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Reading Immigration Stories: Emotion and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs

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Reading Immigration Stories:
Emotion and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs

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This thesis entitled:

**Reading Immigration Stories: Emotion and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs**

written by Mark A Lewis

has been approved for the School of Education

____________________________________________________

Dr. William McGinley (Chair)

____________________________________________________

Dr. Kenneth R. Howe

Date__________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Lewis, Mark A (Ph.D., School of Education, Curriculum & Instruction – Literacy Studies)

Reading Immigration Stories: Emotion and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs

Thesis directed by Associate Professor William McGinley

Abstract

In this dissertation, I examined what middle school students participating in a school-based book club ultimately took away from this reading experience emotionally and imaginatively, particularly the extent to which book club discussions provided a space for possible opportunities to learn about the social/cultural lives and worldviews of others. The students I worked with were sixth graders in a middle school with a population split between Latino/a and White students, many of whom were children of immigrants or were recent immigrants themselves. Focusing on interactions around stories of immigration, I drew upon social/cultural theory, critical discursive perspectives, and the emotion and literary imagination aspects of reading to explore the relationship between the reading and telling of stories and the students' social, cultural, and political understanding. Drawing from critical discourse analysis strategies, I analyzed how the emotional and imaginative engagement created by reading stories of immigration, and then discussing those stories with a socially and culturally diverse group of peers, influenced student talk and positioning within a book club. I argue that literary imagination was central to a reader’s ability to emotionally and intellectually connect to the fictional lives of characters, to ethically critique the actions of these characters, and, in turn, to empathetically relate with others. For the sixth graders participating in his research, emotional and imaginative literary engagement was essential to their ability to discern the realities of the immigrants in the novels they were reading, and to compassionately comprehend the immigrant realities of their classroom and school peers.
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I would not have been able to complete this project without the willingness of the teachers at Nelson River Middle School to open their doors. Susan Kandyba and Wendy Meyers were invaluable to this project. More important, I was lucky to be able to work with two wonderful teachers who have taught me much about what it means to care about students’ success, both in and out of the classroom. The lessons I learned during the two years of working with these teachers are ones that have made me a better educator.

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Finally, my parents, Walt and Janet Lewis, are role models after which I lead my life. I could never have had the fortitude it takes to complete a doctoral degree without the example they set for what it means to live and teach. Also, their commitment to social justice has set the foundation for my own, which has driven the scope of this project. I thank them for their continued love and support.
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Chapter One

Telling Stories

Kristine burst into the classroom a day in early January, threw her backpack into a chair, and rushed over to me. “I just finished New Moon, and it was so good,” she exclaimed, extending her so an extra three heartbeats. She then went on to explain her favorite parts of the story, how great an author Stephanie Meyer is, why she was excited about reading the next book in the series, and her exasperation that I had only read Twilight, the series opener. One of her teachers, Susan Kandyba (Mrs. K), finally asked Kristine to find her seat and get ready for class. I smiled, as this was the most common way Kristine, Mrs. K, and I started each day. I begin with this anecdote because Kristine’s entrance exemplified a story of these students that I return to shortly. As Kristine sighed and moved to one of the circular tables arranged around the classroom, the other students trickled with the more reserved nature of a sixth grader at 8 a.m., choosing their usual places at the various tables. The teachers rarely assigned seats to their students, so the students often chose the same tables and peers. Kristine, Amy, Danielle, Gwen, and Shari sat at one table. Veronica, Selena, Magda, and Leticia chose another table. Iliana, Mercedes, and Melosa sat together, while Ernesto, Jacob, Jaime, Federico, and Benicio sat together. Finally, Geoff and Kaleb chose a table to be by themselves. As typical of young middle school students, they self-segregated themselves by gender. Perhaps also typical, the students also often self-segregated themselves by ethnicity. Something I noted because it was the different ethnic backgrounds of these students that became central to my study on reading and telling stories in a school-based book club.

1 The teachers involved in my study, Susan Kandyba and Wendy Meyers, gave me permission to use their real names. All student names and school sites, however, are pseudonyms.
Susan Kandyba and Wendy Meyers (Ms. M) teach at Nelson River Middle School – a school known in the school district for its commitment to students of diverse backgrounds, namely Latino/a students who are learning English as their second language. Approximately half of Nelson River’s student population is Latino/a and the school has a strong bilingual ethos, which were a couple of reasons I was drawn to the school and its students. I taught in a similarly diverse school, so it felt much like my community in Arizona. There is also something special about Nelson River in the way the administrators and teachers promote diverse perspectives and working together across social and cultural boundaries both in and out of the classroom. Over the course of the first semester of 2008-2009 school year, in which my study took place, I took note of how students of different ethnicities worked and talked with one another. Mrs. K and Ms. M worked hard to build a community of learners in their classroom that respected each other despite academic or social or cultural differences, and the Nelson River community continued to work toward their overall mission of providing space for diversity. Slowly, these sixth grade students took on that mantle and by the end of the school year it seemed that these boundaries were beginning to become blurred.

At the beginning of the second semester, Ms. M and Mrs. K used immigration as a curricular theme for reading novels and writing argumentative essays. The students read and wrote about immigration and associated issues over the course of three months. A central activity to this unit was the book club. Small groups of students read the same novel, wrote reader responses, and then met once a week to talk. The groups were primarily constructed with reading level in mind, but also with the purpose of grouping students with diverse social/cultural backgrounds. The conversations in these book clubs were extraordinary, and would probably surprise anyone who had not worked extensively with youth because of the insight these students
expressed about a contentious, and, for many, an extremely personal topic. Examining how the students’ talk functioned in the book clubs was the primary purpose of my study. For these students and teachers, reading fictional stories led to the telling of personal stories, especially due to the ways the teachers facilitated the book club discussions. Story-telling became a primary way these students reflected upon what they knew about immigration, and, subsequently, how they conveyed what they knew about immigration. Stories can be educative and epiphanic. For instance, the connections these sixth graders made between and across stories, both fictional and personal, were crucial to their perspectives on the life of an immigrant, as well as the social, cultural, and political aspects of immigration in the United States. These consequences are indicative of why stories and story-telling are so important to English classrooms, as they have the ability to work toward change.

Therefore, the following research questions informed my study:

1. What is the nature of the teachers’ facilitation of book club curriculum and instruction in this sixth grade English language arts course?

2. In the context of these teachers’ book club curriculum and instruction, what discursive roles and/or subject positions are available to students from differing social/cultural backgrounds?

3. To what extent do the book club discussions in a school-based book club provide opportunities for students to learn about the social and cultural lives and perspectives of others, especially as it pertains to conceptions of immigrants and immigration?

As public school classrooms become increasingly diverse, it will become more important for teachers to be able to navigate personal, social, political, and cultural issues with their students, and just as vital for students to be able to navigate these issues with their peers. Nelson River is
a school confronted by these questions, and Mrs. K and Ms. M’s classroom was a microcosm of how the school was thinking about these questions in curricular ways. Further, there is an increasing tension in English language arts classrooms over the reasons for and outcomes of teaching literature. In the language of accountability standards and literary academics, students should be able to comprehend literature – plot, character, setting, conflict – and analyze story through specific literary lenses – feminism, Marxism, psychoanalytical. Others argue for a more humanistic approach to reading literature, one that considers emotional, moral, expressive, and imaginative aspects of story-reading and story-telling. This tension was revealed in this classroom as well.

Even before Harvey Daniels published the first edition of his how-to curriculum textbook on literature circles in 1994, teaching literature in reading groups was becoming prevalent in English language arts classrooms. His work popularized the curricular idea even further, and I remember attending his session, along with about 100 other teachers, at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention during my first year of teaching. Over the course of the last thirty years, there have been two main strands of research on book clubs. There has been research on community-based book clubs that has primarily looked at three major groups – women’s clubs from 1850 to 1920, African American literary societies of 1830 to 1940, and contemporary women’s groups (Blair, 1980; Gere, 1997; Long, 2003; McHenry, 2002; Radway, 1997; Scott, 1991). Another strand is research on school-based book clubs that have mainly investigated two aspects of using book clubs in the English language arts curriculum – improving teacher practice for teaching literature (Daniels, 2002; Faust et al., 2005; O’Donnell-Allen, 2006) and improving the comprehension of young readers (Blum, Lipsett, & Yocum, 2002; Broughton, 2002; Clarke, 2006; Helt, 2003). Within this strand on school-based book clubs, there has been
other work cautioning teachers in the way they conceive and construct book clubs in terms of student membership and discursive practice, especially in regards to gender, ethnic, and linguistic differences (Henry, 2001; Johnson, 2000; Lewis, 1997). However, little work has been done linking these two areas, considering what it would mean if school-based book clubs more closely resembled community-based book clubs. My research extends the field of book club studies because it, first, attempts to link these two strands of research, and, second, because it examines other types of content and outcomes of book club discussions than teacher practice and reading comprehension.

Specifically, emotion and literary imagination is often a realm in which community-based book clubs tend to function, yet school-based book clubs tend not to, which I found not to be the case in Mrs. K and Ms. M’s classroom when the students began discussing stories of immigration in their own book clubs. Therefore, I draw upon theorists from literary studies (Edmundson, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1995; Weinstein, 2003), philosophy (Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 2001), political science (Ganz, 2008; Marcus, 2002), and psychology (Bruner, 2002; McAdams, 2006) who have considered the aspects of emotion and imagination in reading and telling stories. These theorists argue that these aspects are inherent to how stories function in literature and life in that a writer and reader, or teller and listener, necessarily engage in affective dimensions of inner selves when imagining plot and character. Further, they argue that feeling is the basis for positive citizenship and ethical judgment because of the empathetic participation in others’ lives. I also take a social/cultural perspective on language and literacy as this perspective pertains to the nature of a school-based book club (Heath, 1996; Gee, 1996; Lewis, Moje, & Enciso, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978), as well as draw upon discursive perspectives on how language functions in specific contexts (Bakhtin, 1982; Fairclough, 1995; Mills, 1997). These perspectives form a
framework for how I made sense of what was happening in the book club discussions about stories of immigration in this sixth grade classroom.

**Telling Stories**

I began with the brief story of Kristine’s daily entrance into this classroom because it was indicative of the importance of story for these students. Many students like Kristine enjoyed reading novels outside of school, and most spent time watching movies. These fictional stories were topics of conversation before and after class, as well as during classroom conversations. The students also related stories about their lives to the teachers and me, regaling us with what happened to them over the weekend or the night before. Part of this story-telling culture came from Mrs. K and Ms. M, as they often began class with one of their own stories, or used personal stories as sources of clarification. Telling stories was part of the culture of this classroom.

Creating such a culture was important for these teachers because of their philosophical approach to teaching – that the classroom should be a caring place in which students and teachers take the time to learn about each other’s lives. It was also important to these teachers due to the new structure of their “Language and Literacy” course. This new course brought together linguistically diverse students in a way that Nelson River Middle School had not previously practiced. Students who were native English speakers and students who were learning English as a second language were mixed, despite academic history or ability. The teachers were concerned that the students would be hesitant to socially interact, so they consciously built a classroom in which being open about one’s life was the norm. They hoped this approach would mitigate some of the self-segregation issues that were occurring in their classroom, as well in other common areas of the school. This approach worked to some extent, as these students became comfortable working with anyone in the class. Of course, as in any classroom, students
had their preferences for who they wanted to partner with for group projects. More important, the students primarily self-segregated themselves when it came to seating arrangement. However, the book club unit on immigration began to break down some of these barriers through the intimate stories students told during the book club discussions. It seemed that their preparation to tell personal stories during class contributed to their comfort to tell stories during the book club discussions. As well, the norm of story-telling prepared them for the possibilities open to them by engaging in the fictional and lived stories present in their literature discussions.

**My Path to This Research**

I started my career in education as a middle school teacher in Arizona. For five years, I taught 7th and 8th grade English language arts and English as a second language in a school that served the children of the large population of migrant farm workers in the area. When I started there, citrus groves and corn fields decorated my daily commute, and a dairy farm occupied a large tract of land west of the school. We always knew which way the wind was blowing. As sprawl continued in the Phoenix area, the demographics of our student population gradually changed as farms were replaced with subdivisions, and I personally witnessed the issues involved when students of very different backgrounds of ethnicity and class came together. Our struggles as teachers was partially what led me to my research interests during my graduate career, and influenced why I developed this research project.

In my first year at the University of Colorado at Boulder, I was assigned to be a university supervisor for a group of student teachers. One of the schools in which my student teachers were placed was Nelson River Middle School. I immediately felt like I had returned to my school in Arizona due to its student population, as well as due to some of the issues my student teachers spoke about during our seminars. I made it a point to get to know the teachers,
and seemed subconsciously aware that my dissertation research would take place at Nelson River. When it came time to find a research site, Susan Kandyba was recommended to me because of her experience working with middle school students, and her use of book clubs in her literature curriculum. I volunteered in her class the year prior to my study, which was invaluable to increasing our comfort level with one another, as well as my understanding of how she approached teaching. I was extremely lucky to find Nelson River and this classroom.

As I observed Susan Kandyba’s class that first year, I was intrigued by her choice of immigration as a curricular theme for one of her book clubs, as well as how the students talked about the issues presented in the novels. In this instantiation the year before my study, the students were grouped by reading level (as well as personal interest in each novel), which meant that the groups were also grouped by ethnicity because of the linguistic differences of the Latino/a students. I began to wonder how the talk of the book club discussions might be different if the groups were linguistically and culturally diverse. Susan was also intrigued by this question, especially since it matched the goals of a newly designed English language arts program the sixth grade team was planning to implement in the upcoming year, which included the creation of a new class she would be co-teaching with Wendy Meyers. A study was born.

**Chapters Outline**

I relate the story of my research in the following chapters, focusing on a book club unit in the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year. In this book club, sixth grade students from one Language and Literacy course read different novels about immigrants moving to and living in the United States, primarily from Latin American countries. In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical lenses through which I attempted to understand how the talk in the book club discussions functioned for these teachers and students, especially as they relate to discourse and
narrative. I provide a context of my study in chapter three, explaining more about Nelson River Middle School, the Language and Literacy course, and the teachers and students. In this chapter, I also detail my methodology used to gather and analyze my data. In chapters four and five, I explicate my findings as related to my research questions. In chapter four, I consider how these two teachers constructed their book club curriculum, and how their choice of instructional strategies engendered certain approaches to story-reading and story-telling. I turn to the students’ various roles as story-tellers in chapter five, specifically how the Latino/a students used story-telling as a way to become co-characters in and co-authors of stories of immigration, as well as the consequences of these roles for other students in the book clubs. Finally, I present the relevant themes of my findings as they relate to the emotional and imaginative implications of story-reading and story-telling, as well as how these themes relate to secondary school literature curriculum and instruction. I conclude by contemplating my own future directions for research in this field of literacy education.
Chapter Two

A Theoretical Framework for Making Sense of School-Based Book Club Discussions

As I examined my data from the book club unit on immigration taught at Nelson River Middle School, I brought several theoretical lenses to bear. Specifically, I drew upon social/cultural perspectives and critical discursive perspectives on language and literacy, as well as theories on the emotional and imaginative aspects of story-reading. I also reviewed research on book clubs based in the community outside of school and research on book clubs in English language arts classrooms. In this chapter, I provide brief explanations of these theoretical perspectives and a review of the relevant literature, especially as each pertains to my study on book club discussions.

A Social/Cultural Perspective on Language and Literacy

I drew upon social/cultural perspectives on language and literacy learning as they inform my examination of book club discussions within classrooms because they address the link between the individual and the community (Vygotsky, 1978), but also because they address the need to study literacy learning as a social, cultural, and historical phenomena (Moll, 1992). The major implications of the former include the idea that there is an active learner and an active environment in which the learner is situated, that this active environment begins and remains socially, culturally, and politically situated (Vygotsky, 1978), and that knowledge does not reside solely in the mind of the learner. In my case, the active learner refers to young students, and the environment refers to the classroom and school in which they work and learn. Social/cultural theorists argue that considering social/cultural contexts increases learning in youth, as they make the connection between school and community (e.g., Lee, 2007; Valdes, 2004). In other words,
the border between school learning and community learning blurs; school becomes part of the community instead of a sterile environment disassociated with the students’ “real” world.

The language and literacy implications, moreover, include the Bakhtinian idea that language is socially developed in a particular place and time, and that a person who becomes “literate” within that social and cultural tradition will ascribe meanings in disparate ways than a person who becomes “literate” in another social and cultural tradition (Enciso, 2007; Gee, 1996). When these two diverse others come together, they will socially and culturally construct meaning using their past experiences, but this meaning will be nuanced based on the current setting. As Dyson (2002) put it succinctly, “Our utterances replay our past discursive travels (those social situations from which our words come), and, at the same time, they play out our social present, which, in turn, becomes the basis for our future encounters” (p. 8). It is imperative to remember that these encounters take place between people within an institution, such as between teachers and students within a school classroom. Language and literacy learning in the situated practices of schools and classrooms involves certain ways of thinking, talking, interacting, and valuing, and these, in turn, affect the way meaning is negotiated within these certain social and cultural norms (Gee, 1996). Further, these school-based institutional norms shape identities and power relationships of the youth living and working in classrooms. Language and literacy learning, then, is dependent on negotiated social and cultural norms as well as dependent on particular literacy situations. These aspects are inextricable as one “can no more cut the literacy out of the overall social practice, or cut away the non-literacy parts from the literacy parts of the overall practice, then [one] can subtract the white squares from a chess board and still have a chess board” (Gee, 1996, p. 41).
The book club is a certain situation of reading, talking, and writing; therefore it is imperative to recognize the particular features of this literacy learning situation. Barton and Hamilton (2000) presented a set of principles around literacy which include: 1) literacy is a set of social practices mediated by texts; 2) literacy practices are influenced by social institutions and power relationships; 3) literacy practices are embedded in larger social and cultural goals and practices; and 4) literacy is historically situated. The literacy of a curricular book club practice follows all of these principles in that the discussions are framed by certain fictional texts, the curriculum and instruction employed by teachers and schools highly influence the functioning and positioning of the students within book clubs, the social, institutional goal of increased reading comprehension scores affects how book clubs function, and book clubs have a long and storied history as important personal, social, cultural, and political means of expression. I approached my study of school-based book club discussions as situated literacy practices and events that are culturally, historically, and institutionally constructed and produced.

Critical Discursive Perspectives

I approached this research from a discursive perspective because I believe that language shapes and acquires us. How one defines oneself and understands her/his life cannot be separated from the language that s/he uses to construct that life. Further, discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but “groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Mills, 1997, p. 11). In this way, discourse is inextricably linked to the social/cultural perspective on language and literacy I described previously. The language one uses to define oneself is fundamentally influenced by the social, cultural, and political context in which that language is constructed and learned. This
language is also based on ideologies of the situational context in which it is constructed. It is important to recognize the ideologies of a social/cultural context because, as Gee (1996) explained, “since theories ground beliefs, and beliefs lead to actions, and actions create social worlds, ideologies simultaneously explain, often exonerate, and always partially create, in interaction with history and the material bases of society, the distribution of goods” (p. 21). These goods can be material, intellectual, or spiritual. In the case of the book clubs that I examined, the goods distributed were intellectual and spiritual as the students and teachers negotiated the space of the book club discussion.

I considered this book club discussion space a text constructed by the teachers and students within the particular social/cultural context of a sixth grade classroom at Nelson River Middle School. As Fairclough (1995) argued, texts (broadly construed beyond written forms) are both ideational and relational. Texts both convey meaning and ideas, and establish and contradict social/cultural relationships. Both of these aspects occur in a context, which should be fully explained as the context has direct influence on both the ideas that are conveyed and the relationships that are formed, confirmed, and broken. Fairclough also considered that every social situation or network had an order of discourse practices that were “ordered in dominance in the sense that there may be a dominant (‘normal,’ naturalized) practice and dominated (marginalized, ‘alternative’) practices” (p. 12). Negotiating these various normed and alternative discursive practices may be ideologically invested as the members of the discourse community struggle over a diversity of practices. This negotiation over the diversity of discursive practices was part of the book club discussions in the classroom I studied as the students and teachers positioned themselves in certain ways, especially through the stories they told.
Discourse and discourse community. Discourse is the use of language seen as a set of social/cultural practices. It teaches us that when we speak, read, write in certain ways we take on the value of those practices, as well as the community in which those practices reside. Gee (1996) would expand discourse (which he capitalizes) to include more than language, but also beliefs, gestures, and attitudes in a comprehensive “identity kit” equipped for a way of being in the world “complete with the appropriate costume and instruction on how to act, talk, and often write, so to take on a particular social role that others will recognize” (p. 127). In this way, discourse can produce a structure for a community in that it forms a system of ways of thinking maintained within a particular context, and, yet, that discourse is simultaneously constructed by the community members and effects how those members think, believe, act, and interact. In other words, discourse is a different way of thinking about language, one that moves beyond simply a form of expression into a “form of representation…with its own determining effect on the way that individuals think and express themselves” (Mills, 1997, p. 8). A discourse community, then, is a place where membership is defined by specialized ways of talking, working, valuing, performing, and being – where language shapes and disciplines its members. A book club is such a community, and thinking about the book club discussion with a discursive perspective helped me map out the discursive practices common to this unique space.

