difference and in their identified roles. A narrative-style discussion ensues on the idea of helping as it pertains to the politics of care in a section titled *"I am a Helper— I Make a Difference"* followed by the conclusion to this exploration in a section titled Hearing the Voice of a Special Need Called *Experience*, which acknowledges limitations, reader and researcher choices, and an author celebration of children's voice.

A Review for Readers

I felt there were unknowns within this inquiry that required *other* words; therefore, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1990) ideas of *otherness* provided a fitting framework. First and foremost, I point out how Bakhtin (1990) cautions researchers on putting words and ideas into the mouths of the researched in order to create a semblance of truth and validity. Since this is a study focused on, with, and about children and their voice, I feel it especially important, as their teacher, to reiterate this point. Other than a few directions to a group of my students at a specific table that it was time to line up to go to Room 24, there was no coaching, teaching, or questions to guide them through their experience. The 20–30 minutes on their special day belonged entirely to them with no indications or directions from me as to what they were to get out of it. My first graders were allowed to just be, —in what I can only describe from what I saw upon their return to our classroom as—a truly unique and personal, felt event (Ellsworth, 2005).

Once the children reached Room 24, they were greeted by two adult aides and the Special Education teacher who were in the room as well as the eight young friends with various special needs. As my students arrived on their day, the teacher, Miss A., would assign each child, or sometimes two, to a friend who was in one of the stationed areas.

Other than to assist in moving one of their own students, my students were free to interact with their friends during the time they were there. Though none of their friends spoke in sentences, there was a verbal and non-verbal exchange occurring—a dialogue. The importance of their time together begins there—Bakhtin's (1982) concept of dialogue as an essential ingredient in *all* human interaction and one that is unique to the sender and the recipient dependent upon the socio-cultural experience. However, the actual source of that interaction was where I believed the mystery lay, a place both inside and out.

Bakhtin's (1990) idea of outsidedness—*self* and *other*— intrigued me because the layered complexities of his theoretical ideas seemed to mirror what I saw in my students upon their return to my classroom. What I had been witnessing over the years in my students had been a unique and mysterious phenomenon and so special that from a classroom teacher's standpoint I felt the explanation deserved the austerity of Bakhtin's thinking and feared it would shrink in importance if framed in one of the more familiar theoretical boxes. As I began to write about the magical interaction between my first graders and their friends and answer my guiding research questions, I felt slightly intrusive, a feeling I did indeed experience in the field while capturing some of the many interactive moments on film. Surprisingly, as I gazed at my findings through this chosen theoretical lens, I found that the guiding questions were better answered in two parts by first halving each question then combining the opposite halves with the other to complete. That is, the first half of question #1 is combined with the second half of question #2 while the second half of question #1 is combined with the first half of question #2. The discovery of how my questions needed to be answered added an interesting parallel in my

study to Bakhtin's theory of *self* and *other* (1990) where one is dependent on the other in order to be complete.

The Teaching

Finding the Source of Magic

Part One: First half of question #1 combined with second half of question #2. Question #1: ***How* do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities**, and what do their words reveal about their understandings about and across difference? Question #2: What do interactions between students "look like," and **what can *"doing"* reveal about human interactions?**

I begin by focusing simultaneously on the italicized words "how" in question #1 and "doing" in question #2. How is it that my first graders make sense of their interactions? The answer, I found, according to Bakhtin (1990) actually resides *within* the doing. Prior to Bakhtin, John Dewey (1939) also wrote about the doing in his book *Art and Experience* and how the doing and undergoing occur together to yield an artistic experience full of energy, love, and complete satisfaction. As I begin to eke out the relationships of my students and their friends through this idea of doing, and focus my sights of the children's doing experience through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1990) theory of outsidedness—*self* and *other*— the adage, "to put yourself in someone else's shoes" seems an appropriate phrase.

