

McGinley, W., & Kamberelis, G. (1996). and :
Children Negotiating Self and World through Reading and Writing.
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Maniac Magee and Ragtime Tumpie: Children Negotiating Self and World Through Reading and Writing

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This article appears in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 28(1), 1-39.

Theoretical Background

ining and participating in the public sphere. More specifically, she

Interest in theories about the potential of narratives to function as...

...of the

Gundlach, 1981, 1982; Newkirk, 1989). Writing has also been reported to serve certain "mimetic" functions (e.g., Gundlach, 1981; Shuman

In the area of reading, recent interest in the transactional nature of literary understanding (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978) has spawned two kinds of

1986; White & Peirson, 1979). Mimetic writing involves modeling the

studies designed to explore the interpretative processes that underlie chi-

Method

research project. These visits eventually led to several research projects,

as presented in this article.

stories about themselves. The children were asked to arrange their desks in a circle and to share some experiences or details about themselves or their families. At this stage, sharing time was to be a time for children to

These and other similar activities served several purposes in Vicki's classroom. First, they helped both to initiate and to sustain much of the

events (local or national) as important props for writing projects. Finally, the children's attention was directed to the written work of other chil-

During each interview, children were asked to review the reading and writing they had done since the previous interview and to identify those

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Although children's individual reading interests varied, many of the most popular books embodied the following more specific themes: friends and friendships, families and family relationships, sports and sports heroes, heroic experiences of child or adolescent characters, animal stories, the lives of important African Americans, and social and cultural histories. Some of the texts that were read by many or most children included: *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (Bains, 1982), *I Have a Dream: The Story of Martin* (Davidson, 1991), *Honey I Love and Other*

their lives. Finally, children engaged in reading and writing to "experience" or participate in the storied lives and worlds of imaginary characters.

Reading (and to a lesser extent writing) provided children with opportunities to adopt and imaginatively explore a variety of new roles, responsibilities, and identities derived from both real and fictional story characters. For example, after reading several books about well-known African American women, Mary wrote the following in her reading-response journal, indicating how the experiences of these women enabled

'Cause um, I was just sittin' there thinkin' about what I was going to write and
I was thinking about my life and stuff. And I think about

When I wrote it down, I felt better because I was always, before I wrote it
down I was always scared. I was still scared but I was not scared.

Americans such as Rosa Parks, Frederick Douglas, Harriett Tubman,

Some children also went beyond increasing their own awareness of

to know how it feels to be something a giant animal but then you're ---

abiding concern with understanding inter-racial conflict. Indeed, he revisited this topic in much of his reading and writing, in conversations

Jamar also used writing as a means to objectify emotions in relation to social problems that affected him only indirectly. One text that was

...of belief in the constructive potential of his own writing was not

"Dustin" and other essays and stories that I

To summarize, reading and writing functioned for Jamar in ways that allowed him to address a host of complex personal and social issues. He

Tanya's class) came to school, and I started, started thinking on her [Mary]. And then it went on and on, and started, then we started being friends.

probably be a singer or a preacher or somebody like Dr. Martin Luther

First, in response to our questions about how she came to write the

tion and respect of peers within her own classroom. This sense of power became manifest in children's responses to her essay, "Non-Violence"

One of the essays that stimulated much discussion in the classroom

fashion social and moral codes, and to consider possibilities for social change.

Although some of these responses...

... to the names that concerned them. Similarly

... field. ...

-

discrete causal forces. On the other hand, we recognize that we might

be interested in the relative effects of various influences

instances of these problems outside of school. At a more subtle level, it

would be very important to know whether a focus on

extend our special thanks to the editor and reviewers of RTE for their constructive responses to various versions of this manuscript. This work was partially funded by grants from the National Council of Teachers of English and the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan.

Note

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Functions Related to Present Problems