A word on the critical possibility of discourse. Finally, it is important to remember that discourse and discourse communities are sites of struggle as a discourse determines what counts as membership because it can govern what can be said, believed, or done within that community. As Bakhtin (1982) explained, talk is not without value, nor is it a neutral activity; rather it is constitutive with social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. Since discourse determines membership, it can be seen as "principally organized around practices of exclusion"
(Mills, 1997, p. 12). Yet, taking a critical stance about the discourse practices in which a community engages can also lead to more inclusive conceptions of who can be a member. One way to approach this critical nature is through the making sense of the talk of discourse community membership, and then exposing possible exclusionary aspects of that talk, as well as the inclusive aspects of that talk. This can lead to changed perspectives, or at least the way one describes one’s perspective linguistically, which was one consequence of certain discursive practices in the book club discussions I explore in chapters four and five.

**Role of Stories in Our Lives**

Any study on literary book clubs and the power of literacy, however, must examine the nature of stories and narratives and recognize the importance of stories and narratives in people’s lives. This is especially true in classrooms of social/cultural diversity because we explore ways of being in the world and ways of knowing the world through narrative – both through ones similar to our own culturally taught ways and through narratives told by others of different backgrounds. These diverse cultural ways of knowing work to continue our understandings of the world, but also work to complicate those understandings. Exploring these narrative tensions becomes a necessary part of social/cultural diverse classrooms if a teacher desires her students to work with their peers, of differing social and cultural backgrounds, in productive and imaginative ways. For story organizes experience and builds relationships, as story is, in the words of Hardy (1977), “a primary act of mind” (p. 12), and through the sharing of stories, teacher and students build a new story of shared relationships.

Bruner (2002) explained the manner in which how shared stories work to build human community. First, he claimed that we use stories to make sense of our world, and, conversely,

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1 I will use the terms *story* and *narrative* interchangeably, although I recognize that narrative comes with some theoretical history and weight concerning structure and form, for my purposes I am considering narrative to refer to an anecdotal account similar to a story.
use our world to make sense of stories. Secondly, and perhaps more important, he said that stories do not teach, but rather subvert reality. In other words, they provide possible worlds and alternative realities to our own lives and society. Through stories, we can realize that the world does not have to be the way we have perceived it up to now. In fact, our world can become different and we are agents of change in the process; “it is not just who and what we are that we want to get straight but who and what we might have been, given the constraints that memory and culture impose on us, constraints of which we are often unaware” (Bruner, 2002, p. 14).

This can happen in classrooms as well, especially within the context of an English classroom using literature discussions to not only understand the fictional stories literature contains, but also the lived stories of the students and teachers involved in the discussions. Further, bringing the personal and emotional to the reading and discussing of literature can work to develop the ethical and compassionate understanding of ourselves and others (McGinley & Lewis, 2008).

How students use stories and, conversely, how stories influence students’ lives was a major focus of my research, hence I built upon other theorists’ ideas and conceptions of the role of stories in our lives. For instance, Dyson and Geneshi (1994) provided three main themes of stories: 1) stories have interrelated evaluative and social functions; 2) we demonstrate cultural membership through our ways of crafting stories and the content of our stories; and 3) we reconstruct stories with our own experiences and in this way weave our lives with others through story. I use these three themes to structure the following discussion on stories and narratives.

First, stories and narratives serve evaluative and social functions. Story is evaluative in that it is a primary way of determining the truth and reality of our lives. Similarly, it is social because it is also a primary way of determining the truth and reality of others’ lives. As Hardy (1977) eloquently put it:
[W]e dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.” (p. 13)

Story is how we construct our world and the players involved in our world. We evaluate how our world progresses through story and we connect to one another through the sharing of stories. Eisner (1997) claimed that “[s]tories instruct, they reveal, they inform in special ways” (p. 5). These special ways include reflecting on what we know and then conveying what we know. This is similar to how Bakhtin thought about parole, or language in use. Phelan (2006) claimed that the diversity of parole is a:

function not just of the range of semantic forms and syntactic structures used by speakers but also of the inseparable connection between language and ideology. The social nature of language means that different social groups develop characteristic patterns of diction and syntax and those patterns come to carry the ideological values of those groups. (p. 294)

In other words, narratives are helpful for what they reveal about social life, cultural and historical contingencies, and practices of power (Reissman, 1993). We can investigate social relationships by observing the stories people tell one another, and by observing the uptake (whether positive or negative; heard or ignored; venerated or denigrated) of those stories by others. This was part of my study on book club discussions as I investigated how adolescents used stories to build relationships as well as build barriers, as we need to remember that not only do stories bring people together, but they can also identify groups to which people belong.
This leads to the second theme of stories, that the ways we craft stories and the content of our stories can reveal cultural membership. For example, Jackson (1995) provided two functions of story – the epistemological and the transformative. The first implies that stories contain knowledge, and it is this knowledge that older members of a social, cultural, historical, and/or political group want to impart on younger members of that group. The epistemological function also implies that every group has a number of shared stories that its members need to know in order to participate in that group. Dyson and Geneshi (1994) also argued, following Bakhtinian thought, that the way we tell stories place us in social and cultural spaces in particular ways, and that “[s]tories are an important tool for proclaiming ourselves as cultural beings. In narratives, our voices echo those of others in [a similar] social/cultural world” (p. 4). Therefore, within a book club on immigration and border crossing stories, students might be placed in particular social/cultural groups by the stories they tell in response to the literature read. Certain students may identify with protagonists moving across borders, and other students may struggle with hearing a personal account of immigration that might challenge their perception of an associated political issue. Paying attention to these tensions was vital to answering my research questions as different cultures have stocks of stories and knowing these stories is to participate in shared meanings, which are in a constant state of change (Gudmundsdottir, 1995), especially when confronted with alternative narratives that subvert someone’s preconceived and/or learned ways of viewing the world and different others.

Yet, this is not to imply that the disequilibrium often caused by stories creates discord. Instead, following the third theme of stories, they are often used to weave our lives with others in harmonious ways. This is Jackson’s (1995) second, transformative function of story, which he argued, and I agree, is more important. The transformative function works to provide new
perspectives and outlooks, instruct and entertain, and reveal previously unknown aspects of life. Similarly, Hardy (1977) argued that through narrative we have the hope of understanding ourselves and others, and then make the changes we see necessary to improving our social and cultural (and I would add political) relationships. Of course, creating tensions and disequilibrium can, at first, be the source of discomfort. At times, this was particularly true for the sixth graders who participated in the book club discussions I collected for my research. Again, how these youth use (or not use) these stories to confront social, cultural, historical, and personal tensions was the crux of my research analysis. Hence, the importance of story in my research framework, and the importance of story within this English classroom, for I believe, along with Witherell (1995), that stories provide connection to our surroundings in a deep, peaceful way that reveals unforeseen possibilities. Stories can also ask readers to confront other worlds in productive ways, and “[e]vents once considered strange and persons once considered strangers are met as wise teacher and companions once the barriers are traversed” (Witherell, 1995, p. 44). The fictional stories read by the students in the book clubs asked them to figuratively cross such barriers, as well as literally cross borders in their book club discussions with their socially and culturally diverse peers. It was a goal of my research to pay attention to these stories, to analyze how youth use such stories, and to contribute to the field ways teachers and students can approach difficult topics, such as immigration, through stories and story-telling.

**Reading with Emotion and Literary Imagination**

Particular aspects of stories that I focus on in my analysis are the roles of emotion and imagination in how readers, listeners, and tellers understand their own lives and the lives of others. Drawing upon several theorists from literacy studies, philosophy, political science, and psychology, I consider the importance of emotion and imagination in how my participants,
particularly the sixth grade students, (re)built their understanding of immigrants and immigration through the reading and telling of stories. This perspective on reading is shaped by three fundamental principles. First, a vital part of what story reading offers requires the emotional participation of readers. Second, readers’ imagination is an essential part of the process through which stories unravel “the real” or the canonical, and reveal the possible. Third, readers’ emotional and literary imagination is a critical agent of democratic equity and the art of the possible (McGinley & Lewis, 2009).

**Emotional participation and affective sensibilities.** A primary mode for coming to understand how one’s life is linked with others is through emotion. The affect is a common landscape that most can access despite social, cultural, or linguistic differences. This is true because most everyone feels, and can articulate, at some level, what a certain emotion entails. This is not to say that there is not nuance when it comes to a personal perspective on love or hate, pleasure or pain. Yet, emotions such as these evoke certain common expressions, and it is these common expressions that provide a map that connects people. For example, the emotion of care can suggest several ideas for interpersonal relationships – nurture for a child, support for convalescence, an aspect of love, supervision of an invalid. All of these conceptions of care, however, involve providing sustenance for another person, often through one’s own sacrifice of time and resources, and it is this common ground of understanding the emotion of care, and all that it means for someone’s life, that makes available a possibility for connection with another person. The emotion of care is a link that most everyone can imagine and attend to. To put it another way, if someone understands what it means to care, then s/he can imagine what it might be like for someone else to care, and that common understanding of care can provide a landscape for these two people to know each other.
This is an important concept to consider when reading fictional stories. People like stories because the consciousness of the characters are “magnets for empathy” and the conflict between the characters’ vision and reality is “classic human plight” (Bruner, 1986, p. 21). The reader seeks in a story how plight, character, and consciousness are integrated. This happens through the two-sided nature of stories. On one hand there is a linguistic aspect that guides reaction and, on the other hand, an affective aspect that is triggered by the plot. The words used by the author guide how the reader understands the movement of the characters through conflict, and the emotion associated with those words evoke imagined possibilities for how the lives of the characters might unfold. Further, discussion about a text with other readers can extend one reader’s imagination by disrupting it with other, perhaps very disparate, readers’ emotional reactions; these new interconnected imaginations and shared feelings must then be translated into other possibilities for the characters, and, ultimately, for the readers and their relationships with other readers. Perceiving the lives of others as part of one’s own life involves emotion and imagination because it is through these lenses that one is both able to recognize the experiences of someone else and appreciate the differences in someone else’s worldview from one’s own (Bruner, 2002; Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 2001; Weinstein, 2003). One is able to recognize another’s experiences because emotions are part of the shared human condition – love, pain, joy, sadness are common currency.

The reading and discussing of fictional stories, and the translation from the fictional characters’ emotional lives to discussing the interconnected lives of the readers are moralistic acts, and the “moral of a successful story is emotionally experienced understanding, not only conceptual understanding, and a lesson of the heart, not only the head” (Ganz, 2008, p. 9). Since stories involve characters, the emotional understanding of a fictional text provides the context for
the emotional understanding of others, both fictional and real. Emotional engagement with literature is the basis for this work because stories require the reader “to see and to respond to many things that may be difficult to confront – and they make this process palatable by giving us pleasure in the very act of confrontation” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 6). Discussion about these emotional engagements with literature can then lead to the readers thinking about how such engagements might play out in the lived lives of their peers, or in the case of my work, their book club members. As Weinstein (2003) explained, we are “interconnected, inevitably and across boundaries of all kinds” (p. 19). There is an endless flow between each other – my life is different from your life, but part of the same river of experience. Reading can transform one through one’s imagination of what a character’s life is like on an emotional level. Reading moves the reader into other realms and other selves. In other words, the art of literature “vitalizes us by making its people finally alive to one another” (Weinstein, 2003, p. 41).

Emotion is the sustenance of our lives, and, because feeling has public utility, it is communal and networked. Literature and art expand our purview “conceptually, imaginatively, vicariously” (p. 73) out of the boundaries constructed personally, socially, culturally, historically, politically. It brings one out into new terrains. Particularly in the sixth grade classroom I examined, the book club discussions opened affective pathways or emotional maps through which the students (and teachers) were able to negotiate the subjectivities of someone else.

As I explain in chapters four and five, discussing the fictional stories of immigration led many of these students to tell their own stories of immigration, establishing their narrative identity as someone with a recent immigrant past. Immigration stories, both from the fictional novels and from the lived lives of the students, were also a part of discovering the links that intertwine among these students, both peers with similar pasts and those with dissimilar pasts.
These stories invited the students to consider their own affective sensibilities, or how they made sense of their emotions in relation to the fictional characters and their school peers. Therefore, the relationships between students of diverse backgrounds were built partly upon the networks the students (and teachers) built through story-telling and all of its emotional trappings.

**Literary imagination.** Literary imagination is a way of seeing the world that develops from experiencing the complex and storied lives of imaginary others (Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 1995). Nussbaum explained the portrayal of life in creative narratives as being committed to showing how people are separate and unique, that one cannot reduce the quality of one person into the quantity of a certain demographic group. Stories also describe the lives of characters from within, revealing their complexities and richness. These revelations can lead to the readers’ imaginative understanding of the significance and morality of others’ inner worlds. Imagining the lives of literary characters is, therefore, absolutely necessary to the critical analysis of texts. It is also necessary for our social and political institutions because this literary imagination is ultimately a critical agent of democratic equity for the excluded, the voiceless, the despised, as well as the powerful, since only through that imagination, as it is cultivated during emotional and personal literary engagement, will we get the “facts of their lives right, and see in others unequal treatment a degradation of oneself” (Nussbaum, 1995). It is through this type of literary imagination that one is able to see how received wisdom, or the canonical, might not be an adequate enough depiction of others’ lives. Other possibilities for thinking about distant others are revealed, and those possibilities allow readers to imagine that the world does not have to be the way it is.

**The art of the possible: Co-characters and co-authors.** Literary stories portray characters’ lives in ways that are emotionally evocative – the reader feels real emotion toward
the lives of these characters – and because they are emotionally evocative, they are essential to a view of human understanding that promises to be ethical and compassionate (McGinley & Lewis, 2009). The emotional investment required of readers creates the more likely possibility that readers will view the life of another in all of its contexts prior to making judgments. Part of that process is seeing the life of a character as one’s own. A reader can become a co-character, experiencing alongside all of the thoughts, feelings, successes, and disappointments of a fictional character. Reading with emotion and imagination is part of this process because it requires that the reader enter fully into the life of the character. Similarly, a reader can become a co-author, writing the story of the characters as one’s own story. In this way, the reader has the power to alter or refute the events of the narrative to fit his/her own. Again, this is an evocative process that makes fictional characters part of one’s real life, and, perhaps, leads to action. As Marcus (2002) argued, emotion is part of any reason to act in the presence of a group, or why people bind over situation and spectacle. This link between emotion and reason is what disrupts comfortable habits, stimulates public deliberation, and puts new understandings into action. Fiction, then, is an art revealing the possible in the reader’s life, both in changing oneself and resisting social/cultural norms. The possibility of becoming co-characters and co-authors was taken up by the sixth graders in my study through the ways the teachers facilitated the book club discussions.

**Book Clubs in Society and Schools**

As this is a study involving book clubs, I would be remiss in not providing an outline of the areas others in the field have previously examined. Essentially, there are two strands of research on book clubs – book clubs in society and book clubs in schools. The research on community-based book clubs is mostly historical in nature, but it also delves into the features of
book clubs that have made them popular for an extended period of time. The research on school-based book clubs has primarily focused on two outcomes, the improving of teacher practice and the improving of young readers. In this section, I summarize both strands of research and point to ways this research informs my own work.

**Features of community-based book clubs.** The field has focused on book clubs, more often called literary clubs in the literature, within three major groups – women’s clubs from 1850 to 1920, Black literary societies of 1830 to 1940, and contemporary women’s book clubs. Five features, or threads, that explain why these groups were successful weave across these different groups. First, through these clubs, members, especially women and minorities, were allowed to work towards education and advancement. The association of personal success with literacy has long been pervasive in most Western societies and it became a primary reason women and other minorities formed literary clubs in the early years of this country. Learning to read and write was both an educative endeavor and one that afforded civic and social advancement for the members of these clubs. Women sought their own path to extend their education since late 19th century society restricted paths to higher education, and patriarchal norms kept them out of the workforce (Gere, 1997). African Americans of the same time period, on the other hand, had the desire to be seen as literate citizens worthy of full civic rights, and with the same opportunities as other groups (McHenry, 2002). Currently, there has been a resurgence of women who are joining literary clubs, either on their own or with the assistance of media forces such as Oprah’s Book Club, to further their own education and understanding of their worlds.

Second, they were able to increase solidarity with those of similar backgrounds. Creating shared cultural, social, historical and political meanings was extremely important for the literary clubs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Minority groups needed safe places to speak one’s
mind about what was happening socially in a time of United States history rife with patriarchy and prejudice. A place was also needed to share, and validate, inner thoughts and feelings with others of like backgrounds and experiences. Literary clubs provided one type of space for solidarity to happen through conversations about literature in the process of learning to read and write more effectively. They became a platform for women to speak on the right to vote, and for minorities to speak on the right for equality. This work augmented solidarity as women found that their collective voice could generate change. For contemporary women, the solidarity worked on a smaller scale, but literary clubs were still a place of shared experience (Long, 2003). Stories were used in historical literary clubs, as well as in contemporary clubs, as representative of the social, cultural, and political forces members were experiencing outside the literary club, and discussion of these stories provided impetus for social action.

Third, members felt a rising sense of human community through personal interactions. Reading and writing with others is a human endeavor. We have an innate need to communicate with others, to express our feelings, needs, desires, successes and failures. These literary clubs allowed for members to make connections to the broader cultural community by improving the lives of others, and providing opportunity to serve as role models and guides in creation of shared meanings. For instance, Porter (1936) explained that clubs were the impetus for the founding of many libraries in Black communities, and were often the precursor to the first schools within these poorer communities. Long (1986, 2003) revealed that through the talking about books, contemporary women were able to reveal something about their lives, to transform their view of the world, and to come to profound understandings of others’ perspectives as they increasingly became aware of other cultures and attended more cultural events. In other words, these literary clubs not only provided space to build solidarity amongst members, but also
provided opportunities to work with others outside the groups. Often, these others were members of different social, cultural, and political circles.

Fourth, personal engagement with reading and writing was augmented as the importance of sharing stories became apparent in members’ lives. Thus far, I have focused my discussion on the historical practices of literary club in relation to their communal and social aspects. Yet, it is important to remember that relationships between the social and the individual are two-way streets. In other words, the individual develops a sense of human community and solidarity with others, but the social, in turn, empowers the individual to work towards personal enrichment. The social aspect of literary clubs worked to empower the individual so personal engagement with these groups was sustained. Literacy practices were seen as avenues to gain personal power, as they still are in many circles today (cf. Gee, 1996). This may have been more true for working class women in their study clubs (Gere, 1997) or for African Americans in their literary clubs (McHenry, 2002) than for middle-class women in their literary clubs (Long, 2003), yet all club members used their advancement in literacy practices to demonstrate their argument for equal status. Members returned to their literary clubs because they were able to entertain the idea that they are powerful individuals. This led to a strong personal engagement with the club.

Finally, literary club members experienced heightened spiritual connections with each other through the act of reading and writing together. Spirituality, as defined as transcendental and existential, was an aspect of literary clubs because reading and writing with others created bonds that moved beyond the intellectual. Club members came to know each other in ways that cannot be fully defined intellectually. In other words, the connections created in these clubs were built on the ineffable as well as the intellectual. Members of literary clubs experienced the spiritual in that they were connected to something larger than themselves. Long (2003) argued
that contemporary women participating in literary clubs, especially middle-class women, felt that there was an existential hole in their lives. Joining and reading in a literary club helped these women define who they were socially and culturally, and provided an opportunity to find spiritual connections with like-minded women. Literary clubs offered a “mix of literature and life, intellectual discussion, and personal support that makes them…a potentially transformative way of being in the world” (Long, 2003, p. 113). Essentially, reading stories makes one aware of existence, of others’ existence, and of inherent spiritual connections in “being human” (Coles, 1989). Perhaps this can be done in isolation, but in the presence of others these inherent connections were made perspicuous, especially because members of these groups had not necessarily previously, or continually, experienced the communal reading and talking about stories outside of the home.

Understanding these features of community-based book clubs has helped me think about how school-based book clubs are often conceived and constructed by teachers. It has also helped me consider the role of discursive practices in school-based book clubs, if they promote such features as solidarity and community, or if they primarily promote education and advancement. These considerations came into my analysis of how certain discursive practices functioned for the teachers and students in this sixth grade classroom.