According to Bakhtin (1990), as my first grade students interact with their immobile friends they must first "project themselves into…and experience his life from within him" (p. 25). The children cannot stay in the shoes of their friends of course. They must return to their rightful position of *self*, but their time as *other* enables them upon

their return to act ethically through “assistance, consolation or cognitive reflection” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 26). This was a very good place to begin to answer the *how*, but I felt there needed to be more. If I were to stop there, the explanation outside the world of research would explain the effects of the interactive experience in simpler terms of how the children were learning to be compassionate toward others. Compassion is indeed an important and wonderful thing for 6- and 7-year-olds to learn and a quality I do nurture throughout the year with my students. However, I agree with Dewey (1938) who cautions that the feeling/showing of compassion can be limiting, and one of my goals was that my students not feel sorry for the other children but view them as people with differences, in that light, a condition of being human and one worth honoring (Ferri, 2009).

What I had been seeing over the past several years, since implementing this first grade experience with friends, was actually more difficult to pinpoint and name. I found myself studying my students very closely as their eyes had a different look in them; their faces held a new expression. The way my first graders re-entered the classroom and approached their table to write about their recent experience was noteworthy, as well as the fact that it was extremely difficult for me as their teacher to get them to put their journals away and rejoin the class. Whatever descriptors I could use to sum up the effects of their experience, I felt that it was a powerful lived event within their lifeworld. I witnessed this daily event to be a personally satisfying journey for my students and one that appeared to be very private as I watched them earnestly concentrating on their journal writing, not whispering, not looking around the room, and not hearing me call to them to rejoin the class. As their teacher, I wanted and needed to understand what I had

been seeing in my first graders year after year as a result of time spent with friends in Room 24.

Bakhtin has helped me to understand the magical phenomenon that occurs during the children's interactive experience with one perfect descripter: complete. Merriam-Webster's (2015) definition of the word *complete* in combination with Figure 3 assisted in the visualization of the process behind this remarkable theory:

Complete – "not lacking anything; not limited in any way, fully carried out; entirely done."