**Research on school-based book clubs.** Using book clubs in schools has been met with varying success. Within the education literature, there are as many reports of unsuccessful book clubs as successful book clubs. Most research that reports successful implementation of book clubs in the English classroom either focuses on a specific population and/or on the increase in literary skills. For instance, Brown (2002) and Helt (2003) reported that low-achieving students showed improvement between pre- and post-tests after working in book clubs. Blum, Lipsett,
and Yocom (2002) found that book clubs were especially effective for increasing reading comprehension for special education students. Within each of these studies, prescribed reading and discussion roles were assigned to the students, and the curricular focus was to improve the literacy, as shown through student test scores, of the students. Studies have also shown other types of improvements, such as Henry’s (2001) work with Caribbean girls in a book club that had positive effects on their social relationships with one another. Similarly, Johnson (2000) found that girls who were silenced in whole class discussion were able to voice their thoughts within an all-female book club.

However, Evans, Alvermann, and Anders (1998) and Lewis (1997) reported that power structures limited the positive outcomes of book clubs for girls and minorities, respectively. Essentially, male and White students dominated the discussions and worked to silence and marginalize girls and minorities, working to re-establish social power structures. In other words, social interaction can be just as destructive as beneficial in student groups, and actually propagate hegemonic paradigms rather than work towards raised student awareness on social issues (Evans et al., 1998). Although Henry (2001) pointed to positive aspects of book clubs, she also reminded us that student background is an important aspect of implementing book club discussions in the classroom. Since this curricular strategy promotes individualistic response, it is logical to assume, and expect, that students will bring personal experiences to the discussion. Further, it highlights the importance that teachers have an indication of student background prior to implementing book clubs, as the novels chosen or the groups formed might create, at best, counterproductive discussions or, at worst, hostile situations. Broughton (2002) agreed and reminded teachers that students are not only readers, but also people with unique experiences.
Also, prescribed reader roles, from Daniels’s (2002) curricular materials, become hackneyed and mundane after time, and, perhaps more important, limit students’ responses from personal reaction to an academic practice. This goes against the spirit of literature discussions and potentially deadens the experience (Burns, 1998). Further, Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford (1999) found that in teacher-present discussions, the roles the teacher took transformed the conversation. The facilitator dominated the conversation by redirecting or probing student comments, or providing conversational maintenance. Students spoke less when the teacher was in this role. When the teacher was in participant role, she would push student conversation through her sharing of personal experiences to follow her conversation (and curricular) agenda. When modeling the active listener role, the teacher inadvertently became a competition for student attention, so instead of listening carefully to their peers, the students became more concerned that the teacher heard their contributions. These issues are important cautions to be aware of when designing curricular book clubs and for researchers examining talk within curricular book clubs. These were issues that I considered when examining the book club discussions at Nelson River Middle School.

Review of Literature Choices

These teachers had a number of novels that they had collected for the immigration book club unit. They chose certain books for each of their classes based on the students in those classes, especially in regards to the students’ reading abilities. In the class I observed, the four novels chosen were Crossing the Wire (Hobbs, 2006), Lupita Mañana (Beatty, 1981), Ask Me No Questions (Budhos, 2006), and Journey of the Sparrows (Buss, 1991). Three of these authors are White – Budhos, as an Asian American, is the exception – and wrote their novels from an

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2 These roles are only suggested as beginning points by Daniels, but they often become seen as prescriptive by teachers following Daniels’s curricular ideas. The roles include discussion leader, connector, questioner, literary luminary, illustrator, summarizer, researcher, word wizard, and scene setter.
outsider’s (to immigration) perspective, although all acknowledge others who helped them in their research into particular story details. Buss goes as far to name Daisy Cubias as a secondary contributor. However, the question of author’s perspective and purpose remains one to consider. As Angel (2003) pointed out, the importance of personal experience is vital to presenting a story that is true to the actual experience of immigrants. She argued that the voice of immigrant characters, as analyzed through the author’s language choices when writing dialogue, can lead to particular views of those characters by readers, which are often pejorative because of the simplicity of the characters’ dialogue. In other words, it can place some readers in a position “looking down” on the immigrant characters in possibly negative ways. This is not to say that someone who has never experienced an event might be able to imagine how that event might progress, yet it does limit the level of veracity of such a telling.

The limited perspective of these White authors relates to their purpose for writing a novel with undocumented immigrants as central characters. Based on the authors’ notes included in the texts, it is apparent that these authors had laudable intentions, namely that they wanted to tell a story that presented the human side of the immigration debate. As I present in later chapters, these novels worked toward that goal through the facilitation of these teachers, so these authors were successful, in this limited case. Further, many have extolled the immigration novel as ideal for broaching the social/cultural issues associated with immigration (e.g., Banks, 1997; Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010; Lauter, 1999). However, it remains problematic that these are White authors presenting stories of Latino/a immigrants because of the institution of race in United States society. In other words, the act of White authors “giving” voice to minority characters, especially characters that are flouting civil laws, can further marginalize and/or infantilize minorities because it implies that these groups cannot speak for themselves. This can
also lead to overuse of stereotypes in the telling of these stories, a charge explicitly articulated against *Lupita Mañana* (cf. Schon, 1981), and implicit in the reviews on *Journey of the Sparrows* (cf. Semrau, 1991) and *Crossing the Wire* (cf. Hommel, 2006). In the immigration book club unit, it is important to note that the backgrounds of the authors were rarely discussed by the teachers or questioned by the students as they discussed the lives of the fictional characters. Perhaps it should have been a larger part of the conversation.

**Summary**

It was these theoretical perspectives, along with the knowledge of this previous research about book clubs and the particular literature choices in this curricular unit, that I approached the data I collected from the sixth grade classroom at Nelson River Middle School. Understanding the classroom as a particular social/cultural space was important for me as I was curious about these aspects of not only a literature discussion, but also the influence of social/cultural backgrounds on how the students entered such discussions. Essentially, the space of the book club is fraught with social/cultural dynamics because it is a discursive space in which members must enter. Members’ entrance to this space is built on social/cultural norms that are initially established by the teacher, and then negotiated by the teacher and students as they talk and work in that space. Further, each member brings with her/him certain social/cultural backgrounds that influence their initial participation. For instance, a student has learned early in traditional schooling that hand-raising and turn-waiting are preferred ways of engaging in classroom discussion, yet the book club discussion is a discursive space that allows for more flexible turn-taking and overlapping talk. The student socialized in traditional school norms may not be initially comfortable entering such a space. It may also be true that a linguistically diverse student would feel uncomfortable because of his/her language abilities, and/or become silenced.
in the discussions because s/he does not have the time to construct deliberative contributions. Paying attention to social/cultural dynamics was vital to my analysis of what was occurring both in the book club discussions and in the students’ thinking about immigrants and immigration.

Additionally, the concept of “life as narrative” was foundational to how I made sense of the role and function of story-reading and story-telling in this classroom. I view this concept as a braid of interrelated perspectives that include, but are not limited to, the idea that the unity of a life – from birth to death – resides in the story of that life, the essentiality of the affective dimensions of social/cultural interactions, and the role of imagination in one’s development of his/her worldview. Although I introduced these perspectives separately within this chapter, I perceive them to be inextricable when describing the entire picture of what was happening with these sixth graders reading and telling stories of immigration. Bringing these ideas together defines the “literary judge” (Nussbaum, 1995). The literary judge (or novel-reader or judicious spectator) does not read as “literary theorists asking about theories of interpretation, but as human beings who are moved and delighted…free from personal bias and favor” (p. 83). This occurs because the novel-reader brings to bear her/his “evolving sense of principle and tradition to bear on a concrete context” (p. 84). In other words, the story-reader applies her own personal experiences to a new context; however, if the reader is not judicious in their observation, then those experiences might color their judgment. Instead, the literary judge looks for “evidence that certain groups have suffered unequal disadvantages and therefore need more attention if they are to be shown a truly equal concern” (p. 87). In the case of my study, this is what the students did in their reaction to the immigrants portrayed in the novels. Emotion enabled this possibility for literary reading, yet their judgments went beyond sympathy. These students seemed to not only assess the implications of the suffering of the immigrants but also what those implications meant
for their own lives/society. In the description of my findings, I will address these different aspects separately for analytical purposes, but I consider them working in concert during the participants’ engagement with the book club discussions.

My research questions arose from these theories and research, as I was interested in how the teachers facilitated a book club with a diverse group of students, how discourse was a part of that facilitation, and what discursive practices afforded opportunities to learn about diverse social/cultural others. Of course, this was a recursive process as I when I began to notice how stories were functioning for these students I had to return to the literature on reading to mine it for what it said about emotion and imagination. Before exploring my findings related to these questions, I present the context of my study in the next chapter. I also provide my general analytical techniques, which were influenced by these theoretical perspectives.
Chapter Three

Examining Book Club Discussions: A Methodology

The purpose of my study was to examine the discursive practices within a school-based book club in order to delineate consequences of reading and discussing stories in certain ways. In order to accomplish this research, I became a participant observer in a sixth grade English language arts classroom in which the teachers used book clubs as part of their literature curriculum and instruction. I then collected data from the teachers’ book club implementation, and analyzed that data through a critical discourse analysis frame. As I described in the previous chapter, the nature of stories also helped me to think about what was happening with these teachers and students in this classroom. Yet, discourse was the medium of the data I collected, the manner through which I entered into the analysis, and central to my interpretation – hence why I decided to follow discourse analysis strategies. In addition, due to the topic of the book club unit that became the focus of this study, as well as the purposes of literature study that the teachers revealed through their curricular and instructional choices, taking a critical perspective in my analysis was intuitive.

In this chapter, I provide an explanation of this analytic approach. I then provide examples of my initial results that led me to my primary findings, which I explore in chapters four and five. Prior to my explanation of my data analysis, I introduce the setting and participants involved in my research. My research site was a unique school within this school district, and experienced some major changes over the course of the school year in which I completed the study. Although setting is paramount for contextual reasons, it remained background to my study as I focused on the particular discussions occurring in this sixth grade
classroom. Of course, it might have affected the topics presented by the students during the discussions, affected how they felt about certain aspects of the fictional novels, and/or influenced what stories they decided to tell. However, I could never be sure what effect the context had on what students said during the book club discussions. That said; the story of my research would be incomplete without placing these book club discussions in a particular place and time.

As explained in chapter one, three research questions inform my study:

1. What is the nature of the teachers’ facilitation of book club curriculum and instruction in this sixth grade English language arts course?

2. In the context of these teachers’ book club curriculum and instruction, what discursive roles and/or subject positions are available to students from differing social/cultural backgrounds?

3. To what extent do the book club discussions in a school-based book club provide opportunities for students to learn about the social and cultural lives and perspectives of others, especially as it pertains to conceptions of immigrants and immigration?

The data I chose to collect and analyze were aimed at answering these questions. More important, the emblematic instances that were chosen for triangulation reflect the aims of these questions, and many of these instances became the center of my findings. I return to this process after I detail the particulars of my study.

Research Site

The middle school, the student population, and the classroom. My study took place in a sixth grade English classroom in a midsized city in the Mountain West. Nelson River Middle School houses three grades – sixth, seventh, and eighth – and usually about 300 students; the student population was smaller during the year of the study due to a temporary site
relocation, which I explain in more detail below. It has a prominent bilingual ethos, and many of
the students are recent immigrants themselves or children of immigrants. On Nelson River’s
home campus, the school’s name on the headstone on the corner of Mill Avenue and Bruce
Street is written in both Spanish and English, as are all administrative signs throughout the
building. There are two secretaries in the main office, one who speaks English and one who
speaks Spanish. Most of the teachers in the building are bilingual, and even the morning
announcements are read in both languages. Most important, the school offers a bilingual
program that includes courses in Spanish language arts and Spanish social studies to support
bilingualism in both native Spanish and native English speaking students, and makes an explicit
commitment to providing all the support English Language Learners need to achieve
academically.

Nelson River Middle School was built in 1924 and, despite changes over the years in the
surrounding city, has been a fixture in the city ever since. Not only did the parents of current
students attend Nelson River, but their grandparents did as well. Many parents sport Nelson
River Wildcat gear as they walk their children to school in the morning, while other parents man
the bike racks and crosswalks out front. Wednesday mornings are especially busy due to “Walk
& Roll Wednesdays” on which parents encourage students to self-motor their way to school;
anyone walking in the neighborhood on these mornings will see trains of students, parents, and
teachers walking, skateboarding, and cycling their way toward Nelson River. The school is a
sanctuary of nostalgia and memory for the neighborhood, and, yet, along with those memories
come age, and the school district decided it was time to give Nelson River new facilities.

Unfortunately, this meant razing the old building, and finding a temporary home for the
teachers and students. So, in January of the year of this study, the teachers and students of
Nelson River began a year and a half housed within another district middle school on the opposite side of the city. Selecting a location was a difficult decision for the school district, Nelson River administration and teachers, and community members. The host school had to have enough space to house Nelson River, and be willing to open their doors for the entire year and a half. Perhaps surprisingly, the latter requirement became the more contentious of the two requirements. The school chosen to house Nelson River has a population of a notably different composition (90% Caucasian, 5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 1% African American\(^1\); 6% free and reduced lunch and 1% English Language Learners), a different academic mission, and a different ethos. The Nelson River students, therefore, were bused from their familiar neighborhood into a place of strangers. In fact, they remained an island in the other school as they did not intermingle classes or extracurricular activities. The Nelson River students had a separate entrance, and were relegated to several empty, often isolated rooms, and a handful of mobile classrooms.

This became a palpable irony for these students. Nelson River’s student population during the year of the study was 49% Hispanic, 45% Caucasian, 3% African American, 2% Asian, and 1% American Indian. Of the 49% Hispanic students, it was projected by school administration that approximately 60-65% of these students were recent immigrants (Boggs, personal communication, September 2, 2008). The fact that 37% of these Nelson River students were English Language Learners supported this speculation. Also, since 50% were on free lunch, and another 6% were on reduced lunch, it could be intuited that many of these students were from a particular economic class. Therefore, it was probably safe to assume that many Nelson River students had experienced crossing a border into another environment, or at least

\(^1\) For the reporting of school demographics, I am using the ethnicity designations reported by this school district. In my own discussion, I use Latino/a to identify students with Latin American heritage, and White to identify students with a European heritage.
had familial history of border-crossing. The move to another school during this school year, as well as the living environment of that other school, probably mimicked closely these students’ immigration and border-crossing experiences (see Staley (2010) for further explanation of the relocation experiences of the Nelson River students).

To further complicate matters, the experience of living and working in a new environment – socially and culturally, as well as socioeconomic – was also affected by a new language arts curriculum. The Nelson River sixth grade team piloted a program for restructuring their language arts (LA) and English as a second language (ESL) classes in the year of the study. Previously, all ESL students had their own isolated LA class, which was further stratified by ESL designation – beginning, intermediate, or advanced. Native English speakers were in their own LA classes without regard to ability level. At the sixth grade level, this program was disbanded. Instead, all intermediate and advanced ESL students were enrolled in an integrated Language and Literacy (L&L) class with native English speakers of varying ability. In other words, unless a student was designated beginning ESL, then s/he was enrolled in an L&L class with students that might be advanced native speakers or intermediate ESL or somewhere in between. The L&L class was team-taught by a certified LA teacher (Susan Kandyba, or Mrs. K) and a certified ESL teacher (Wendy Meyers, or Ms. M).

The history and demographics of Nelson River were what initially attracted me to the school. While teaching in Arizona, I worked in a school philosophically similar to Nelson River, and with youth of similar diversity. I taught in a bilingual program in which students received instruction in both Spanish and English in science, math and social studies, and took level-appropriate sheltered English classes. I also taught ESL courses (after Arizona passed an English-only law), and my students in these courses were mostly children of migrant farm
workers or children of recent immigrants or immigrants themselves. My colleagues and I worked diligently to build a safe, comfortable environment for these students, as that was not always the type of environment they experienced elsewhere in the community. I heard many stories similar to the stories told by the students in Mrs. K and Ms. M’s sixth grade class. They are often stories of pain, but also stories of hope.

**The teachers.** During the school year previous to the study, I volunteered a few days a week in one of Mrs. K’s sixth grade Language Arts classes. I took this opportunity to immerse myself in the community of Nelson River – meeting with the principal, chatting with other sixth grade teachers, mentoring and teaching students. The main secretary knew me by name, and I felt truly welcomed when she hopefully asked me if I was returning for the next year to help with Nelson River’s move. I entered into a teaching career because I enjoy working in schools with youth, and Mrs. K graciously opening her classroom to me allowed me to maintain that work during my doctoral studies. Frankly, those three or four hours a week spent at Nelson River motivated me through the remainder of my studies and responsibilities at the university.

Susan Kandyba has been a teacher for 28 years, and is considered a premier language arts teacher in her district. She has a background in elementary and middle school education, a Master’s degree in literacy education, and is a certified ESL teacher. She loves working at Nelson River because of the type of students that attend the school. She told me that she was constantly amazed by the students because of their kindness for each other in the hallways, and their collegiality in their classes. Mrs. K is also highly involved in the local community, which belies her dedication to not only Nelson River but to the people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding the school.
Working with Mrs. K the year before the study also provided me a chance to witness her teaching philosophy in action. It was clear that she not only cares about her students’ learning, but also about their lives. She sets high expectations for her students, and constantly pushes her students to reach these expectations. Yet, she is also willing to meet students where they are academically, and create differentiated opportunities based on student abilities. For instance, she asks students to sit and work in groups and each group is often given different materials – texts or curricular scaffolds – to use in order to meet the same objective. At other times, she asks students to work in academically diverse groups to help each other through a curricular activity. Perhaps most important, she helps students to become aware of their differences in academic abilities, accept those differences, and realize they are there to help each other achieve.

This environment is created and maintained through Mrs. K’s unconcealed care for her students’ lives. She knows students’ parents by name, and has often taught their older siblings. She knows what extracurricular activities her students enjoy, and attends as many student events as possible. Mrs. K also hosts an afterschool radio program for Latino/a students to air the events in their community. She listens to students’ stories and responds by sharing stories of her own. When a student shares a personal worry, Mrs. K takes the time to talk after class, and she often opens her classroom during lunch for students to study and socialize. Students respond to her care by showing their respect and care for her during class. It was a pleasure to work in her class for two years.

In the new L&L class, Susan team taught with Wendy Meyers, the sixth grade ESL teacher. I met Wendy while I was volunteering, and through several discussions I found out that she holds a similar teaching philosophy to how Mrs. K approaches her own classroom. Ms. M has been an ESL teacher for 14 years, including teaching stints in Japan, China and Russia, and
she highly respects the manner in which Nelson River makes ESL a central part of the school culture, rather than an isolated program relegated to the margins as it has been in other places she has worked. Relationships between researcher and participants can be a bumpy ride, especially when involving teachers and students, and I feel fortunate that I had the opportunity to work with two teachers who were not only open to the idea of my presence in their classroom, but also intrigued by aspects of my research.

The students. There were 21 students in the sixth grade classroom I studied. This was the first class of the day, and it met on four days a week due to the modified block schedule followed by Nelson River Middle School. In a typical week, on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday all classes met for an hour, half of the classes met on Wednesday for 90 minutes, and the other half met on Thursday for 90 minutes. In the data I present, 19 of the 21 students were participants. The parents of one student did not consent for their child to be in the study, so he was excluded. Also, one student was absent from school for a month, which coincided with the first half of the immigration book club unit, due to a family vacation in South America, so she did not participate in the book club discussions. The demographics of this class resembled the overarching demographics of the school: ten had a Latino/a heritage, eight had a European heritage, and one self-identified as both White and African American. Of the Latino/a students, all but one were still classified as English language learners (ELL) by the school district. The one not classified ELL had exited the program prior to his sixth grade year. One of the White students, a Bosnian American, was also classified ELL. The other White students, as well as the bi-ethnic student, were all native English speakers. Ten of the students were also on Free/Reduced Lunch, but I was unable to match this status with individual students because I
only was permitted access to aggregate data for the class. I provide more specific descriptions of each student in the following section on data collection.

**Data Collection**

In order to answer my research questions, I focused on one sixth grade L&L class over the course of one school year. During this year, I was a participant and observer in this class, attending class three or four days a week. I worked to establish positive relationships with the students, and they viewed me as both someone who could help them with their school work and as a confidant (at least as much as an adult could be a confidant to 11/12-year-olds). For instance, I often worked with a student group during independent reading, or helped a group of students who were behind in their work to help them catch up with the rest of the class. I was also someone students would come to tell me about their soccer game over the weekend, or about how much they loved the newest installment in the *Twilight* series. In this way, I was another adult teacher and mentor, someone they could talk to about their lives. It took time to build these relationships, yet, since the book club units did not begin until October – in fact, I concentrated the study on the immigration book club unit from the second semester – I had ample time to do so.

**Initial steps.** The first step in my data collection was to define the demographics of my student population. Since this district participates in a State Student Assessment Plan (SSAP), I used student SSAP scores from the previous year (2007-2008) as an initial description of ability level of each student. In addition, the Nelson River teachers used the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) to determine student reading achievement. This is a norm-referenced test given to the students at the beginning of the year. The beginning-of-year GRADE scores, therefore, served to complement the SSAP scores in determining student
ability levels. I only collected these test scores to help me understand the positioning of the students in the room, beyond their language status and ethnicity. Achievement is a chief concern of all teachers, including Ms. M and Mrs. K, and they used this information for instructional purposes and for grouping students in all their classes; therefore, having this information help completed the picture of what is happening with students in their book club discussions.

The next step was to determine the composition of book clubs. This was done in concert with Mrs. K and Ms. M, and we used certain student characteristics: previous year’s SSAP reading scores, beginning-of-year GRADE scores, language status, and ethnicity. As Tables 3-1 through 3-4 show, the book clubs were mixed with regards to ethnicity and reading ability. The students were divided into four book groups (a fifth group was formed around La Linea by Ann Jaramillo (2006), but this group was excluded because it included the student whose parents did not consent to be included in the study, so I was unable to videotape their book club discussions), and the teachers and I also considered the difficulty of the novel when grouping the students. In Tables 3-1 through 3-4, the reading levels come from the GRADE assessment, and are reported in grade equivalencies for instructional (Ins) and independent (Ind) reading. The SSAP reading scores are divided into four levels – unsatisfactory, partial proficient, proficient, and advanced. The last column provides the student’s home language, number of years designated an ELL by the school district, and the student’s ELL level – beginning, intermediate, advanced, or exited. Again, all student names are pseudonyms.
Table 3-1. *Students in the Ask Me No Questions Book Club*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading Level (Ins/Ind)</th>
<th>State Reading Score</th>
<th>Language Background</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.2/9.7</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3.8/2.8</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Bosnian</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Adv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>4.8/3.5</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Adv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>4.5/3.3</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-2. *Students in the Crossing the Wire Book Club*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading Level (Ins/Ind)</th>
<th>State Reading Score</th>
<th>Language Background</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernesto</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.2/11.4</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>9.5/5.0</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaleb</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6.2/4.2</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-3. *Students in the Journey of the Sparrows Book Club*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading Level (Ins/Ind)</th>
<th>State Reading Score</th>
<th>Language Background</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10.4/5.3</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White/AA</td>
<td>5.7/4.0</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leticia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>Partial Proficient</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Adv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>3.3/2.5</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shari</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.2/11.4</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-4. *Students in the Lupita Mañana Book Club*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading Level (Ins/Ind)</th>
<th>State Reading Score</th>
<th>Language Background</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bencio</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>10.4/5.3</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Exited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federico</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>6.8/4.4</td>
<td>Partial Proficient</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Adv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.2/5.8</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>3.9/2.9</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melosa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>3.8/2.8</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>&gt;=3yrs/Int</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Sources

I used various data sources throughout my study. These sources included field notes, videos of book club discussions, student reading logs, teacher interviews, and student interviews. I describe each of these data sources before turning to my data analysis.

**Field notes.** As a participant and observer in this classroom, I was present on days when the lesson included other topics besides the book clubs. Ms. M and Mrs. K’s sixth grade curriculum included other literature units, such as Greek and Roman mythology, the “Hero’s Journey,” and science fiction. The curriculum also included writing myths, persuasive essays, research reports, and debates. I spent these days participating in curricular activities and moving between students and groups, but also taking field notes on various aspects of the classroom. Specifically, I recorded where students sat, who they sat with, who they decided to work with on partner and group projects, and how the teachers organized students. These notes contributed to determining the social dynamics in this classroom, which had some effects on the book club discussions. For instance, the teachers were committed to having students of various abilities assist each other, and building those relationships in one context affected relationships built within the book club discussions.

**Book club discussions.** In previous years, the teachers structured their literature units through a series of book clubs, and continued to do so in the new L&L class. In the third quarter of the school year, they implemented a thematic book club unit on immigration. The book club discussions were videotaped, and each discussion lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. I focused my analysis on the immigration unit to address my research questions. Within these book clubs, small groups of students read the same literature selection and met once a week to talk about the novel. Within the immigration unit, students were grouped into five book clubs,
and the book clubs met with either Ms. M or Mrs. K on Wednesdays for their book club
discussion. Each book club met separately, but I was only able to observe half of the book club
discussions because two were always meeting simultaneously. I kept content logs of the sessions
I observed.

**Reading logs.** I also collected the students’ reading logs. The teachers asked their
students to keep a running reading log during the immigration unit. On independent reading
days, the students recorded four to six responses that they wanted to discuss further with the
book club on Wednesdays. In these responses, the students wrote about their thoughts, feelings,
and wonderings in response to reading the stories of immigration. These reading logs were used
as supporting data for determining the students’ perspectives on the topics presented in the
novels, as expressed during the book club discussions.

**Student interviews.** I interviewed all 19 students. These interviews occurred after the
book club unit was over, and were audio-recorded. These were open-ended interviews, but I did
prepare an interview guide (see Appendix A). The purpose of these interviews was to gauge
student interest in the book club curriculum, and their interest in the novel assigned to their book
club. We also discussed their thoughts about the characters in the novels, the issues related to
immigration presented by the novels, and various topics discussed in their Wednesday meetings.
I also used emblematic instances from the book club videos to spark discussion. The students
only viewed book club discussions in which they were a participant. The student and I viewed
the book club video, and I asked them to clarify or expand upon what they said during the
excerpt. I also asked them about their ideas about what their peers talked about during the book
club discussions. These interviews were used for triangulation in my analysis, which I explain in
more detail below.
**Teacher interviews.** Finally, I formally interviewed Susan and Wendy prior to and after the immigration book club unit, as well as informally debriefed, either in person or through email, with them on a weekly basis. These conversations were a place for us to discuss changes in book club formation and instructional curricula. The formal interviews were audio-recorded, and the informal debriefings were either transcribed from the email posts, or recorded in my field notes. In the formal interviews, I interviewed each teacher separately and followed an interview guide for the first half of the interview (see Appendix B), and then used the second half of the interview to view emblematic excerpts from the book club discussion videos. The teachers viewed several of these videos during their interviews. After viewing the videos, I asked the teachers their ideas about what was happening in the excerpts, especially as related to my research questions. I then triangulated these interviews with my own analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In my data analysis, I employed critical discourse analysis in order to better understand how book club discussions about stories of immigration develop cultural awareness and/or raise cultural conflicts. In this ethnically diverse classroom, I looked for instances in which students brought cultural tensions and cultural identities to a book club discussion. For instance, I looked for tensions between students of different ethnicities or between students of different social classes. I also identified instances in which students were presented with alternative stories that contradict or challenge their canonical perspectives of the immigrant and immigration. These tensions and identities influenced interactions among diverse students, and interactions between the students and the literature was an important focus of my research. Further, students’ talk helped me analyze how they see their position, or lack of position, in their own English classroom, at Nelson River and/or in their community.
Critical discourse analysis defined. As critical discourse analysis is both a framework and a method, the views on discourse I presented in the previous chapter are reflected in this methodological definition. Hicks (1995/1996) defined discourse as “communication that is socially situated and that sustains ‘positionings’: relations between participants in face-to-face interaction or between author and reader” (p. 49). She also employed a Bakhtinian understanding of discourse as dualistic – it is textual and constitutive – and not neutral or value-free. Discourse analysis, then, investigates form and function of language in various situations or events (Gee, 2005). Common dimensions analyzed from a discourse perspective include linguistic expression, connection between linguistic meaning and contextual meaning, assumptions behind communication, and linking local characteristics of communication with broader social characteristics (Jaworski & Coupland, 2004). Wertsch and Toma (1995), for example, grounded their analytical approach on discourse and learning in a sociocultural theory of mediated action, which assumed that mental functioning is inherently situated in social, cultural, historical and institutional contexts. I also view discourse as a mediator for student learning, and that academic discourse is situationally constituted, hence my use of both a social/cultural framework and a discursive framework. In other words, student talk is the instantiation of student thought, and one of the few ways teachers are able gain a sense of what students have learned. The particular discourse that occurs in classrooms is dependent on the situation in which the discourse occurs. For instance, the academic discourse on a classroom discussion on the physical properties of light will involve different talk structures than an academic discourse on the parsing of sentences.

Critical discourse analysts, however, begin with these contexts but also bring preconceived ideas about power structures and use their research to reveal how discourse
constructs and reifies such structures, to challenge social ideologies and power structures, and to contribute to social change (Rogers, 2004). Additionally, critical discourse analysts view language as constitutive of social practices, which, in turn, are always political in terms of status or power (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2004). Further, discourse in education is “always provisional and indeterminate, contested and, moreover, at issue in social relationships, within which all teachers and learners are positioned” (Fairclough, 1999, p. 81). The interpersonal nature of book clubs is illustrative of the educational discourse Fairclough is describing. Therefore, in regards to my study, I implemented critical discourse analysis in order to understand how social and cultural backgrounds influenced what roles book club members were afforded during their talk about stories of immigration.

Following Fairclough (1995), I used a three-tier model of critical discourse analysis (see Figure 3-1). First, I organized the talk by content, which refers to features, forms and genres of the talk. This level of analysis answers the following descriptive questions: What topics did the teachers and students talk about? What discursive practices were used by the teacher and the students? Second, I made connections between these descriptive features of the data and the various discursive practices in which the teachers and students were involved. This level of analysis answers the following interpretive questions: Who participated in particular ways of talking in the book clubs? Which ways of engaging were encouraged by which participants? What subject positions were available to which participants during various discursive practices? Third, I linked these discursive practices with the social practices of the book club members. This level of analysis answers the following questions: What were the social/cultural purposes of engaging in book club discussions in these particular ways of talking? What were the social/cultural outcomes of these book club discussions? This was a recursive process in which I
often had to return to a previous tier in order to understand some new aspect discovered in another tier.

*Figure 3-1. Three-Tier Model of Critical Discourse Analysis*

**Tier One: Talk by Content:** What topics did the teachers and students talk about? What discursive practices were used by the teacher and the students?

**Tier Two: Descriptive Features and Discursive Practices:** Who participated in particular ways of talking in the book clubs? Which ways of engaging were encouraged by which participants? What subject positions were available to which participants during various discursive practices?

**Tier Three: Discursive Practices and Sociocultural Practices:** What were the social/cultural purposes of engaging in book club discussions in these particular ways of talking? What were the social/cultural outcomes of these book club discussions?

*Emblematic instances as “moments for analysis.”* Although my data will include students’ book club discussions, written assignments, and participant interviews, I used emblematic instances as “moments for analysis.” Although others have written about emblematic instances, I think about them in similarly to the idea of “critical events” from Webster and Mertova (2007), which they define as a “change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller” or a “change experience” (pp. 73-74). They argue that a critical event is the instantiation of a conflict of a held belief and a new, contrary experience within the speaker. In other words, the critical event is part of the speaker’s struggle of accommodation or reconciliation between the held belief and the new experience. This is strong language. At first glance, it might seem that these critical events only include large-scale, life-altering events. However, I consider critical events to include smaller change experiences, especially those
educative experiences that occur among and between students and teachers in classrooms every day. A critical event might be the moment a student becomes comfortable writing a hypothesis or understands the importance of the Pythagorean Theorem. Neither of these events would be considered life-altering (although they might be for some), yet both of these events would be critical to the advancement of a student’s science or mathematics education.

Of course, there are similar critical events for students in a language and literacy course. Particularly, the instances of interacting with stories of a different cultural or social experience, and how these new interactions can alter held beliefs of political issues. These critical events are central to the advancement of students’ language and literacy abilities. Yet, I also believe that these smaller critical events or change experiences lead to larger critical events, such as the experiences of how reading stories affects other aspects of one’s life, and how the sharing of stories can alter one’s perspectives of his/her lived worlds. For instance, it might be critical for a native speaker to hear the story of how an English language learner has struggled to learn English, or for one student to hear the struggles of moving to a new place from another student. It was these critical events that I looked for within the book club discussion data. To avoid confusion from other definitions of critical discussed elsewhere, I use emblematic instances to refer to these excerpts from the book club discussion videos. In the next section, I detail some examples of how this analysis progressed.

Examples of data analysis. Beginning at the first level of the three-tiered model of critical discourse analysis described above, I began by identifying the primary discursive practices used by the teachers and students in their book club discussions. I also identified the primary topics discussed by the teachers and students. By primary, I mean that the practices were used or the topics were raised at least once in any discussion within one book club, and
those practices were used or those topics were raised across all four book clubs. In other words, if a practice was used or a topic was raised by a participant at some point in the book club unit, and every book club used that practice or talked about that topic during the unit, then that practice or topic was added to the primary list. It is important to note that these practices and topics do not necessarily map onto one another. A topic could be raised through any practice, and a practice could be used to talk about any topic.

For example, every book club discussion began in a similar way. The teacher would ask the students for a summary of what they had read since the last book club meeting. I labeled this topic “surface text summary and/or description.” Within this topic the students would relate the summary of the plot, description of characters and characters’ actions, description of different settings, and description of problems or conflicts the main protagonists were experiencing. As a subtopic, some evaluation of the quality of reading experience of the novel, or evaluation of a character’s actions or choices would also occur during this primary conversation topic. It should be noted that significant amount of time was devoted to this topic. The teachers would devote the first five to seven minutes (out of a 20 to 30 minute session) of each meeting to hear the students’ summaries. Also, students would often return to this topic during the rest of the discussion, either for their own clarification of the plot’s events or a character’s motivation, or as an example to reinforce their ideas on some other topic.

The other primary topics discussed by these teachers and sixth grade students were related to the central theme of the book club unit – immigration. These topics included immigrants’ experiences moving from one country to another country and living in a new country, immigration policies, borders and border guards, stories of immigrants from other texts and from their own experiences, and family togetherness and family separateness. These topics
were usually discussed after the initial time spent on summarizing the reading for the week, and would last 15 to 20 minutes. These topics were often discussed in conjunction with the novel, but also were talked about in the context of the book club members’ own lives.

Finally, instructional logistics were a discursive topic at the end of the most meetings. The teachers used this topic to help students organize their reading logs, remind students of responsibilities before the next meeting, and provide feedback to the students on their reading logs and performance during the discussion. The teachers usually spent one to three minutes closing each book club meeting completing these logistic items.

The primary discursive practices used by the teachers and the students to discuss these topics did not vary from week to week. Most of these practices were presented and modeled as possible ways of talking in book clubs by the teachers during the book club unit during first semester, and I focus on these in more detail in chapter four. At the beginning of each book club discussion, the teachers would use teacher-centered practices to “warm-up” the conversation. A form of I-R-E – in which the teacher would initiate a student’s response, a student would respond, and the teacher would evaluate that response – was commonly used to question students about surface text features of plot and character, or about their progress in reading the text or completing their reading logs. The “whip-around” approach was also used to get everyone an early chance to contribute to the conversation. In this approach, students would take turns, as directed by the teacher, and it provided an early opportunity for everyone to talk by explaining a part of the plot to the group.

Once the conversation was moving along, usually after the teacher asked the students to share or introduce a reading log entry to the group, the discursive practices became less teacher-centered and followed more conversational styles. Students used “questioning” to initiate
discussion topics (e.g., what do you know about, what do you think about), and “I-statements” about discussion topics (e.g., I am). Related, both teachers and students engaged in “personal judgment” and “personal evaluation” during the discussions. These practices are characterized by the participants pronouncing opinions or feelings or appraisals about a conversation topic. Other ways of talking included group members “inviting others into a discussion” (e.g., what do you think Shari?), and “request for elaboration” (e.g., what is a mosque?). Finally, “story-telling” was a prominent way of engaging in the book club discussions.

At the second level of analysis, I was interested in who was encouraging which topics and practices, and how the teachers and students were positioned by a particular topic or practice. The topics outlined above are divided into two categories – talk about reading comprehension and talk about immigration. Both categories of topics were instigated by the teachers, and the teachers encouraged the students to delve into both categories. However, the type of engagement available to the students was different for each category. The students and teachers also took up different positions within the book club within disparate discursive practices. For instance, these teachers and students participated in a particular discursive practice – story-telling, which I discovered during the first tier of analysis. I noticed that both teachers and students told stories, yet the students were able to take a more central position in the book club when they became tellers, than during other discursive practices such as the whip-around. Also, students with a recent immigrant past took on the role of expert when it came to talking about immigration issues. Students with a more distant immigrant past then became knowledge seekers. These positionings influenced the social/cultural outcomes of the book club discussions.
Therefore, at the third tier of analysis, I was interested in the consequences of how these discursive practices positioned different students in the book club discussions. I interpreted the use of the whip-around and the use story-telling as both discursive practices and social/cultural practices, and worked to understand how these aspects were linked for the teachers and students as they navigated the discursive space of a book club discussion. Making this link conspicuous was a purpose of my analysis. For instance, I found that story-telling provided unique opportunities for students to enter imaginatively into a peer’s life that might have been different from their own. The consequence of this imaginative engagement was to understand more fully the inner life of someone with a recent immigrant past, including what it means emotionally to decide to leave one’s home for a new place. I discuss both these practices, as well as others, in detail in chapters four and five. In order to understand how one process might influence another process, I also considered the reading space of book clubs in its entirety.

My analysis led me to map out the string of processes these sixth grade students seemed to be following during the book club unit (see Figure 3-2). In this process, as the students read they linked their lives to the fictional stories. This was revealed through their reading logs and through my informal conversations with them as they read. This story-reading experience, as well as their own personal experiences with immigration, was then brought by the students to the book club discussions. Since the teachers encouraged the students to respond to the literature in expressive ways, they knew that part of being prepared for the book club discussion was to be ready to talk about these experiences. During the book club discussions, the teachers modeled certain discursive practices, and the students took up many of these discursive practices. Engaging in these discursive practices promoted insight and reasoning, rooted on how the students made sense of the stories that read and told, about immigrants and immigration. It was
then possible for students to return to future experiences – with both reading and living – equipped with the insight and reasoning gleaned from the book club discussions. This is not to say that this string of processes is necessarily linear. Instead, each process seemed to be constitutive and recursive. I return to this process string as I explore my findings in chapters four and five, as well as in my discussion of possible implications of my work in chapter six.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3-2.** Book Club Member’s String of Processes

The analytical process I employed should be considered critical, from Fairclough’s (1995) perspective, because I followed the idea that language is constitutive of ideology and conceptions. A book club discussion involves relationships of ideology and subject positions. For instance, the simple fact that there was a teacher present in all these book club discussions necessarily positions students in certain ways. There were instances in which these teachers
attempted to disrupt that notion – such as encouraging the students to talk to one another as opposed to talking just to the teacher. Yet, there were instances in which the teacher positioned herself as one with discursive and positional power, such as the whip-around. Often, topics were chosen (both explicitly and implicitly) by the teacher, certain students’ ideas were either taken up or set aside by the teacher, and the curricular practices of the book club discussions were set by the teacher. Some of these consequences were mostly unavoidable – as in the curricular choices – and some were avoidable. The decisions by the teachers on which discursive practices they would implement were instructive on what positions were available to the students, and which were not. This evolved over the course of the semester, which allowed for different options for the students during the immigration unit. From the student perspective, however, there were opportunities for book club members to take on central roles in the discussions. In particular, students used story-telling to become co-characters who testified on behalf of the fictional characters, further establishing the verisimilitude of the multifaceted life of an immigrant. Also, students took on the role of co-author in order to confirm and/or refute the stories of immigration presented in the novels. These were ideological positions in the book clubs because the students were able to use these roles to inform and resist received, or canonical, notions of immigrants and immigration. I bring these analyses of teacher roles and student roles together in exploring answers to my research questions, and it is the triangulation of the teachers’ voices, the students’ voices, and my interpretation that I present in chapters four and five.