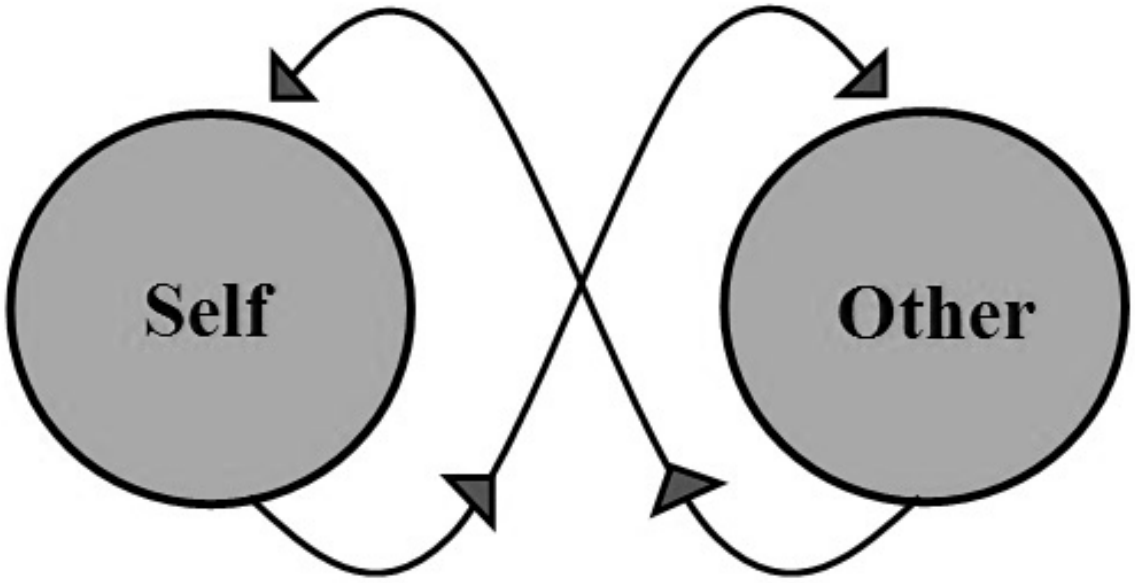


Figure 41. Self and Other: Complete Exchange

According to Bakhtin (1990), it would follow that as my students viewed their friends from the outside, projected themselves inside the Other (one of their friends), returned to them-Selves (self), and acted in some ethical manner (this is the "doing" part), they were then able to use the excess of that exchange and see their friends in a new way within a new setting. The experience with friends ceases to be painful, sad, or scary for these 6- and 7-year-olds who were now able to, upon their return to *self*, "fill in" or "complete" the *other* (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 26). The experience for my students becomes whole, the aesthetic value being beautiful—becoming a deeply satisfying dance with an-Other during the special time of human interaction.

The following selections, from the individual interview portion of the data presented in Chapter 4 for the purpose of reader ponderment and symbolic interpretation, serve to illustrate the dramatic change in my first graders' feelings, in their own words, before and after several visits to Room 24.

Before:

- *"Um, I was, kinda scared."*
- *"At the beginning of the year I felt a little shy, and I feel like the first time that I went down there I felt a little weird."*
- *"When I first went down, I felt kinda nervous."*

After:

- *"I feel happy, and I'm really glad that we go to Room 24."*
- *"I feel glad because I get to help people. I'm happy that I get to do stuff with them and so they can be happy too."*
- *"Um, I felt, like, peace in my heart. Um, there were some other feelings, um, love— joy. It feels like—goose bumps."*

The early feelings of being scared and feeling weird, shy, and nervous were replaced overwhelmingly with feelings of "happy" and "glad" as well as my first graders experiencing feelings of "peace," "joy," and even "goose bumps" (see Chapter 4: Individual Interviews). This feeling of euphoria experienced by my first graders during their interaction—back in their own classroom and beyond—is the result then of the event's completeness. It is through the completeness of their experience that my students make sense of the interaction with their friends. This interactive process serves to answer the *how*— in research question #1— explained by Bakhtin (1990) through the *doing*—in research question #2— by the fact that my students, because of the completeness of the exchange, are now able to see their friends in a new light within a new setting. The doing answers the how by combining the words from my research questions 1 and 2— how and doing— and illustrates that the source of magic I had been searching for lies in the *completion* of the exchange during the human interactions— in Bakhtin's (1990) words, the "consummation of the environment" (p. 25).

Though this exploration is primarily focused on the transformation of *my* students, the environment, according to Bakhtin (1990) is only complete because of the *exchange* between individuals. At the inception of this interactive relationship between our students, both the special education teacher and I agreed that it certainly would be a reciprocated event (see Vignette 1, page 4), one, according to Bakhtin (1990), that "…can take place only when there are two participants present" (p.22). Neither participant can complete themselves without the other, however, during this exchange, the resulting contemplation of ethical actions which consummate the experience and are unique to each encounter, "fill in" the other "without at the same time forfeiting his distinctiveness"

(Bakhtin, 1990, p.25). As the children interact with each other, "two different worlds are reflected in the pupils…" of their eyes (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 23).

There is ample evidence in this research to support this exchange as one of euphoria for the *selves* (my students) and though this exploration did not specifically gather/report findings on the results of the exchange for the *others* (friends) there is a source of interpretive data regarding their reactions within the reflective voices of my first grade students as the following quotes demonstrate:

- "Pressing the, pressing the thing that makes the computer do something. **They have a smile, and they like to make a little noise** that lets us know **they're happy**."

- "When they listen to the music, after they press the button **they kind of like get all happy** and then like, they like the song, and they like, 'If You're Happy and You Know It'. **They kind of like move around and kinda do some squeals (to show happiness)**."