Conducting a Critical Social/Cultural Analysis

Examining the discursive practices within these book clubs about stories of immigration was important because reading these stories, and the subsequent stories the students told in response, were directly linked to the opportunities these youth had for exploring social, cultural,
and political issues in this sixth grade English classroom. Critical discourse analysis, then, allowed me to explore these discursive practices because it is a frame that matches the idea that language constitutes thought, and that knowledge is constructed in social situations (cf. Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). If taking any critical look into discourse was primarily concerned with “transformation by focusing on the ways in which members’ resources are privileged, appropriated, rejected, and deployed as part of a participation in activity” (Rowe, 2004, p. 81), then my study on book clubs took a critical look into positioning, as related to social/cultural aspects of reading and talking about stories, of students within book clubs and, consequently, their lives. Moje and Lewis (2007) encouraged researchers to “conduct critical sociocultural analyses that can move the field toward a deeper understanding of literacy learning” (p. 46). The methods I have outlined here assisted in my own contribution toward a deeper understanding of how youth use stories and story-telling as opportunities for literacy learning, and as opportunities for learning about their own and others’ lives as well.
Chapter Four

Teachers’ Facilitation of School-Based Book Clubs:
Expressive Approaches to Story-Reading

The act of story-telling has a long tradition in our society. From the time humans have gathered around fires and shared the story of the day’s hunting expedition, people have enjoyed a good story. It is through this practice of story-telling that we learn about each other and about ourselves. This has been long documented in various fields – anthropology, sociology, psychology, theology – and the teachers in this sixth grade classroom continued this tradition in their book club discussions. In fact, they embraced story-telling in response to story-reading as a valid and valuable way to engage with fictional novels. In this chapter, I discuss three particular ways, through their facilitation of the book club discussions, the teachers demonstrated to the students that the book club discussion was a space for personal story-telling, and that story-telling was a method to demonstrate knowledge about the issues, settings, conflicts, and characters of the novels they were reading. More important, my analysis of the book club curriculum, the book club discussions, and teacher interviews revealed the specific process through which the teachers and students negotiated the discursive practices of their book club discussions on the topic of immigration. First, I found that the teachers invited students to talk about the fictional stories in a variety of ways that kindled expressive, affective responses. Second, the teachers modeled and negotiated the practice of story-telling for the students during the book club discussion. Finally, I found that the teachers developed a range of social practices designed to encourage students to ask about each others’ lives in relation to the fictional story, as
well as explicitly invited their students to tell personal stories during the book club discussions (see Figure 4-1, the bolded numbers).

![Figure 4-1. Teachers’ Facilitation of Book Club Members’ String of Processes](image)

In the following, I discuss the various ways the teachers facilitated and modeled and negotiated with students certain discursive practices that defined and identified the roles and responsibilities of book club membership and discussion. I begin by describing how the teachers used the reading log as a preparation tool for personal ways of talking about fictional stories. I then turn to the primary facilitation routines implemented by the teachers, as well as how they modeled personal story-telling during the book club discussions. Finally, I explain how the teachers encouraged their students to tell their own stories both in reaction to the novels, but also as a way for students to learn about the immigration issues presented in the novels and see how those issues might affect their classroom peers. Using story-telling in this fashion resulted in
certain social and cultural consequences, namely the prominence of reading with emotion and imagination, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Talking about Fictional Stories in Book Clubs

There are several approaches to reading and talking about fictional stories, both in and out of classrooms. The approach a teacher takes greatly depends on his/her curricular goals, objectives, and/or purposes involved in reading literature in an English language arts classroom, as well as her/his instructional reasons for choosing particular literary selections. For example, preparing students to answer reading comprehension questions on a standardized assessment would require different approaches to literature instruction than preparing students to read through a feminist or Marxist critical lens. Mrs. K and Ms. M had distinct objectives for their book club unit on immigration, as outlined on their curriculum map:

1. Students will be able to list reasons for push and/or pull from Mexico and Central America into the United States.
2. Students will understand and be able to discuss both sides of the immigration debate.
3. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the "human face" of immigration through reading novels and discussing with peers.

These objectives pointed to two ways of knowing about immigration – an awareness of factual information about immigration issues and recognition of the humanness of immigration issues. Bruner (1986) considered the first way of knowing as “argument,” which the first two objectives indicated were the purpose – to convince someone of truth about the issues – for the students to study immigration in their English language arts class. The third objective called for a second way of knowing, which Bruner named “story,” and considered narrative as a way of convincing someone of lifelikeness. Ms. M and Mrs. K’s objectives implied that they valued both ways of
knowing, that they aimed for their students, through reading, discussing, and learning about immigration, to be able to convince someone of the truth of immigration issues and to be able to convince someone of the lifelikeness of the effects of immigration issues. In other words, these teachers seemed to value both ways of knowing: first, learning push/pull factors of immigration was one way of understanding the issues associated with immigration; second, reading novels and delving into the narrative lives of immigrants was another avenue into understanding the issues of immigration.

During our interviews, the teachers further articulated their curricular and instructional reasons for choosing immigration as a theme for this book club unit, particularly their value of story-reading for providing their students an opportunity to view the “human face” of immigration. For instance, Ms. M explicated her reasons, both academic and personal, for choosing immigration as a curricular theme:

Ms. M: In their social studies class, their world geography, they talk about push/pull factors of immigration, and I don’t know if every school does it, but we do it because of our large immigrant population, and I think it’s really important for the students to, on both sides, to know the issues. How it affects families, and about the Dream Act, about students whose parents came here when they were young, and yet they can graduate from high school and have no other options. So, I think it’s important for immigrants and for non-immigrants to know all the issues. So, it’s the one unit that is, we’re able to integrate across sixth grade. And so we’ve found, and we keep finding more really good immigration novels that I
think the kids can relate to who were immigrants. And then the other kids just understand what families are going through, and not just judge people.

Ms. M twice pointed to the benefit of being able to create a cross-curricular unit with social studies (lines 1-2 and 8-9), so it seemed that this was an important motivation for these teachers. Maybe more important, however, was the social, personal goals for choosing immigration. For her, the fact that her school has a “large immigrant population” (line 3) meant that many of her students could personally relate to the topic. She also felt that it was important for all students to “know the issues” (line 4), which she reiterates later (lines 7-8), and for students to “understand what families are going through, and not just judge people” (lines 12). These latter reasons move beyond the study of reading comprehension and surface text features into a study of “text-in-life” comprehension (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996). In other words, Ms. M wanted her students to develop understanding, through the reading of fictional stories, of social, cultural, and political issues involved with immigration, as well as see how these issues affect their classroom peers before making judgments about immigrants and immigration. Mrs. K echoed these aims, both the “elegant ties” that they were able to make with the social studies curriculum and the importance for her Latino/a students to “be empowered in our [school] system.” The teachers’ curricular choices reflected their goals of knowledge about immigration issues and empowerment of their minority students. In particular, the teachers’ choices included the use of a reading log for students to record personal reactions to the novels, the employment of more student-centered discursive practices within the book club discussions, and the legitimation of telling personal stories as a way of responding to fictional stories.

**The reading log as preparation for expressive ways of discussing literature.** The reading log, as the teachers called it, was an important discursive tool that teachers developed in
supporting valued ways of reading and discussing books in the immigration unit. In the book club unit on immigration, the teachers asked the students to maintain a reading log on independent reading days. This reading log was designed to help the students summarize and reflect on their daily reading, and used as a catalyst for the book club discussions on Wednesdays. This type of preparation focused on and gave prestige to particular kinds of conversation and ways of interacting with peers. Specifically, these ways included approaches to text that valued emotional and imaginative engagement with characters and peers, as well as centering text discussion on students’ own reactions built upon the students’ own life experiences. In this way, the students had some control over topics raised in the discussions, which I described in the previous chapter. Pertinent to how Mrs. K and Ms. M prepared their students for the book club discussions was the design of the reading log. The students were asked to build a two-column notebook. The left-hand column was entitled, “What I Read”, and the students were to note at least two story events that “interested them, made them think, shocked them, or made them question.” In other words, the teachers wanted the students to choose two events from the novel, for each day of reading, that they might want to discuss further during the Wednesday book club discussion. The right-hand column was entitled, “What I Thought, Wondered, Felt”, and the students used this column to comment on the plot event they recorded in the left-hand column.

As an emblematic example of the reading log, I have included a sample reading log page from Kristine in Figure 4-2. Kristine was a member of the Journey of the Sparrows (Buss, 1991) book club. She identifies as having both an African American and a White heritage. Kristine was a gregarious member of this sixth grade class, and sometimes sat with different groups of students on different days. She was also quite talkative during the book club discussions, to the
point that the teachers often reminded her that listening to classmates was just as important to making her own contributions. Her reading scores on district and state assessments were mixed, scoring below grade equivalency on the district test but scoring as a proficient reader on the state assessment. I chose Kristine’s reading log because her entries were representative of other students’ entries in regards to length, number, and content.

Briefly, *Journey of the Sparrows* was written by Fran Leeper Buss (1991) with the assistance of Daisy Cubias, and tells the story of El Salvadoran refugees living in Chicago. The novel begins with the terrifying account of María, Julia, and Oscar nailed inside vegetable crates on the back of a truck crossing the Mexico/United States border and then traveling north to Chicago. The three siblings are refugees from the cruelties and killings of an oppressive El Salvadoran government, and came to Chicago to search for work, simultaneously avoiding arrest and deportation back to their homeland. They are taken in by a matriarchal figure of their new neighborhood who teaches them what it means to hold onto your familial and cultural past while living in a new, dangerous and strange environment. Buss and Cubias use the journey of the brave sparrow as an extended metaphor for the characters’ own arduous journey, which clearly illustrates the enduring strength that must be embraced by any immigrant living in a new society.

As exemplified in Figure 4-2, the typical student did not write more than a sentence or two in each entry, yet these were simply starting points for developing topics, as well as socializing students into a way of reading and talking about books that assigns power and importance to the personal experiences, feelings, and opinions of students. In other words, the reading log design made it clear that the teachers valued the students’ ideas about, or responses to, the novel equally to the students’ ability to identify the most important plot events for each daily reading assignment. (It should be noted that the teachers used other curricular activities to
gauge students’ reading comprehension, such as read alouds, paired reading, and plot curves.)

The title of the right-hand column was particularly indicative of the type of response the teachers were asking their students to develop. Writing about thoughts, wonderings, and feelings clearly invited the students to consider affective sensibilities of themselves and the characters when reading and responding to fictional stories and characters.

![Figure 4-2. Reading Log Example from Kristine](image)

In this sample of Kristine’s reading log, she took up the request of her teachers to consider responding to the novel by imagining the emotions of the characters and her own emotions, which is indicated by her multiple ideas about feeling. Particularly, she wondered in
her third and sixth entries “what it feels like to know that you had a baby that you thought was another persons [sic]” and “I wonder what it feels like to be told that their mom got sent back where there is killing going on.” Both of these statements reflect Kristine’s attempt to read in a way that requires an imaginative engagement with the characters in *Journey of the Sparrows*, specifically with the emotions the characters were experiencing during these two distinct story events. More important, it seemed that she was thinking about the characters through the lens of her own possible experiences. In the third entry, she used the personal pronoun “you” instead of the character’s name, which implied that she was thinking about this situation outside the context of the novel. She was imagining the fictional situation in the context of her own world. Similarly, in the sixth entry she indicated that she was exploring what her own emotional reactions might be to the loss of her mother to a hostile environment. In both cases, Kristine was attempting to reach out to the characters by imagining their circumstances as her own, or what her life would be under these possibilities – exactly as the teachers might have hoped she would do.

I return to the function of reading with imagination and emotion in the next chapter, but I include Kristine’s attempts at responding to the literature through emotional imagination to illustrate the type of reaction the teachers requested by structuring the reading log with a particular type of prompt. This type of open-ended prompt – “What I Thought, Wondered, Felt” – specifically called for the students to consider the inner dimensions of the characters’ lives and how the characters’ inner emotional lives might be reflected in their own lives, which influenced the content of the book club discussions. This was especially true because the teachers faithfully spent time in each discussion on the reading log responses that the students brought to the weekly book club meetings. As Kristine’s example demonstrated, many of the students’ entries
included their attempts at imagining how the fictional characters might be feeling during certain immigrant-related events in ways that moved beyond what was revealed in the text. By working through their own affective sensibilities about the experiences of the characters, it afforded these students opportunities to reach out into others’ lives (both fictional and real) through commonsense understanding of the affect. In other words, they considered how they might feel in the same situation the characters were experiencing, which allowed them to deepen their knowledge about the characters in a way that humanizes them, instead of turning the characters into symbols representing a feminist or Marxist or some other literary interpretive approach. Reading with emotion and literary imagination became an avenue used by the students and teachers in the book club discussions to engage with the literary characters, and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, to engage with their book club peers.

The role of the whip-around at the beginning of the book club discussions. The whip-around approach to discussion functioned uniquely within the discursive world that both Mrs. K and Ms. M sought to value, construct, and practice reading with students. The teachers used a variation of the whip-around strategy to begin almost every book club discussion. In this practice, the students were instructed to relate a summary of the novel’s plot by taking turns. The teacher determined when a student’s turn began and ended, and every student was asked to take a turn – similar to this excerpt from the *Crossing the Wire* (Hobbs, 2006) book club:

13 Mrs. K: We’re going to do [the summary] in a whip-around. The way a whip-around works is Geoff will start at the beginning and give us one sentence,
14 then Jacob will give us another that builds on it, and then Jaime, then
15 Ernesto, then Kaleb. We’ll just go whoosh {makes quick circular motion with her hand} really quickly. Does that make sense? So, Geoff you are
going to start at the beginning of the book. Tell us what’s happening in
the book so far.

Geoff: From the beginning?

Mrs. K: From the beginning.

Geoff: From the beginning, his father died and his best friend Rico left, got some
parting money from his cousin and left.

Mrs. K: {interrupts and points to Jacob} Jacob.

Jacob: Victor was in the fields and he saw the bus come and he saw men get on
with Rico.


The excerpt continues with Jaime’s, Esteban’s, and Kaleb’s contributions, and then Mrs. K
started the circle over with Geoff, continuing until the students had summarized everything the
students were supposed to have read so far. There were two consequences of summarizing the
plot using this discursive practice. First, although the students were the main contributors to the
re-construction of the plot for the group, the teacher was positioned at the center of the
discussion. The students spoke to her, not to the overall group or to each other. She determined
when a student could contribute, and she determined the length of time for each student’s
contribution. The topic was also chosen by the teacher – plot summary – and she evaluated
whether the student had summarized the plot correctly.

Second, it was an economical method for summarizing the plot of a novel, and for
checking students’ reading comprehension. Typically, Mrs. K and Ms. M spent approximately
six to seven minutes at the beginning of each book club discussion summarizing the assigned
reading for the week. Considering that the book club discussions averaged almost 25 minutes,
this meant that only a quarter of the time, on average, was spent on plot summary – a proxy for checking one aspect of reading comprehension – and almost three quarters of the time, on average, was spent discussing the students’ more expressive responses in their reading logs and other reactions to the novels presented during the Wednesday conversations. This was an indication of what the teachers considered the primary purpose of the book club. Yes, ensuring that students were reading and understanding the story was an important part of participating in a book club, as well as an important part of literature instruction in schools. However, they also viewed the book club as a way for students to have a space for discussing the topics and issues involved in the fictional stories. As Ms. M explained:

Ms. M: I noticed that when the students read [by] themselves and they have kind of an idea of what they’ve read…but when they start talking about it you can really see it helps clarify for students what they’ve read and it also helps them to think differently when they have an opportunity to discuss it with other students.

The idea of helping students to consider their own responses in conjunction with their peers’ responses (lines 30-31) to the fictional stories was a central reason for the teachers to use book clubs for their unit on immigration. Mrs. K described further why a book club unit for the topic of immigration: “And immigration is really important to [our immigrant students] because, especially in the political climate we had recently, they need to understand and be empowered in our system, and not feel as frightened and apprehensive as they usually do.” Therefore, the whip-around strategy was an effective way for Ms. M and Mrs. K to attend to the reading comprehension of their students, but also was efficient so they could spend more time discussing their students’ disparate ideas about the topic of immigrants and immigration, as well as their
students’ own stories about immigration. Further, the teachers were aware of the richness and nuance their students’ ideas and stories would contribute to the book club discussions.

**The role of questioning within the social practices of the book club.** During the majority of each book club discussion, the teachers strived to make the conversations student-centered. The teachers asked the students to use their reading logs as a vehicle for bringing topics and ideas about the novels to the book club discussions. The students were then asked to choose one or two of their reading log responses to talk about with their peers. The teacher’s role during this portion of the book club discussions was two-fold: one, ensure that every student had an opportunity to contribute something from her/his reading log, and, two, extend discussions when the students did not take up a topic or idea. The former was a classroom community norm for these teachers, as they made many attempts during each lesson to hear from every student. Further, establishing this discursive norm for a book club discussion was vital to meet their philosophy of extending students’ individual reading experiences and responses through peer interaction and discussion, as Ms. M explained (lines 28-32). The latter role of extending discussions was typically facilitated through the asking of questions and through the telling of personal stories. First, I will discuss the use of questions, before turning to storytelling as a valued and important discussion practice.

The teachers often used questions to help students expand their thoughts, ideas, and feelings about the topics discussed during the book club meetings. Primarily, the teachers used two types of questions to complete this task with the following basic stems: “What do you think about that?”, “Can you imagine that?”, and “How does that make you feel?” These three were discursively different, yet all three were important to maintaining a student-centered book club, as well as burgeoning the students’ nascent attempts at thinking and talking about their own
affective sensibilities in relation to the emotions involved with the characters and fictional events in the novels. Instead of bringing the particular topics for each Wednesday meeting, the teachers asked the students to use the reading logs to generate topics, and then asked them which ones they wanted to discuss. Further, instead of elaborating on these topics themselves, the teachers often prodded the students for elaboration through questioning. As two emblematic examples from the book clubs, I examine one instance from a book club led by Ms. M and another from a book club led by Mrs. K.

In the *Lupita Mañana* book club, Ms. M used two questions to stimulate conversation around family separation and crossing the border, which are two of the main issues in the novel. In Patricia Beatty’s (2000) novel, two Mexican siblings are sent to the United States by their mother in order to find work. The mother makes this decision because she can no longer support her family on her hotel maid’s salary after her husband dies while working as a fisherman. Lupita, the main character, struggles with the loss of her father, the separation from her mother, and the eventual separation of her brother. As Nazario (2007) explained, familial separation is one of the largest problems associated with immigration, especially for immigrants moving from Central America to the United States because the majority of these immigrants are individuals looking for work to support a family left behind in the home country. Another issue that the characters confront in the novel is crossing the border and the finding of a *coyote* that would not only be willing to help with the crossing, but also one that was honest because many of these people would steal immigrants’ money, strand them in the desert, turn them over to border patrols, or sexually assault the women and children.

Ms. M asked two questions in order to continue a conversation started by Benicio and Iliana about hiring *coyotes* and traveling without parents, as the characters in the novel are forced
to do. First, Ms. M asked “What do you guys think about a 13-year-old and a 15-year-old leaving their home and their family to go someplace where they don’t know the language, they don’t know anything, to go work?” In this example, Ms. M was responding to the students’ discussion of traveling without parents, and she wanted to help them consider the separation factor and the emotions of what the characters were experiencing. In addition, she was asking the students to negotiate imaginatively the subjectivities of a distant other, which is a particular way of reading and discussing stories. After watching the video, Ms. M remarked that she had to use questions because “it’s kind of hard because you want to get them talking” and “I want them to talk more than me.” Her implication was clear; she wanted the book club discussion to be about the students’ ideas, and not her own. Yes, she had her particular goals, as outlined previously, yet she wanted those goals to be met through student-led discussion, through student-generated ideas, and through topics the students deemed were relevant to their lives. This last point was revealed through the next question she posed to the group during this discussion: “So that’s like a seventh grader and a ninth grader. Could you imagine just leaving your family and going by yourself?” This question was different from the first in that it asked for more than just the students’ ideas about the topic of familial separation. It asked for an imaginative engagement related to the students’ personal lives, which was a particular reading lesson – to read with imagination. Ms. M was not asking only about the students’ basic comprehension of the novel, *Lupita Manana*, in this part of the book club discussion; that was a separate discussion at the beginning of the meeting. Here, she was interested in what the students thought about the lives of the characters, and how they might imagine their own lives if their experiences were similar to the characters’ experiences.
These types of questions – “what do you think”, “what do you imagine” – met her goal for the students to “understand what families are going through” (line 12) because they work to build students’ knowledge not only through constructivist pedagogies, but also through the students’ imagination. Discursively, it is different to ask a student what they “know” about a topic (e.g., listing the push/pull factors involved in immigration) than to ask a student what they “think” about a topic or if they could “imagine” what another’s life might be like. These are requests for personal reactions to a fictional text; they are requests to enter into another’s life and imaginatively experience what that life might be like in all of its concrete contexts (cf. Nussbaum, 1995). For these teachers, asking their students to respond to literature in expressive ways was essential to their attempts to socialize and enculturate students into a particular way of reading that can reveal a new set of possibilities available for the students when they read in this way.

In addition to asking students to think and imagine about the lives of the characters in the fictional stories, the teachers asked their students how they felt about the issues associated with immigration. In this example, Mrs. K was working with the Ask Me No Questions (Budhos, 2006) book club and the group was discussing the Dream Act, which is federal legislation that would link eligibility for United States citizenship to the completion of a college degree or military service. After providing some background knowledge and asking for students’ stories related to the topic, Mrs. K extended the conversation by asking Selena about her feelings on the subject:

33 Mrs. K: There’s something called the Dream Act, and the Dream Act is saying we
should give in-state tuition to people without papers if they’ve been here.
34 So that’s real controversial, some people really want it and some people
really don’t. So, do you know anyone like that Selena, who feels really
discouraged about even trying because they don’t have the papers? Have
you heard of things like that?

Selena: Yeah.

Mrs. K: How does that make you feel?

Selena: Bad.

Mrs. K: Yeah. Tell me why.

Selena: ’Cause a lot of people come here to study and they think that they’re going
to get, they’re going to get scholarships and stuff like that to go to college
and study at university and they don’t give you nothing and you have to
pay a lot. And so they can’t come here and study.

Asking how Selena feels about the topic (line 40) presented a different discursive task than if
Mrs. K had asked what she thought, as in the above example from Ms. M. It was still a request
for a personal engagement with the topic, but one grounded in emotive reaction. Mrs. K did not
leave the conversation with Selena’s sensibility about the Dream Act. Instead, she asked Selena
to expound on why the situation surrounding the legislation was “bad” (line 41). This type of
link between an affective evaluation and a rational explanation of the issue matches Marcus’s
(2002) theory on how the sentimental citizen engages in political issues. Mrs. K has used the
question about feeling to assist Selena in explicating her ideas about the Dream Act. The
practice of questioning about students’ feelings is a different discursive practice from other types
of questions – a practice that legitimized, in this case, a more personal and expressive approach
to reading and responding to stories. Further, this was an important step in meeting Mrs. K’s
goal of “empowering” her students. By opening a space in the book club discussion for Selena’s
perspective, rather than providing her own, the teacher’s, perspective, she created a more student-centered book club discussion. In other words, if Mrs. K wanted to “empower” her students, then she had to approach literature instruction with curriculum that valued personal reactions, opinions, and discussions around that literature. Querying about students’ feelings seemed to succeed in assisting students in becoming a member of the book club discussion in this classroom, which included reading with emotion that was valued in this classroom.

**Teachers legitimizing story-telling as a way of responding to story-reading.**

Following their goals of creating opportunities for personal ways of responding to literature, Ms. M and Mrs. K valued story-telling as a legitimate discursive practice in the book club discussions. In multiple instances, they indicated that one way to talk about literature is through story – one’s own story or another’s story. Encouraging this practice placed value on this kind of expressive literary response. It placed the students’ responses – a response through story-telling – at the center of the book club discussion, which made the students’ stories the content of the discussions. In other words, it demonstrated for the students that reading and talking about literature inherently involves talking about oneself, at least in this classroom, and that reading was about more than basic comprehension of the text, but also about deepening knowledge about the inner dimensions of humans’ lives by experiencing those lives in all their lived contexts.

Both Ms. M and Mrs. K spoke about story-telling in our interviews at the end of the school year. They were both interested in how story-telling functioned in a way to help their students meet the curricular goals of their immigration unit. For instance, Mrs. K spoke directly about the importance of providing a space for her students with recent immigrant pasts to tell their stories:
Mrs. K: Also, [telling stories are] just a really, really good way for the kids who are second language learners to be on top because they know these things, and our question was, as you know, will [the students with immigrant pasts] tell their stories in mixed groups because they never have. It’s been a real secret thing and you just disclose that you are undocumented only if you have to. It’s not anything you do. And you saw the amazing stories the kids told during this. So, that’s been really interesting.

Mrs. K revealed that she valued story-telling because of her local knowledge about the cultural practices and language practices that might be familiar to her students. She was also referring to two concerns. First, she was addressing an overarching concern of this Language and Literacy course about participation opportunities for linguistically diverse students. By providing a space for her “second language learners to be on top” (line 48), she meant that these students would have an opportunity for a different level of participation because of their direct knowledge of the topic of immigration. Of course, there was some hesitancy about such an approach, which was her second concern. She was concerned that these students would not be willing to share personal stories of immigration with students of other diverse backgrounds (lines 50-52), probably referring to White students from families who have been established in the United States for multiple generations. While discussing a video of the Lupita Mañana book club group, Ms. M spoke about the same concern. I had asked her about her comfort in asking students about their stories of immigration:

Ms. M: I’m nervous in the sense that I don’t want to make [certain students] feel like they have to share something they don’t want to share, or make them
look poor. Though it’s a hard thing because you know, you’re sure that
they’ve got stories, so you want them to talk.

For Ms. M, there was concern over putting students with recent immigrant pasts in the spotlight, yet she also saw the value of having students share their stories with their book club peers. This was especially true in light of the curricular goals she outlined for the immigration unit (lines 1-12), as well as the value Ms. M placed on her students’ stories as a way to talk about the novels (line 57). Therefore, Ms. M decided to ask about her students’ lives as a way to discuss the fictional characters’ stories, as I illustrate below. Further, as Mrs. K alluded to (lines 51-52), and as I describe in the next chapter, this concern about “tokenizing” immigrant students did not seem to present itself, at least for the majority of students who revealed their immigrant pasts during the book club discussions. In fact, the value of story-telling became apparent in the ways the students talked about and approached the topic of immigration, both during and after the book club unit.

**Teachers’ endorsement of expressive approaches to reading and discussing fictional stories.** Through the use of the reading log, student-centered discussion practices, and the significance placed on personal story-telling, Ms. M and Mrs. K endorsed a certain approach to reading and discussing fictional stories. Namely, that they valued a more personal approach based primarily on the students’ individual reactions to the novels. Yes, they spent time during the book club discussions attending to their students’ comprehension of the novels, yet this instructional goal was accomplished mainly during the first few minutes of each weekly meeting, as illustrated by the whip-around strategy. Of course, the students were also demonstrating their reading comprehension during the remainder of the discussion as they discussed pertinent topics related to the fictional novels. Yet, it was also important for Mrs. K and Ms. M for their students
to use expressive reactions to the novels as a basis for the book club discussions. This pedagogical approach was exemplified through their student-centered questioning practices, especially represented by the types of questions they posed, and, most importantly, through their stance that story-telling was a legitimate way for their students to respond to the novels, especially those students with linguistically diverse backgrounds and/or recent immigrant pasts.

**Teachers telling stories as a way of modeling the discursive practice for students.** As a way to further mitigate their concerns about casting an unwanted light on students with recent immigrant pasts, Mrs. K and Ms. M told their own personal stories in the book club discussions. Choosing to share their personal stories in the setting of the book club discussion illustrated that the book club space was a safe place to share personal history, or, at least, it demonstrated that the teachers were willing to take on the risks of sharing a personal story with their students. In other words, by taking on the role of story-teller themselves, the teachers were demonstrating that story-telling was an appropriate and valuable way of responding to fictional texts. Additionally, as a story-teller, the teachers were modeling the discursive practice of story-telling for their students. As indicated by the teachers’ curricular and instructional reasons for choosing immigration as a book club theme, it was important for these teachers to encourage their students’ understanding through narrative. Telling a personal story to their students and then discussing their story helped their students develop a way of knowing and understanding others that was rooted in the importance of narrative. As an emblematic example of the teachers telling personal stories, I examine one of the many stories that Mrs. K told to the various book clubs, often repeating certain stories to different book clubs.

This particular instance came from a book club discussion with the *Ask Me No Questions* book club. In *Ask Me No Questions*, the father of the main character, Nadira, is retained for
investigation by United States border guards when attempting to take his family across the Canadian border to seek refuge from the oppressive policies stemming from the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001. The facts of this plot event involve the issues of having documentation, namely work visas, when attempting to cross a national border, and the civil versus criminal repercussions of living in the United States without proper documentation. The story of this plot event, however, involves both the desperation of a family to escape oppression and discrimination based on the actions of others unassociated with themselves, as well as Nadira’s family’s Muslim religion, and the ultimate separation of Nadira from her father.

This narrative event in the lives of Nadira’s family provides an avenue into understanding the impacts of immigration policies through story. That is, the students reading *Ask Me No Questions* have an opportunity to learn about immigration issues by recognizing how it affects the humanity of Nadira and her father. In order to expand on this opportunity, the teachers opened the book club discussion as a space to discuss such issues. One way to further the discussion of the students was to tell their own stories as an example of one way to respond to the fictional story with feeling. Further, this event in the lives of Nadira’s family had the potential to raise memories in many members of this book club – as it does for Selena, which I discuss in the next chapter – so Mrs. K told her own story to illustrate that a reader can empathize with a character through personal memory. In other words, through personal memory Mrs. K was able to imagine the effects on Aisha’s family during their attempted border crossing, and, therefore, help her students interpret the events of the story. Mrs. K’s story was about her own family returning from a family trip to Mexico, and how crossing the border was always an anxious event for her own father:
Mrs. K: We’ve been here for five generations. My great-grandpa was here. My grandpa was here. My dad, actually my great-great-grandpa was here, my great-grandpa, my grandpa, my dad, and me. And when we go to Mexico, my dad, who’s been here for four generations in this country, still gets scared crossing the border. He is always sure they’re not going to let him come back into the U.S. even though we’ve been citizens for five generations.

Veronica: Is he from Mexico?

Mrs. K: He is [father’s name], but he’s not from Mexico. He’s from Nelson River. He was born here, but he still gets scared because those border guards are so mean.

Selena: Yeah.

By sharing her own stories, Mrs. K created a space within the book club discussion for her students to share and discuss their own stories in conjunction with discussing the fictional story, and then interpret that story as she did. She was revealing to her students that she had some understanding of the experiences of Nadira’s family because her own family had similar experiences. By revealing that understanding through story, she was also demonstrating that knowledge about immigration could be found through narrative. She could have revealed her understanding of Nadira’s family experiences by stating her knowledge of immigration policy about documentation, the acquiring and renewing of work visas, or the rules about crossing national borders (which both she and Ms. M do discussed at other times during the unit). Further, discussing the facts and arguments around these immigration issues would have been illuminating for her students and probably instructive in developing the students’ arguments.
for/against such policies. However, in the space of the book club discussion, Mrs. K chose to reveal her understanding through the telling of one of her own stories. By telling a personal story similar to the one told in the fictional account of Nadira’s family, she revealed that she comprehended these fictional experiences. She was interpreting the story of Nadira through her own story. In particular, because of the affective sensibilities that are inherent to story-telling, she demonstrated for the students that using an emotional event from her own past to comprehend the emotions of the characters is good practice for a good story reader. She was modeling that a good reader attempts to imaginatively work out the emotional networks of a character’s life, and one way to do this was to use one’s own stories as an avenue into the character’s feelings.

Mrs. K’s story clearly involved the affective consequence the border crossing experience had on her father. She named the experience as scary (lines 62 and 67) for her father because he worried that he would not be able to return to his home, his United States. In order for her audience, in this case her sixth grade students, to have a complete understanding of what it means for some people to cross a border, they would need to imaginatively recognize the feelings associated with the experience. In both the fictional account of Nadira’s family border crossing attempt and in the border crossing experience of Mrs. K’s family, the characters experience strong emotional reactions at the border, so Mrs. K’s story might further the understanding of her students about what it means to cross a border. Discussing her lived account, in association to the fictional account, could work to deepen the how these students perceived such an event. Mrs. K was modeling for her students that story-telling was a legitimate way to respond to story-reading because it widens the lens through which a reader views someone’s life. In other words, a reader could interpret a fictional account by examining
the text, but a reader could also consider a fictional story in light of her/his own stories. Moreover, examining story involves a certain way of knowing, particularly knowing the emotional dimensions of someone’s story. For these students, examining these emotional dimensions broadened their conception of an immigrant.

For example, Veronica’s question (line 65) illustrated the canonical view that she had about who crosses borders. It seemed that she imagined border crossers as people who are not from United States, although Mrs. K made it clear that her father was a United States citizen from a family well-established in the country (lines 58-60). Mrs. K’s story of her father seemed to disrupt Veronica’s perspective; it provided another possibility to Veronica’s conception of what is “real” – that many types of border crossers are nervous; that border crossing is difficult for many people, whether one is documented or not, whether one belongs on both sides of that border or not. For Selena, her simple statement of commiseration about the attitude of border guards (line 69) denoted her empathy for Mrs. K’s father. Expressing this empathy was indicative of Selena’s comprehension of some of the experiential effects that borders can have on border crossers. This empathetic understanding was further articulated through one of Selena’s own stories about border crossing. I examine Selena’s story, as well as the emotive and imaginative dimensions of story-telling in the next chapter.

Teachers telling stories in the book club discussions performed two primary functions. First, they illustrated that story-telling as a way of responding to fictional stories was a legitimate practice. The teachers participated in the practice story-telling because of their stated purposes for the immigration unit, namely that they wanted their students to experience the “human face” associated with immigration. By telling their own stories related to immigration and border crossing, they put their own lived face on the issues, which exemplified a certain way of
knowing, that story was a way to understand the lives of others, both fictional and real. Second, by taking on the role of story-teller, the teachers modeled an important way that a book club member could participate in a book club discussion. Since they wanted their students to tell their own stories, as discussed above, they needed to demonstrate that telling personal stories was something a book club member often did. They took on the risks of telling personal stories hoping that their students would also take on these risks.

**Teachers inviting story-telling from their students.** The teachers did more than model their own stories in order to support their students in telling their own personal stories. I also found that they invited students to tell their own stories during the book club discussions by encouraging students to ask about each others’ lives in relation to the fictional story. As I explained previously, the teachers wanted to hear their students’ stories because they valued their experiences as an avenue into discussing the immigrant and immigration issues presented in the novels the students were reading. Therefore, the teachers worked to create a reading discussion space in which talking about personal stories was common practice.

In their efforts to create a book club discussion that was mostly student-centered, Ms. M and Mrs. K often reminded the students to speak to one another, to invite others in the conversation, and to ask direct questions to one another. These reminders usually occurred when the students would seem to be only talking to the teacher, rather than to each other or the group as a whole. This has been documented to be one of the struggles of implementing book clubs or literature circles in the classroom (cf. Daniels, 2002; Short et al., 1999), as students tend to want to “please” the teacher and, therefore, speak only to the teacher in order to be seen and heard. In order to mitigate this phenomenon, the teachers would verbally remind students to talk to the group, and would physically remove themselves from the table either by walking away or by
pushing their chair further away and remaining silent for brief periods of time. One of the ways the teachers worked to make the discussions student-centered was to encourage the students to ask about each other’s lives, especially in relation to the immigration topics intertwined in the novels the students were reading.

For instance, in the *Ask Me No Questions* book club, the students were reading about Islam and what it means to be Muslim in the United States post-9/11. The main characters in the novel are all Muslim, many of these characters are confronted by governmental officials about their immigration and citizenship status, and they often have to downplay their religious affiliation in social circles and at school. One of the students in the book club, Magda, is a practicing Muslim. She was born in Bosnia, and her family had to leave the country during the Serb-Bosniak conflict due to ethnic and religious persecution. In the following book club discussion excerpts, Mrs. K asked Magda about her family’s move to the United States and her perspective about what the characters were experiencing in terms of their religious beliefs. As Magda described this perspective, she disclosed stories about her own religious background, piquing her peers’ interests. First, Magda told about her family’s travels:

70 Mrs. K: {to Magda} How did you get over here? Fly on an airplane? Where did you land? Do you remember? You were tiny, weren’t you? You went from Germany to Bosnia to here?

71 Magda: No. I went from Bosnia to Germany to here.

72 Mrs. K: Right. From Bosnia to Germany to here. I had it opposite. Do you want to tell us {the story}?

74 Magda: Well we were like, so we were in Germany but first my parents were in Bosnia but then the war started and they went to Germany. And then I
was born in Germany, and then they went back to Bosnia to visit, and then they came back to Germany and my brother was born. And then from Germany we came here. It was like, I don’t remember, it was like, we had to go through immigration and stuff.

Mrs. K: How old were you?

Magda: Maybe like two or one.

Mrs. K: So, you don’t remember at all.

Magda: No.

Mrs. K: So, what were you doing in Germany? What sent your parents to Germany?

Magda: They had like a lot of friends who were there, and like family, so.

Danielle: When they went to Germany, did they take a plane?

Magda: Yeah.

Danielle: Okay. Where’s Bosnia?

Magda: It’s in Europe in the middle.

Danielle: Cool.

Later in the discussion, Magda described the traditional dress of a woman of Islamic faith:

Mrs. K: A chador. It’s really a robe, but we usually only see it around their hair.

{to Magda} Does anyone in your family still dress traditionally?

Magda: My grandma does.

Mrs. K: Does she?

Magda: Yeah.

Mrs. K: So tell us how she dresses.
Magda: Like she just wears that thing over her hair, but when I like go to mosque I like have that thing over my head too. ’Cause you have to. You can’t go into mosque if you’re not all covered. They don’t let you.

Danielle: What happens? They just? What’s a mosque?

Magda: It’s like this, it’s like this place you go pray.

Danielle: Cool.

Magda: I can show you guys a picture.

Mrs. K: Would you?

Danielle: Yeah.

{Magda pulls out cell phone and passes it around to other students. Students scroll through pictures. Mrs. K points out Bosnia on wall map.}

Magda: Well, this is, have you guys heard of that [mosque] in Saudi Arabia? That huge one? {Danielle, Selena, and Veronica shake heads ‘no’} Well, it’s huge. Well, anyways if you go over there you can never take [the chador] off your head. You have to wear it every time, even to go to school. You cannot like take it off.

Danielle: What happens if you take it off?

Magda: You’re not Muslim anymore.

Veronica: What if you have to take a shower?

Magda: Well you can take it off then. To take a shower. {laughs}

In this excerpt, it was clear that Mrs. K wanted to provide a discursive space within the book club discussion in which students had space to become interested in their peers’ stories as part of their conversations about literature. Through her invitation for Magda to share the story
of her family’s move to the United States (lines 70-72), Mrs. K modeled for her students that asking about each other was an acceptable practice in their book club discussions. She could have constructed the book club discussion solely around the story of Nadira and Aisha in *Ask Me No Questions*, and these fictional characters’ issues with citizenship status and being Muslim. Instead, she wanted to use the lived experiences of her students to broaden and deepen the book club discussions, and the invitation for story-telling was the primary way these teachers attempted to bring in the stories of their students into their literature classroom. As important, the students in the book clubs took up this work by asking their own questions about their peers’ lives.

In the above excerpt, Danielle in particular took a curious interest in Magda’s story of being Muslim. Her repeated queries (lines 89, 91, 103, and 116) not only demonstrate this interest, they also revealed her embrace of the norms of a book club discussion, as facilitated by Ms. M and Mrs. K. I noticed that Mrs. K did not try to change the topic back to the particulars of the novel, which was emblematic of now both she and Ms. M facilitated the book club discussions. Allowing the students to continue hearing from Magda about her story, even to the point of giving permission for Magda to show some pictures (line 109-110) of her trip to Saudi Arabia off her cell phone, was indicative of how these teachers viewed the role of personal storytelling in response to story-reading. They encouraged the students to continue asking questions about each other’s stories, as Danielle and Veronica (line 118) do in this instance, instead of silencing such conversation for other types of literary response. The students’ exploration of each other’s lives was just important for these teachers as exploration of the lives of the fictional characters.
Constructing a Book Club Discussion around Story-telling

This discursive practice of story-telling became a key part of the social practice of the book club discussions in this Language and Literacy class. Through their book club curriculum and their own discursive practices, Ms. M and Mrs. K constructed a book club discussion that endorsed certain expressive responses from their students. These expressive responses often were told through narrative, and the responses required the emotional and imaginative engagement from both story-teller and story-listener. As expressed through their interviews, this type of engagement was important for these teachers because of their purposes for reading literature and for choosing immigration as a theme for a literature study. Further, they viewed story-telling as an equitable way of engaging in book club discussions, especially for linguistically diverse students as it increased these students’ comfort with joining the conversation. The teachers also seemed to understand the unique consequences of encouraging their students’ expressive responses to literature, namely that it opened the book club discussions to talk about the students’ lives. Literature reading, then, was more than the study of plot and character – it was the study of life and living. For these students reading stories of immigration, talking about their lives also led to social and cultural consequences of learning about another person in a unique fashion, which lends to compassionate reasoning about the social, cultural, political issues related to immigrants and immigration. As students began participating in the telling of stories, it opened up certain emotional and imaginative ways of engaging with both the fictional stories and with one another, which led to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of an immigrant. I explore these consequences further in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

Emotional and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs

The discursive practice of story-telling as response to story-reading was an essential aspect of the teachers’ approach to book club discussion during the immigration unit. As described in the previous chapter, the teachers consciously provided opportunities in the book club discussions, as a response to the novels, for students to tell their own stories, to tell the stories of others, and to engage in co-authorship of those personal stories. As teachers instructed students with ways of talking about books, and modeled possible ways of engaging in the book club discussions, what began as more explicit instruction of responding to literature through story-telling became an accepted way for engaging in the book club discussions. The students then ultimately and seamlessly took these cues, and appropriated and adopted the practice of story-telling as their own. More important, story-telling was more than a student’s personal response to the fictional story, but was also a practice with particular social and cultural consequences because stories extend a unique invitation to engage in the emotional and imaginative dimensions of living. For instance, in these book club discussions, telling stories in response to the fictional novels read in the book club unit opened affective avenues for these students (and teachers) to explore each others’ varied familial pasts. Whereas other studies on school-based book clubs have focused on certain reading outcomes, such as comprehension, my research on book clubs provides insight into how emotion is evoked and circulated among book club members as ways to consider particular issues presented both through the lives of fictional characters and through the told stories of these young readers. In this particular case, story-telling as a way to responding to fictional stories made eloquent the immigrant and immigration
issues that specific fictional characters were attempting to navigate within the novels. The nature of this knowledge came through both the fictional stories the students read in the book clubs, and also the lived stories the students told one another during the book club discussions (see Figure 5-1, the bolded numbers).