- "We're helping them push buttons so we could watch videos, shows, yeah, and sometimes when they're on **they laugh**."

- "Um, pressing a button. Um, it like changes like to another video, and **they smile**."

A Brief Interlude: Shaping the Source

As my first grade students returned to their own classroom in the euphoric state of their recently consummate experience, they would immediately sit down to write about the time they had just spent with friends in Room 24. I found it interesting (and perhaps age appropriate) that some of the children described the process of reflection for the purpose of *remembering* the experience at a later date.

- "We are writing our thoughts about how we felt when we went down there. We helped them and we went down to their room – **so we can remember**."

- "Um, someone's writing in their reflection journal what they did in Room 24. They **need to remember** the stuff that they did."

- "They're writing what they did at Room 24 **so you can remember** what you did."

The use of the word *remember* could be attributed to the fact that during a typical writer's workshop I occasionally refer to the written word as something "lasting" or a piece that could be "shared" with another. A reasonable explanation could be that the word *remember* was one they knew and were assigning their recent experience as one worthy of remembering; but why? Bakhtin (1990) describes all thoughts as potentially infinite as opposed to the situated and concrete-ness of an experience; therefore, the choice of the word *remember* cannot be limited by my conjectures.

Though the above-mentioned word choice of *remember* was notable to me as a teacher, it was more noteworthy to me as a researcher that more students described the reflection process as not only putting words on the page for later remembrance, but also that they were words on the page *for their friends* and seemingly born out of *need*.

- "…and it might touch your heart **and their heart**."

- "I feel good because **we write about them because they're our friends**."

- "It's so you can think back at what you were doing there instead of just thinking about what you're doing right now **so you can think about them and not about you right now**—when you're reflecting."

- "…because **we experienced them and help them** learn and **we write about them**…"

- "It (reflection) **takes place in Room 24 and in our heart**."

- "**Because we like them** and **we wanna go there and make a difference**."

- "Writing about Room 24 **because we share sunshine**."

Once again, I turn to Bakhtin as I write about my students' complete interactive experience. Bakhtin (1990) discusses the process of writing and the reading of said writing in a similar manner of otherness but with seemingly more layers. Writing is seen as a reaction to a reaction. There is a need to bring "shape" to anything of an aesthetic nature (Bakhtin, 1990, p. III-xxx); in this case, the shaping comes in the form of written journal entries. My students' reaction to their self/other experience— themselves and their friends—is now taking the written form of "otherness" known as author/hero (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 4). My first graders give form— shape—to their lived interactive experience on paper as authors— self— interacting with their hero/character—other (their friends)—as a "reaction to the *whole* of the hero as a human being" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 5).

Seeing the Words

Part Two: Second half of question #1 combined with first half of question #2.

In this section I combine the second half of question #1 with the first half of question #2. The relationship I noticed in the re-combined halves of my research questions focuses on the italicized words from questions 1 and 2—*reveal* and *look like*—and begins with the idea that to *reveal* encompasses the act of showing, which in turn results in what something *looks like*. The visual data supports the children's words—voice— while the words support the visuals to answer the second, re-combined part of my research questions and guide readers toward their own completion, wherein the findings answer the questions through the support given by the visual experience of being there (Geertz, 1985).

Question #1: How do children make sense of their interactions with children who have severe disabilities, and **what do their words *reveal* about their understandings about and across difference?**

Question #2: **What do interactions between students *"look like,"*** and what can *"doing"* reveal about human interactions?

During their reflective process of writing, my students' voices of understanding about difference appeared on their journal pages and were ultimately verbally echoed during the interviews, focus group, and photo elicitation recorded sessions. The student drawings that accompanied their words in the journal entries were captured (mimicked) in my photos and provide powerful visual support. The following selections from the shared children's voices in Chapter 4: Sharing the Written Word (page 54) and Spoken Words Echoed in New Settings (page 77), in addition to their individual interviews, will be revelatory of the children's understanding about and across difference as the words show— *reveal*—what our eyes see— what interactions *look like*— in the interactive photos and student drawings.