![Figure 5-1: Book Club Members’ String of Processes within a Book Club Discussion](image)

1. Members independently make links between fictional stories and lived stories.

2. **Members bring experience of story-reading and personal experiences to book club discussions.**

3. Teachers modeling ways of responding to fictional stories.

4. **Students’ practice of personal story-telling.**

5. Discussions lead to knowledge of others through emotional insight.

6. Members return to story-reading and story-living with new empathetic reasoning.

*Figure 5-1. Book Club Members’ String of Processes within a Book Club Discussion*

Particularly, the students delved into immigration issues by using the emotive aspects of story-telling that lead readers/listeners out into the lives of other characters/people as individual experiences are circulated (cf. McGinley & Lewis, 2009). When entering a story, a reader/listener is asked to imagine the life of the character/person as part of the recognition of the experiences that are being revealed in the story, and taking on the emotional dimensions of those experiences is a vital aspect of imagining another’s story. Moreover, as Weinstein (2003) has
made clear, acknowledging the emotional components of another’s life is essential to imagining someone else’s life as one’s own. Additionally Nussbaum (2001) has noted that emotional imagination is essential to the process through which one comes to understand the degradation, oppression, and success that is attached to that other life – which affords a reader/listener a more empathetic perspective of another’s life. In these book club discussions, the students imparted their life experiences through story-telling, and the engine of re-making or co-authoring their stories with their book club peers thrived upon the emotional and imaginative engagement that was inherent in the story-telling practices of these book clubs. Through story-telling, these students were able to imagine the immigrant lives of characters and peers as part of their own lives, which led to empathic understandings of the life of an immigrant as the affective networks that link their lives became palpable.

In this chapter, I discuss how story-telling, as a way to respond to story-reading, in a book club discussion was a primary way for emotion to travel among these students (and teachers) despite their social, cultural, and linguistic differences. Emotion was also an avenue through which students learned about the lives and perspectives of others in a way that moves beyond traditional social science approaches to multiculturalism. In other words, story-telling afforded emotional and imaginative engagements that facilitated opportunities to explore each other’s lives in unique ways. First, I found that these book club members used the book club discussion to tell personal stories inspired by the events and lives of the fictional characters in the novel. Second, the students used the book club discussions as an opportunity to become co-characters and co-authors of the fictional stories. Third, the students used story-telling opportunities to identify and share emotions relevant to immigration in ways that only stories permit, and, in so doing, the students built emotional links to others in the book club. The stories
these students told were a form of creative outreach to the feelings of others. Finally, I found that these stories made it possible for some students to imagine a positive, more complex narrative of the immigration experience that was beyond the canonical, which is what stories often provide space to accomplish.

To illustrate these findings, I discuss three students and their stories told in different book clubs. These stories are emblematic of other stories told in the book clubs in that they reveal each student’s immigrant past, as well as each student’s personal knowledge about immigrant experiences and/or immigration issues. I examine what each story does for each storyteller. I then turn what the telling of each story does for other book club members.

**Story-tellers and Story-telling: Iliana, Selena, and Jaime**

The book club discussion is an invitation to talk about one’s own life and experiences as it relates to a fictional story that introduces events, characters, and conflicts beyond one’s own familiar social and cultural circles. Part of reading fictional tales of characters involves joining in the trials and tribulations of those characters, to see what they see, to feel what they feel, to know what they know. Attempting to map out characters’ thoughts, emotions, intentions, and goals is an often difficult task for readers, and one way to assist young readers in this task is to engage in a book club discussion. Within these discussions, talking about those characters’ lives with other readers can be fruitful to the reader’s understanding of the text. More important, talking about characters’ lives can often create a space for book club members to tell about their own lives as a way to help tease out fellow readers’ construal of the text and of life. In the case of these sixth grade students with immigrant backgrounds, the book club discussions were an opportunity for many students to render their lives, through the telling of narratives, in a positive light (as opposed to the canonical negative light shined on immigrants) publicly with their peers,
both those of similar backgrounds and those of differing backgrounds. Narratives are both an expression of identity, and the content of one’s identity; the story is someone and someone is part of a story (Eakin, 1999). In other words, living a life involves telling the story of that life. Further, as McAdams (2006) explained, being able to think about the world through story helps with social life because sharing stories builds “warmth” among others – someone can understand the story of another’s life, which helps her to know that person – and the community of an audience helps determine what a story means and how it will be valued. In this way, storytelling was a basis for these students (and teachers) to explore the lives of both fictional others and the narrative pasts of each other.

In the sixth grade class I examined, many of the students told personal stories during the book club discussions as a way to augment and/or refute the emotion evoked through the immigrant characters’ thoughts and actions within the stories presented in the novels. The telling of these personal stories contributed to the book club discussions by extending what was presented in the text, but the opportunities to tell these stories also expanded possibilities for roles available to these students, as well as the stories that got read or heard. Particularly, in many instances, students became living co-characters in and/or co-authors of the fictional stories. As co-characters, some students took on the role of liaison in that they used their stories to provide a lived context in conjunction to the fictional context, such as a personal story that re-told a character’s experience. As co-authors, other students broadened the message presented in the novels by re-articulating the conflicts and situations associated with immigration. The following three students – Iliana, Selena, and Jaime – told personal stories during the book club discussions that were emblematic of stories told by other students. I present their stories,
however brief, and describe how performing the role of story-teller functioned for them as a member of a book club.

**Iliana crossing with Lupita and Salvador.** In this first example, Iliana told a story that affectively deepened the experiences of Lupita and Salvador – characters in the novel *Lupita Mañana* (Beatty, 2000) – as they attempt to cross the Mexican border into the United States. Iliana is a Latina student who, according to her teachers, improved socially and academically over the course of the year. Her best friend in the class was Melosa, and both have been in their school district’s English as a second language program for over three years. According to district and state reading assessments, Iliana reads several levels below grade equivalency, yet both her teachers remarked at the end of the year that they were impressed with the gains she made in this academic area, as well as in other areas. Socially, Iliana was described as oppositional by her teachers at the beginning of the school year, but had positively altered her interactions with her teachers and peers by early spring when the immigration book club unit began. Iliana lives with her mother and father, who is the step-father of her older half-brother. Her mother and brother play an important role in the story she told to her book club.

Before turning to Iliana’s story, I want to provide some context from the novel this book club read. *Lupita Mañana* tells the story of two teenage Mexicans, Lupita and her older brother Salvador, who are forced to cross the border into the United States in order to look for work. They travel alone because their father died in a fishing boat accident and their mother cannot support them on her hotel maid salary. Lupita relates the trauma of losing her father early in the story, especially when she sees her mother struggle with the loss and the decision to send her children to live with relatives in California. This early trauma is revived for Lupita throughout the story as she and Salvador struggle with the many obstacles of crossing the border, finding
work in the United States, and learning how to live in a strange place. Yet, Lupita gets her “mañana” moniker because of her continued hope that tomorrow will bring a better life. This combination of trauma and hope are taken up and circulated among the group by Iliana in the story she told to her book club.

This book club – Benicio, Federico, Gwen, Iliana, and Melosa – had just read about Lupita and Salvador’s first border crossing attempt, which involved a dishonorable coyote (a paid guide that helps undocumented immigrants cross from Mexico into the United States) that led them into an ambush with bandits intent on robbing them. Prior to Iliana’s story, the group, facilitated by Ms. M, was discussing this border-crossing event from the fictional story. The discussion, along with Ms. M’s invitation to tell a personal tale, prompted Iliana to tell the story of her mother and brother’s crossing from Mexico into the United States:

Iliana: My mom. She like, she was little when she came here. Like she got pregnant with her husband. He came to the United States and he said that he would come and get her but he never did, and then she came by herself and with my brother, he was like two months I guess. And then, it was interesting because a coyote, he was a 12-year-old that crossed them over here, and the coyote told my mom to leave my brother right there in the desert but my mom didn’t let him so she had to run.

As this excerpt reveals, Iliana was, at one level, demonstrating her comprehension of the trauma experienced by Lupita and Salvador. She was revealing to the other group members that she understood the courage it must have took for Lupita and Salvador to confront the danger of crossing the border, in the midst of struggling with the abandonment of the coyote, because she had direct knowledge of similar life-events through her mother’s border crossing story. As a
story-teller, Iliana became a kind of co-character with Lupita, offering her own story in conjunction with the story told about Lupita and Salvador in the fictional novel. In so doing, she acts as an emotional liaison with knowledge of similar feelings, namely the trauma of family separation and the hope of a better tomorrow. She had a sense of the emotional life Lupita and Salvador were living in the novel because of the similarity of her mother’s story about employing the assistance of a young coyote of questionable ethics (lines 5-7); specifically, Lupita and Salvador’s coyote led them into an ambush, and Iliana’s mother’s coyote asked her to leave her son to die. Both stories involved the trauma associated with possible abandonment of a family member. By telling this story, Iliana embodied and made perspicuous the trauma experienced by both the fictional characters and Iliana’s mother for her group member peers.

In our interview after the immigration unit, I asked Iliana about telling this story to the group. She replied that her mother told her this story so she “knew about my family.” Although Iliana was reticent to talk about this story further, she conveyed through her smile as she watched the video, and during her brief answer to my question, that she was proud of this story and, perhaps, about telling it to her group. She told the story to her book club, and spoke about it to me during the interview, with a positive stance. She saw the story in a different light than many often portray similar immigration stories through political statements. Ms. M iterated this point after she viewed the video of Iliana’s story-telling. I asked her how she thought Iliana felt about this story, and she said, “I think [Iliana] may feel embarrassed, you know, her mom was seventeen and, you know, the dad said he would come back for her and left her, but I think she feels good about her family now.” Perhaps Iliana revealed something about her life that illuminated the hope of the character of Lupita “Mañana”. It is possible that Iliana’s comments suggest that she inherited something from Lupita – she re-narrated her own life in a powerful and
positive way – as she perhaps composed herself as something different than others may have previously defined her in making the emotion of this story more public. Iliana’s mother confronted horrible obstacles, namely the loss of her husband and almost losing her son, in her attempts to improve the situation of her family. Yet, her mother survived, and Iliana is living proof of that survival. Telling this story to her book club provided her a chance to valorize her own strength, passed down from her mother’s strength of finding a way to improve their lives, as well as demonstrate her redemption through her own success. Specifically, in this case, the lesson of strength imparted that the risking of one’s own life was worth reaching for the hope that life in the United States promised, yet not at the cost of a family member. Iliana’s story hinted at the possibility that one can both improve one’s own life and keep the family together in the process.

Second, and related, Iliana brought to life the fear faced by the imagined characters in *Lupita Mañana* and the fear she has witnessed in her own lived life. This was a risky move for Iliana, as Mrs. K explained during our interview after viewing, for the first time, the book club discussion in which Iliana told her story:

8 Mrs. K: The fact that Iliana told that story, to me, is just amazing, because Iliana comes up every week in kid talk as being oppositional and hard to deal with and unwilling to work, and for her to make these leaps and disclose that story, and that is a heartbreaking story. Her mom, you know, lost her husband. He didn’t choose to follow. There’s a really young coyote that tells her mom to leave the baby in the desert because he’s dragging them down, probably noisy, he’s probably saying, “we’re going to get caught because this baby won’t quit crying.” And you can see that’s a story from
her past, it’s not her story, but that’s a very painful story for her. And the hand comes up to the mouth, she gets kind of guarded, then she regroups and finishes telling the story. And to me that’s just unbelievably amazing.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mrs. K and Ms. M spoke about specific emotions during the book club discussions, making emotion and feeling central topics of study in their book club unit on immigration. The importance the teachers placed upon this dimension of story-reading was exemplified in this interview excerpt, for when Mrs. K witnessed Iliana telling her story she spoke about the fear that she believed Iliana felt as a story-teller. For instance, there was the fear of familial separation. Iliana’s mother lost her young husband, and she almost lost her newborn son. There was also the panic of crossing. Iliana’s mother had to run, whether she was running from oppression or running toward freedom was unclear, yet the expediency of the situation was clear. Both familial separation and running to/from are common fears that cross social and cultural barriers; this is not to diminish the trauma of the unique experience of immigration, yet students without the narrative identity of an immigrant past can only begin engaging in similar emotions by considering the same emotions felt in a familiar place. In other words, fear is common currency so even if someone has not felt the specific fear associated with immigrating, s/he can use her understanding of fear to build empathy for an immigrant’s particular experiences. Her story deepened the human feeling “content” of the book club discussion.

As a co-character, Iliana used these fears as the imaginative terrain on which to represent her life to other members of her book club. She had the power of her own experience of fear that the novel does not have, and with that power she was able to place herself in the story of the novel as someone experiencing fear alongside Lupita and Salvador, creating a multifaceted reading experience in her book club because she gave the characters added dimension in making
the emotional terrain of fear more complex. Reading novels can allow this type of co-construction because of its imaginative invitation to enter others’ lives and experience all of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters alongside them. Iliana has embodied that imaginative endeavor by extending the story of the novel with her own story. Through storytelling she became a co-character with Lupita. By opening the book club to story-telling, the teachers, in this case Ms. M, opened emotional borders and invited all the book club members to experience the same kind of empathic crossing into the lives of others that story-telling uniquely makes possible, as stories have the power to “expand the boundaries of possibility” and invent new genres that provide “a new way of conceiving human plights” (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000, p. 133). In this book club, Iliana took the opportunity to be a story-teller and expand her possibilities as the daughter of an immigrant; she no longer had to live in the hidden space of plain sight. In other words, Iliana used the trauma and fear rendered uniquely through the narrative of her own story to establish her own individuality – my family’s experience is unique and shapes me in distinctive ways – and used emotion to illustrate that there are communal links between her and others, even fictional others. For the other members of her group, she gave them a lived face (in addition to the fictional face of Lupita and Salvador) that they could imagine as part of their own life, as Iliana was someone living in their classroom. Iliana was a liaison of this emotional network, inviting others into her life by bearing witness to her mother’s story. As McGinley and Lewis (2009) explained, cultivating emotional engagements with stories can lead readers out into the lives of others as individual experience is circulated. In other words, Ms. M extended the invitation to the students in this book club to explore the affective dimensions of the characters, and Iliana took up that invitation by telling her mother’s story, other book club members were led into the lives of both the fictional Lupita and their classmate
Iliana, which circulated feelings that were taken up by other students (and teachers) in this book club.

_Lupita Mañana and the networked lives of Iliana, Benicio, and Federico._ Benicio, a Mexican American student from a family well-established in the United States, accepted the invitation to consider how his life was networked with both Lupita and Iliana, as he continued to think about Lupita’s and Iliana’s stories outside the book club discussion space. Benicio was a conscientious member of the class who consistently contributed his thoughtful opinions and ideas to class discussions. He often used classroom time to assist other students in their projects, and, according to state and district assessments, was a proficient reader. He had exited the English as a second language program prior to his sixth grade year. During Iliana’s telling, Benicio paid close attention to her story, which both Ms. M and Mrs. K remarked upon after watching the video. Although, he remained silent at the time, it seemed that Benicio was at least considering Iliana’s story importance to the book club discussion.

Therefore, during our interview after the immigration book club unit was over, I asked Benicio what he learned in this book club:

19 Benicio: I learned about immigration and how people cross borders. I learned
20 about coyotes. They charge you a lot of money so they make you cross
21 the border, and, well crossing the border without being caught.
22 Mark: Was it dangerous?
23 Benicio: Yeah, a lot of people in my group shared their stories, how they crossed
24 the border and everything. They told me about their family crossing the
25 border.
26 Mark: Oh yeah. What did you learn about them?
Benicio: One of them said that her mom and her brother crossed the border illegally and she was lucky to be born here and be legal.

As we were talking about Iliana’s story, Benicio spoke about his own past in relation to Lupita’s and Iliana’s stories:

Benicio: Yeah, [Iliana’s story] made me think about the past, how my family got to the U.S. Well, my mom and my dad crossed just after they got married, and then one year later my brother, I mean my mom got pregnant with my brother so we were lucky that all my brothers and me were born here and we’re legal.

Mark: Did you tell this story in the group?

Benicio: No.

Mark: Why not?

Benicio: Because I barely know what happened.

Benicio expressed two primary emotions in these excerpts. First, he made it clear that he was not completely comfortable with his knowledge of the story of his parent’s immigration (line 37). That lack of comfort probably contributed to his decision not to tell the story to his book club peers. Yet, his comfort level also illustrated the weight he placed on such a story; if he could not tell it accurately, then he did not want to tell it. Just as important were the links between Benicio’s story and Iliana’s story. Both were about their parents and both were related to younger siblings. It seemed that Benicio told this particular story because of its close resemblance to the story Iliana told to the book club group (lines 29-30), as well as Lupita’s experiences in the novel. The story-reading and Iliana’s telling led to Benicio’s telling, and through his telling, Benicio revealed that others’ stories sparked thinking about his own stories,
and not just in the present of the particular book club discussion in which Iliana was a storyteller, but over the course of a few weeks, as he told me this story three and a half weeks later. The personal risks involved in Iliana’s story (as well as the risks Iliana took in telling her story) were the vehicle for him to consider his own family’s distant path into the United States as he implied when he admitted that Iliana’s story made him think about his own past (line 29). He was making his own internal connections, his “underground” as Weinstein (2003) named it, to the novel and to his peers, which were brought on by his consideration of comfort with his past. In addition, he was implicitly creating solidarity with others of similar pasts; he could see his past linked with Iliana’s past.

Benicio also articulated his lucky feeling about his citizenship status. In *Lupita Mañana*, Salvador and Lupita cross into the United States without documentation. They are constantly worried about their citizenship status when it comes to finding work, talking to authority figures, and not speaking English. A major theme of the novel is the unnecessary hardship citizenship status creates for these two characters – a status which is unavoidable due to their family’s financial worries. This aspect of immigration was a discussion topic in Benicio’s book club, and it was reflected in Iliana’s story in that her mother was forced to immigrate with an infant because she needed the financial support that she hoped to find in the United States. It was apparent in this excerpt that Benicio has continued to consider citizenship status in relation to his own situation, as well as in comparison with others’ situation. In other words, he cannot claim that he is “lucky” (line 32) unless he perceived others as unlucky (lines 27-28). Making comparisons and considering relatedness are part of establishing interpersonal pathways among other people. Benicio was using his feeling of fortunateness in order to create these pathways. It seemed to be significant for Benicio to think about his place among his peers. Reading and
discussing the novel with his book club made him “think about the past” and how his “family got to the U.S” (lines 29-30) and the feelings associated with that experience. The book club discussion provided a space for these stories to be made public, and even though Benicio only publicly told his story to me, it was apparent that listening to Iliana’s story after reading about Lupita and Salvador led to Benicio considering his links to these others, both fictional and real. The emotion of luck provided the “connective tissue” (Weinstein, 2003) upon which he could think about those links in the re-narration of his life.

Reading *Lupita Mañana* kindled similar thoughts and memories in other book club members. Federico is also a Latino student with Mexican heritage. Throughout the school year, he demonstrated his care for his school work, exemplified by his being named a finalist for a city essay contest during the first semester. In the setting of the book club discussion, however, Federico often remained silent unless the teacher or a peer specifically called upon him for a contribution or opinion. Usually, during these times, his ideas were insightfully relevant. He was also still designated as an English language learner at the beginning of the school year, but was exited by the end of the second semester. We spoke in our interview after the immigration unit was completed about what he liked about the story of *Lupita Mañana*:

38 Federico: Like [Lupita and Salvador] almost got robbed in the desert, and they
39 actually crossed the border. And they’re barely like 15 and 13-years-old.
40 Mark: Did you connect with the book?
41 Federico: Like that I come from Mexico, and my parents did like they did, but they
42 didn’t get robbed.
43 Mark: So your parents crossed the border?
44 Federico: Yeah.
Mark: Do you know the whole story?
Federico: No, but they said they were guided by a little 13-year-old. That they had a really hard time.