The Discussion

Voices of Understanding

> "The body is alive, which means it is as capable of influencing and transforming social languages as they are capable of influencing and transforming it" (Siebers, 2011, p. 68).

An important aspect of the interactive experience and one that I as their classroom teacher would communicate to my students on occasion was that their friends be viewed as people first and as having special needs second. A conversation concerning this topic

ensued prior to the first visit due to the fact that we needed an appropriate way to refer to our friends. Oftentimes, in the classroom, I would hear, "our special needs friends" and would interject while at the same time understanding that these young learners simply needed a way to let others know who they were referring to in conversation. Many of my first graders were able to recognize a "people first" stance (see Chapter 4: Interviews, page 40) as is evident by the following representative reflective interview statements:

- *"I was really happy that I get to know someone who's different than us. Their worlds aren't different than any one's else's* ***because they're still children****."*
- *"I liked it once I got in there, '****cuz the people, our friends*** *in Room 24, they like us too."*
- *"I feel glad because I get* ***to help people.*** *I'm happy that I get to do stuff with them and so they can be happy too."*

Through their actions of interacting during the school day, as well as in the understanding demonstrated in their social languages, my students possess the power to transform and influence those around them in the way Siebers (2011) intended. The revelation of a people-first stance heard in their voices is the starting point to answering what my students understood about difference. The understanding that "*… their worlds aren't different than anyone's else's…*" illustrates how my students viewed their very special friends not only in their lifeworld but all worlds.

After recognizing difference as inherent to all human beings the next step for my students was to identify their place or role in the interactive experience. How the children understood their role is clearly evidenced in both written and verbal accounts by their ability to see themselves as *teacher, helper,* and one who *shows* due to the obvious

differences that were realized in ability, both mental and physical, between themselves (*self*) and their friends (*other*).

"That's where we go!"
"You go!"



Figure 3. Journal Entry 1.1.1

The journal entries, quotes, and photos above and below are representative of many that illustrate how my students understood their roles of teacher, show-er, and helper (see Chapter 4) and answer how my first-graders peered across difference and defined themselves in these roles while the photos and student journal drawings reveal what these interactions looked like. The words of Tobin Siebers (2011), from the perspective of those with disabilities, "…you others are our caregivers…" (p.52), became the role of *other* that my first graders willingly and readily accepted as a necessary part of their friends' *self*.



Photograph 14. Duck



Figure 5. Journal Entry 1.1.3

3/14/14
"I did puppets with _____. I also showed _____ colors."

Excerpt from Journal Entry 1.1.7:
"I played Go Fish. I showed the cards up to my partner, and she looked at the colors."



Photograph 18. Go Fish



Photograph 24. Button

Excerpt from Journal Entry 2.1.1:
"I wondered what ____ felt when I showed the purple button."

“I Am a Helper—I Make a Difference”: The Politics of Care

Throughout this study, I have found that proper word choice when referring to our friends in Room 24 and what occurs during the interactions has been a matter in need of attention for myself as well as for my students. For a teacher whose desire was to encourage acceptance of difference and an atmosphere of love and respect for self and other, this has proven to be one of the most puzzling pieces to sort out as I seek to defend and honor children’s rights and voices.

In the work of Morris (2001) and Ferri (2009) respectively, the term disability is referred to as a disabling and disempowering barrier created by society for those having an impairment. Interestingly, during a recent discussion with my law-student son on the topic of the use of the word impairment vs. disability, he pointed out that in the legal world an impairment is defined as being below the normal level of functioning as set by the state. Though the term used in this manner refers mainly to the effects of alcohol or drugs on the body, it could also be argued that the use of the term impairment implies that it is not normal to be in this state, that it was not present from birth, and that there is a more desirable state in which to be.

Because of these kinds of examples with the uses and definitions of words—though as a teacher I did attempt to have my students use a common descriptor when referring to their friends—my goal was to honor difference, not label it (Ferri, 2009). In the classroom, we spoke less of needs and more of friendships with people. Through our community language and regular interactions, my students were able to look across difference and see their friends as family. Silvers (1995) addresses the difference between the idea of familial love in a care-giving situation as opposed to having strangers

providing the care, the dilemma of difference being mistreatment when caregivers are removed emotionally from those of whom they are in charge. The care in these types of situations becomes custodial rather than care out of concern for well-being or of love/affection. Though my first graders were not responsible for any sort of physical care-giving, there is ample evidence in their words, drawings, and photos that display their care in the form of love and affection. While they are not family members in the typical sense, the type of interactions my students experienced with their friends provided them with a greater opportunity to care *about* as opposed to caring *for* (Bar-Lev, 2010), thus rendering the relationship personal and meaningful, far more family than stranger.

- "Um, I felt like peace, in my heart. Um, there were some other **feelings, um, love—joy.** It feels like—goose bumps."

- "This picture, I think, is S., um, this kid I don't know who it is but he's holding S.'s hand, um, 'cuz **he's friends** with him, and **he likes** Room 24."

- "There's one brown hand and one white hand holding each other, 'cuz **they're sharing sunshine**."

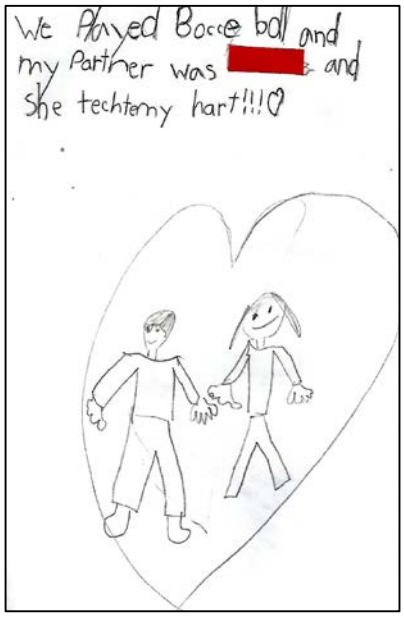


Photograph 21. Playing Cards

- "Someone's holding hands with someone 'cuz **they love each other**."

- "It looks like J. and someone from our class are holding hands. Because it's **having friendship and friends**."

- "It looks like the hands are reaching out and they're touching, because **Room 24 touches our hearts**."



"We played Bocce Ball, and my partner was _____, and she touched my heart!!!"

Figure 12. Journal Entry 1.2.1

As my students get to know their friends as family, it is out of that familiarity and the formation of a relationship that they *help.* Some may choose to hear and see my students' use of the words *help* and *helping* in their voice and writing as patronizing or piteous; however, during analysis it became apparent that the role of helper was a prosocial behavior that my students took on during the interactions, thereby making use of the word forms of help and helping (as they appeared in journal entries and narratives) a natural act that a helper performs. Using the noun forms of the words rather than the verb forms, my first graders eagerly took on the roles of teacher, show-er, and helper as a valued identity of becoming (Bryan, Master, & Walton, 2014). I now understand this as the mystery piece I witnessed in my students as they re-entered our classroom. Their new identity showed in their eyes, in their walk, and in the purposeful way they went about writing in their journals about their roles as helper, show-er, and teacher during their interactive moments with their friends in Room 24.

A study conducted at Arizona State University (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) explored this very idea of the source of a helping stance and found it to be born out of the relationship closeness (akin to family as previously mentioned) and a commonality of "oneness" experienced by individuals that spurred the self-other overlap and empathic concern to help (Bakhtin, 1990; Cialdini et al., 1997, p. 491). That is to say, as my students developed a close friendship— a oneness— and a feel of family for their friends in Room 24, they were moved to help as a result of empathy with the other and not as a result of compassion. Empathy resulted out of the close interactions of the self/other moments that my students experienced with their friends. Bakhtin (1990) says of this close relationship that "the love that shapes a human being from outside throughout his life…..provides images of his inner body's *outer* value….a value capable of being actualized only by another human being" (p. 51).

The final desire of my students was to make a difference. They did. As my first graders interacted with the children in Room 24 and were seen pushing their friends in wheelchairs from place to place around the school, they became a symbol of "positiveness," which replaced ("resymbolized") the existing negative visual symbol of these children being seen as "untouchables and unviewables" (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 25) as had been the case in previous years. Though our readers cannot see the results of our work's effects first-hand, through the visions and voices herein, we hope the new symbolization has been realized.

The Conclusion:
Hearing the Voice of a Special Need Called *Experience*

Advocacy for children and their needs is a familiar topic. In the state of Arizona, now ranked the country's lowest in public funding for education (Children's Action Alliance, 2015; "Per Pupil Spending Varies Heavily Across the United States," 2015), the Children's Action Alliance (CAA) has worked for over 25 years to make sure that all children have proper nutrition, health care, a safe environment, and a good education. According to Bird (2003), however, a child's safety, as well as having food, medical care, and education are uncontested rights and suggests that a needs discourse may sometimes diminish a discourse concerning "various children's experiences" (p. 39). This research on educational interactive experiences illustrates what a major component a critical social experience can be in a child's lifeworld and how easily an experience can be implemented into the regular school day to make a good education one that is *complete*. Dewey (1944) offers further support of this idea when he describes the nature of experience "….to have implications which go far beyond what is at first consciously noted in it" (p. 217). While there are inherent limitations in any study, the rights of children should not be one of those. The children in this study are active participants who have something to say, and, as a respectful adult audience, we need to listen and reflect on the message in their story.

There is no guarantee that a similar experience in another setting/school would have the same results as this study due to the fact that all children may not have the opportunity to create a close-knit community of social awareness nor do all teachers share the same values or views on what is important to teach in the classroom. There may

be many teachers who do not have the autonomy to deviate from the mandated curriculum even if they would like to. However, I would like to point out that opportunities for inclusive experiences are most assuredly becoming more available to all children. School children today are members of a new social construction of diversification with inclusion and mainstreaming mandates. The practice of providing the least restrictive environment for children with special needs, as the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines, has changed the way these children interact with others within the school setting. My students' awareness of this social reality, as experienced through their increasingly integrated rather than segregated school interactions, needs to be heard from their perspective as competent participants of that social world (Bourdieu, 1984).

The reality of a more diverse social construction is just one supporting reason why there is a need for the recognition of both children *and* their views as something that will help to extend the exploration of not only diversity in educational research studies but also in its methods as well. Over the years, though the ways in which children are thought of and what makes up a child's world has evolved, the debate is still ongoing as far as how to characterize a child's *views*. In her work, "On Listening to What Children Say," Vivian Paley (1986) states that the "first order of reality in the classroom is the students' point of view…" (p. 127), but are those views best approximations, core knowledge, or just early concepts (Baxter, 2013)? Even if children are heard, will researchers and others be able to see the world from the native's (children's) point of view (Geertz, 1985)? These are questions researchers and readers will have to answer themselves. Allison James' (2007) perspective on this topic is that the ability to *see*

ultimately is a choice the researcher has to make. I agree and extend this perspective to include others such as teachers, school board members, and communities involved in their children's education and curricular offerings.

To some, the interactive experience that I offer as a part of being a first grader in Room 2 may be viewed as coercive, not a relevant curricular need or even a held value of other educators. However, my students, as well as several prior years of first graders having had this experience, feel differently, and I suspect that a portion of the magic that I had been searching for lies within the children and their voice as an awareness of selves/others and helping (teaching and showing) illustrates here:

"Helping them is important— it's important for everybody."

The exciting knowledge to take away from our story is that what began as an experience for students to accept difference became one of commonality and oneness. The images hold the interactions to show what a progressive curriculum could (or should) look like, and the words have come directly from the voices of experience. These voices describe a special and needed interactive experience between selves and others that as a researcher I choose to see and to hear, but as a teacher, I will always refer to as *magical*.



Photograph 33. Together

POSTLUDE

More Magic in the Making

On February 28, 2015, I attended the funeral service of one of the young friends with special needs who participated in my study. Lying on a memorial table displaying several smiling photos of the 8-year-old at various ages was a pile of letters from my current group of first grade students that I had them write to the family in condolence and celebration. During the ceremony, my first graders and their letters were commented on and quoted from:

> "_____ was my *best* friend!"
>
> "_____'s favorite song was 'If You're Happy and You Know It!'"

It was a powerful moment as I looked around at those in attendance and listened as the mother spoke with pride of her child's having been noticed and known by friends from school while out shopping or getting a haircut. I couldn't help but think that this scenario would not have looked or sounded like this seven years ago, and I smiled to myself as I allowed my mind to imagine the clearer visions and magically amplified voices of the future.



Photograph 28. Clasped

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APPENDIX A

IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Eric Margolis
Human Communications, Hugh Downs School of
480/965-0131 ERIC.MARGOLIS@asu.edu

Dear Eric Margolis:
On 1/3/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The Magic of Room 24: A first grade teacher searches for the magic that occurs when her regular ed. students interact with their friends in Room 24 who have special needs.
Investigator:	Eric Margolis
IRB ID:	STUDY00000457
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Child Assent, Category: Consent Form; • Parental Consent, Category: Consent Form; • "The Magic of Room 24", Category: IRB Protocol;• Interview questions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Research site approval, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings on 1/3/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator
cc:
Gwen Struble

July 26, 2013

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL LETTER OF CONSENT

“THE MAGIC OF ROOM 24”
PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Margolis in the Hugh Downs School of Communication at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to document the unique experience of regular interaction that only my first grade students have at Zaharis Elementary with their friends in Room 24 who have severe disabilities.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve still photos and video footage of your child’s hands and/or feet during their time with their friends in Room 24. In addition to the photos your child may be interviewed to talk about this experience. Participation in this project will be 10 to 15 minutes in length. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no change in treatment towards him/her as a student in my classroom. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, and some photos and speech bites will be made into a video but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is the knowledge that they are a part of something they may view as important or that is making a difference in other’s lives and in their own. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child’s participation, though slight embarrassment may occur during the interview process.

Responses during interviewing will be kept confidential by editing out any use of your child’s name during the video-making process and using only their voice, not facial images. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child’s name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at (480)-308-7202 or Dr. Eric Margolis at (480) 965-0131.

Sincerely,

Gwen J. Struble

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (Child’s name) to participate in the above study by allowing your child’s hands/and or feet to be photographed and/or videotaped and to be interviewed by me.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

VIDEO RELEASE

I am allowing my child to be photographed and/or videotaped as a part of this study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX C

CHILD ASSENT

The Magic of Room 24
Verbal Child Assent

I, _____, have been told that my mom or dad or guardian said it's okay for me to take part in a project about my teacher's learning.

I will have my hands and/or feet photographed as I interact with my friends in Room 24. I will be asked some questions by my teacher.

I am taking part because I want to. I know that I can stop at any time if I want and it will be okay if I want to stop.

Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for my First Graders
"The Magic of Room 24"

1. At the beginning of the school year, how did you feel when you first learned that you would be going to Room 24 to work with students who have special needs?

2. How do you feel now that you have visited many times?

3. What do you do with your friends in Room 24?

4 What do you enjoy most about your visits?

5. Do you feel this experience helps you or your special friends in and out of school? Explain.

6. Who should have this experience? Why?

7. Do you feel that you have changed after having had this experience? If so, how?