Similar to Benicio and Iliana, Federico was establishing the “connective tissue” (Weinstein, 2003) between his own life and the fictional lives he was reading about. In his reading log, after reading about Lupita and Salvador’s plans to cross the Mexico border into the United States, he wrote “this is going to be a very hard experience for Lupita Mañana and for Salvador.” That emotional evaluation of Lupita’s life was the exact emotion he placed on his parents’ story. In his parents’ story, they were led by a young coyote the same age as the novel’s characters, and, since his parents are originally from Mexico, he still identified as someone who “come[s] from Mexico” (line 41) even though he was born in the United States. In this way, he imaginatively saw himself in the text as a contemporary of the characters, as the experiences of Lupita and Salvador could be his parents’ experiences (line 41). This imaginative response to story-reading was vital to Federico’s consideration of his own life, which was revealed in his affective evaluation of his parents’ crossing – “that they had a really hard time” (lines 46-47). He was both stating his understanding of the hardships, be they emotional or physical or financial, and also naming the hardships that his parents endured in order to live in the United States. More important, he was indicating that his life has benefitted through his parents’ endurance. His emotion about the “hard time” his parents had in moving to the United States was not as explicit as Benicio’s expression of luck, but it was implied in how he identified himself as Mexican, and in his continued reflection about how he connects with others, like Benicio and Iliana and Lupita, who have similar stories in their lives. In other words, Federico was re-narrating his life as it
related to Lupita’s and Iliana’s stories, deepening and complicating his own narrative identity, as McAdams (2006) would name it.

Story-telling opened avenues for interpersonal understanding for students’ understanding of the trauma, sadness, and hope the fictional characters endured in the novels, as well as similar emotive experiences of their book club peers. This unique pathway created opportunities to use emotion as the basis for revealing the networked lives of readers, as certain emotions were circulated among the book club members. For instance, Iliana began that work with her Lupita Mañana book club by telling the story of her mother and brother’s crossing (lines 1-7). Iliana’s story contributed to the novel in a way that constructed a book club discussion that asked for empathetic participation for all group members because the participation was based on affective sensibilities and emotional insight. By taking on the role of co-character, or cultural liaison, Iliana called on her peers to listen to her – that she was a more than just a sixth grader with a Mexican past, and that her history exemplified the human, lived aspects of the fictional story of Lupita and Salvador. Her story was compelling to Mrs. K, Ms. M, Federico and Benicio because it asked them to imaginatively participate in her life through feeling. In other words, Iliana, through story-telling, established a human link – based on the peril of a family member – to the frightful and mortal danger experienced by the fictional characters for all members of the book club. Her story has dignity because she taught others about the value of following a life through all its concrete contexts (Nussbaum, 1995). Her story had a commitment to the emotion of fear within a lived context, providing for the book club members the opportunity to use her story in how they imagined what the immigrant experience might be like. Therefore, the emotional appeal of her story about her family’s crossing became the catalyst for other book club members to consider their own lives, and how their stories might be similar to both Lupita and Iliana, as
well as a lesson in how they might know and judge others – that knowledge of someone’s history is a requirement to what it means to know someone. Their continued contemplation indicated the impact that these stories of immigration had on these students – that they thought about how their lives were intertwined with both Lupita and Iliana.

Iliana, Benicio, and Federico took the opportunity of the book club discussions and the immigration unit to compose their own lives in association with the immigrant tales of the novels. Their stories created a more positive and complex narrative of the immigration experience than the canonical story often told about immigrants, especially of Latin heritage. Particularly, their stories of immigration were articulated through the emotion attached to their various immigration experiences. All of them referred to the life of an immigrant as arduous. Iliana used the example of her story of a relative’s crossing (lines 1-7) to show the mortal danger of the immigration journey. Federico explicitly called the journey “really hard” (line 47) in his story about his parents. Finally, Benicio explicitly called someone’s citizenship status “lucky” (line 28 and 32) if s/he was born in the United States like he was. Together they had mapped the emotions of the immigration experience, and they were able to recognize the stories of others as emotionally similar to their own. This emotional insight prepared them to make such judgments about the characters’ lives, as well as about their own lives and the lives of their peers. I will return to emotional insight and judgment in the next chapter.

**Selena and the wall at the border.** This second example comes from Selena who read *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2006) with Danielle, Magda, and Veronica. Selena is a Latina whose family visits relatives in Mexico often. Similar to Iliana, Selena’s grade equivalency scores in reading are below grade level, and she has been designated as an English language learner in the school district for over three years. Ms. M and Mrs. K described Selena in similar
ways, namely that at the beginning of the year Mrs. K was concerned about her because “she was so hard to deal with” and Ms. M described her as “very negative” and “combative.” Yet, both teachers were also excited about Selena’s turnaround as she became, in Ms. M words, “just really excited about learning” over the course of the year. Selena’s experiences with traveling to and from Mexico became a significant contribution to her book club’s discussion of the border crossing issues raised in Budhos’s novel. The story I present here from Selena was emblematic of other stories she told during the book club discussions.

Selena was responding to *Ask Me No Questions*, which relates the story of the Hossain family, Muslim Bangledeshis living in post-9/11 New York City. Due to the caustic prejudice of their New York neighbors and the United States government’s decision to begin detaining entire Muslim families, the father decides to attempt to gain asylum in Canada for his family. The novel opens with the family’s failed attempt to cross into Canada because of their expired visas. The father is detained, but the daughters – Nadira and Aisha – are allowed to return to New York City, and they return to high school pretending that nothing is amiss at home. The daughters struggle with the possibility of being permanently separated from their father, the continued discrimination felt whenever they leave their home, as well as their feelings of invisibility because they are frightened to reveal their true circumstances to their friends and teachers. Due to the issues Budhos raised in her novel, border crossing and religious discrimination became topics discussed in this book club.

In this particular excerpt, Mrs. K was facilitating the book club discussion. Prior to Selena’s story, the group had discussed the wall along the United States/Mexico border in response to the novel’s Muslim Bangladeshi family’s unsuccessful border crossing attempt, and Selena told about one of her experiences at the Mexico/United States border. After a visit to
relatives living in Mexico, Selena shared a story, told in a way that revealed the fear and confusion she felt as a 10-year-old at the time, about coming through customs with her parents:

Selena: Like two years ago when I went [to Mexico], when we were coming back it made me sad because there were kids without shoes and they were trying to climb [the wall at the border]. It was pretty sad.

Mrs. K: So you actually saw this. Where was the part you saw?

Selena: I think it was in Chihuahua when I was crossing to come here, and the scariest part of it was when the [border guard] told us to come and my dad was talking to my mom, and then the guy got mad cause he said, he told my dad, “don’t talk to me through the glass. I’m here so you can talk to me.”

Mrs. K: And this was at a crossing station?

Selena: Yeah. And I got scared. He was talking to my dad and I thought he was in trouble.

Danielle: Did you like walk?

Selena: No, in the car.

The family in *Ask Me No Questions* is unsuccessful in their attempt to cross into Canada because they had allowed their visas to expire, but the experience is not completely devastating. The father is detained, but the rest of the family is permitted to return to the United States. In fact, the father’s entire conversation with the Canadian border guard was cordial, as the guard apologized for not being able to allow the family to enter Canada and then calmly explained the possible options for the family’s next steps. The experience described in the book is quite different from the experiences that some of the book club members have had at the Mexico
border (see Mrs. K’s story in the previous chapter). Selena took on the role of a co-author in her attempt to re-tell how a border crossing attempt might unfold. Selena told this story to disclose that the experience of speaking with a border guard, especially when one has certain ethnic backgrounds, is not always as pleasant as it is portrayed in Budhos’s novel. In fact, for Selena in her story, it was confusing, scary and nervous as she watched her father interact with a United States border guard (lines 53-56). This seemed like an idea that Selena wanted to share with her book club peers.

In offering her own story, Selena was also a cultural liaison. Her role as liaison is unique because it comes through narrative, a narrative full of emotion that asks her peers to imaginatively engage with her own past. In this case, Selena tells a story about an unfriendly border guard, which invites her book club peers to imagine how arduous it can be to cross a border. For Selena, the border guard was not a friend of her father when he “got mad” (line 54). Although it was not clear that this border guard was acting confrontational toward her family because they are of Mexican descent, it was clear that despite their legal United States citizenship, crossing the border can remain an uneasy endeavor. This was an important message for Selena to communicate. She told me in our interview that she understood that many people move to the United States to “have a better life” but that “moving was hard for her parents and it is hard for many people like Muslims.” This was similar to the message underlying Ask Me No Questions, and Selena’s message about unfriendly border guards extended the novel’s message in an important way – that border crossing can be more arduous than what the Hossain family experienced in the novel. Through her story-telling, she seemed to compose herself as someone who has crossed borders despite unfriendly border guards, and that her family has survived such endeavors.
Taking on the role of liaison was an important step for Selena. Instead of remaining the student who was “combative,” she became a student that wanted to help her book club peers with their own engagement with story-reading. In our interview, she stated that she liked working with these girls because “when we read stories together they would be cooperating with me.” Story-telling afforded Selena the possibility of becoming a leader, a role that I observed her avoiding earlier in the school year. This was illustrated in Danielle’s clarifying question (line 60). During the book club unit in the first semester, Danielle took on the role of group leader often, deciding on topics for discussion and validating group members’ ideas. She rarely asked questions of other group members, rather she had answers for other students. Yet, in the Ask Me No Questions book club in the second semester, she looked to Selena and others for answers. She and Selena had switched roles. This was instructive for Danielle, which I discuss below, and it was affirming for Selena as she told me in her interview when I asked her what she thought about this book club: “We worked, we usually worked with me, and we had lots of fun.”

The recognition of Selena, Magda, and Danielle. As described above, Selena’s story (lines 48-61) was an alternative version of border crossers than the one presented in Ask Me No Questions. Through this story and the following discussion, the book club members were able to expand their ideas about particular experiences of those attempting to cross a border because they read one version in the novel, but heard another version from Selena. The book club discussion provided a space for these various stories to be told and talked about. Specifically, Selena was revealing that there are varying histories, motives and desires behind border crossers. Following Nussbaum (1995), the fictional story of Nadira and Aisha and Selena’s story of the border guard ask these students to develop a way of seeing others – in this case, Muslims and immigrants – through literary imagination and narrative knowing, or a poetic, contingent, and
inner knowledge that stories help cultivate. Selena’s story revealed to her book club peers that there are the kids without shoes trying to climb the border wall (lines 49-50), but there are also Mexican American families trying to return home to the United States who are also troubled by the border guards (lines 52-56). These were different depictions than the one presented about the Hossain family in *Ask Me No Questions*, so they contributed to the possibilities for the book club members. Yet, despite these differences, Selena’s, Magda’s, and Danielle’s recognition of what it must feel like to be an immigrant were quite similar. Selena said that “it was pretty sad” (line 50) that the kids were trying to climb the wall without shoes. In her reading log, Magda wrote that she thought it was “really sad” that the father in the novel had to go to jail after his failed attempt to cross into Canada. Danielle also wrote about how fictional story “makes me feel sad that children have to be away from their parents” after she read about the father being separated from his daughters. These empathetic reactions were all based on emotional insight into the immigrants’ lives, and were used as pathways for understanding those immigrant lives. Additionally, the book club discussions cultivated the compassionate insights of literary imagination, which affords a seeing beyond the “facts” of a life.

This empathetic and compassionate understanding included taking up the sadness Selena projected with her telling. This understanding is exemplified in later book club discussions when Danielle took up the empathy of sadness, and Magda explained her confusion about other border crossers. Danielle, from a White, middle-class family, was one of the top academic students in this sixth grade class. This was reflected in her school work and in her scores on formal state and district assessments. Magda is a Bosnian American whose family are refugees from the Serb-Bosniak conflict, and has lived in the United States since she was two-years-old. Despite growing up in the United States, her English reading skills were below grade level equivalency
on both district and state tests, and she remained in the English as a second language program throughout her sixth grade year. These girls all come from unique backgrounds, yet they were able to recognize each other’s worldviews through the affective path of sadness. In other words, these students’ differences were bridged by the common currency of feeling as told through stories.

For instance, Danielle used “sad” to describe her ideas, thoughts, and feelings about the story of the character Aisha in *Ask Me No Questions* in her reading log 12 times. Using this emotional description was how Danielle expressed her empathy for Aisha’s situation: “I also think this is soooooooo [sic] sad because it is through [Aisha’s] eyes it makes me feel like her.” Clearly, Danielle has taken on the emotion she imagined Aisha felt about her immigration status. This affective sensibility was brought to the book club discussion by Danielle and utilized in her discussion of other immigrant’s situations. In this excerpt, Magda and Danielle were talking about the wall at the Mexico/United States border with Mrs. K:

62 Magda: How do they climb over [the wall]?
63 Mrs. K: They’re helping each other. Somebody gets up, they’re hoisting each other up, and then the other guy’s pulling.
64 Danielle: It’s really sad.
65 Mrs. K: It is.
66 Danielle: It shows that they’re desperate.

Danielle once again illustrated her empathy, which takes literary imagination, for someone else’s situation, in this case immigrants who are trying to breach the border wall. She was trying to make sense of the reasons why someone would risk everything to move to a new country. Aisha’s and Selena’s stories opened a possible path toward that understanding in that their stories
told about how border crossers often feel when confronted with border guards, whether one has proper documentation, like Selena, or one does not have papers, like Aisha. As Danielle worked to see the lives of both fictional characters and her peers through the actors’ own eyes, she made sense of those lives through her affective sensibilities. She began to see how her own “underground” life was connected to both Aisha and Selena through the feeling of sadness. As she said in our interview, “it was nice to have [Selena and Magda] in my group” because they “taught us a lot,” specifically about immigration, the border, and Islam. More important, after watching the video of Selena telling her story, Danielle said she wanted to talk to her dad about what happened. The idea of interviewing Selena’s father seemed to indicate that Danielle cared about what happened to him, as well as what happened to Selena. She said she “felt like kind of bad for Selena” because she had to experience that situation at the border. Through emotion, Danielle expressed her desire to be a part of the life of Selena. The insight that Danielle expressed in her reading log, in the book club discussions, and in her interviews would not have likely come about if the teachers’ book club curriculum had solely focused on basic reading comprehension or literary conventions.

Magda approached discussing the lives of the characters in *Ask Me No Questions* similarly to Selena and Danielle. As I mentioned, Magda wrote in her reading log about Aisha’s father that she felt it “was really sad because her dad goes to jail.” During a book club discussion, she also spoke about how Aisha and her sister, Nadira, must be “depressed ’cause they don’t know what’ll happen with their parents or what’ll happen with the college stuff.” Magda was referring to Aisha’s dad’s ongoing incarceration and Nadira’s lack of opportunity to attend college after high school because she no longer had a current visa. Magda does not remember her immigration from Bosnia to the United States because she was only two-years-old
(see her story in the previous chapter), but she told me she was immediately interested in the
novel because the characters were Muslim like herself, which affected how she related to those
characters. When I asked her what she thought about the Muslim characters, she said:

68  Magda: That [living in New York City] was probably hard because people thought
69  that they were terrorists and everything, and if they knew that they were
70  Muslim, if somebody found out, they would probably like arrest them or
71  something, like the whole family, and send them back to their country.

As Marcus (2002) explained, the affect is actually required to “invoke reason and to enable
reason’s conclusions to be enacted” (p. 31) and that emotion “gives rise to action” (p. 28). For
Magda, in these instances, as well at other times during the immigration unit, she used emotional
markers – sad, depressed, hard – to indicate that there was something wrong with how the
Muslim characters were being treated, that there was something wrong about how their lives
were progressing. Then, Magda explained what exactly was wrong about what was happening to
the Hossain family – unfair incarceration, unable to attend college, religious stereotyping. As
well, she narrated the similarities between the characters and herself. Specifically, the characters
were Muslim like herself, and that their oppression is her oppression as she angrily indicated in a
book club discussion about how Muslims are treated at airports: “I don’t get, what’s, I don’t get
why they judge you by how you look like ’cause they look like normal people.” The “you” and
the “they” in her statement simultaneously refer to herself and to other Muslims, illustrating how
she identifies with others who have similar backgrounds. Through these statements, Magda
blurred the boundaries usually associated between “I” and “you” and “they”; there are no longer
separate quarters for Magda and the fictional Muslims in Ask Me No Questions nor between her
and the imagined Muslims in the airport because the concept of individuality has been
intertwined with the concept of community (cf. McGinley & Lewis, 2010). Magda was mapping the emotional web that connected her to the fictional Hossain family, and making that map public in the book club discussions provided an opportunity for her peers to find their own place on that map.

For instance, Selena in her interview made clear the paths that linked her to Magda through the fictional Hossain family in *Ask Me No Questions*. We were talking about Magda’s reaction in the book club discussions about Muslims, and she raised some of the problems the characters were facing in post-9/11 New York City:

Selena: All of the Muslim like started losing their jobs, well that was in the first chapters of the book, and, yeah, the Muslims were losing jobs and that started with the 9/11 ’cause the ones that went to, that got in the airplanes, they were Muslim, and from then on they thought the Muslims were bad.

Mark: And what do you think about this reaction?

Selena: It’s bad ’cause not all the Muslims are bad ’cause like one of our friends is Muslim and she’s not mean or anything.

Selena articulated a clear vision of the emotive trajectory on which the fictional characters, Magda, and she travel. As I discussed previously, Selena took on the role of co-author which afforded her a position in the book club group as someone who could extend the immigration experience portrayed in the novel through her own experiences. As a co-author, her link to the characters was clear in that theirs and her experiences were related. By the end of the book club unit, she had also established the link between the characters and a peer, and how that link is part of her own life. All of these links were emotionally marked, in this last case by her evaluation
That the treatment of Muslims was “bad ’cause not all the Muslims are bad” (line 77), which she knew through her friendship with Magda was an untrue stereotype.

Selena, Danielle, and Magda were mapping the complex emotional web intertwining their lives, despite their cultural differences, through the warmth that came with sharing stories within a community. An essential component of story-telling is that the story is told to a particular audience. In these book club discussions, the audience had members with a diversity of perspectives based on their own life experiences. Danielle is member of a different social class. Magda is a member of a different religion. Selena is a member of a different ethnicity. Yet, these differences were superseded by the common currency of feeling as told through life stories, and these students recognized each other’s life as part of their own. As Selena presented her story, other book club members could see and feel themselves connected to that story. As Magda articulated her feelings about how Muslims are treated, other book club members could see and feel that oppression’s effect on Magda, as well as consider why such oppression was wrong. Nourishing the shared humanity within a community of story-readers and story-tellers was an essential element to these book club discussions, which were constructed in a way that valued responses based on introspection, responses intended to build interpersonal understanding, as well as responses that demonstrated comprehension of the surface features of the fictional text. With these teachers’ guidance, these students moved beyond these surface features into each other’s lives.

Jaime gets the story right. Jaime, in this final example, authored his own stories in response to the literature and his book club’s conversations, using story-telling as a co-author to refute the fictional story. Jaime is a reticent Mexican American student who had missed most of his elementary schooling because of his fight against childhood leukemia, and he was still
missing many school days during his sixth grade year. He usually arrived to class late and sat by himself on most days. Mrs. K referred to him as an “outsskirts kind of kid” who was a “loner and real lethargic,” which she ascribed to his health issues. Yet, the book club unit on immigration seemed to spark something in Jaime. Ms. M remarked that prior to reading stories of immigration, “he never spoke [in class] and then he really talked a lot.” Jaime scored in the lowest quartile on the state reading test in fifth grade, and had been in the school district’s English as second language program for over three years. In the book club with Ernesto, Geoff, Jacob, and Kaleb, Jaime told many personal narratives in response to the story of Crossing the Wire (Hobbs, 2006) and in response to his book club peers’ discussions, using his family’s intimate knowledge of immigration.

*Crossing the Wire* tells the tale of Victor and Rico and their attempt to move from Mexico to the United States because of falling corn prices. The trip is not an easy one, as they are attacked by thieves, cheated by coyotes, and accosted by border officials. Victor finally finds help in a sympathetic United States citizen, but the story ends by leaving Victor with a very uncertain future as his new life in the United States begins. Hobbs paints a provocative picture of life in border towns, both north and south of the Mexico/United States border, and the story raises serious questions about exactly who are the victims of national borders, namely the poor and disenfranchised.

At one point in the novel, Victor tries to stow atop mata gente (translated, people killer), also known as *El Tren de la Muerte* (translated, The Train of Death) north to the United States border. The train gets its moniker from the number of immigrants who die falling off the train, get mangled by its wheels trying to jump aboard, or are raped, beaten, and killed by gangs that prey on the stowaways (Nazario, 2007). Victor gets hurt falling off the train, but survives.
Geoff and Kaleb, both White, native English speakers, tried to discern how Victor manages to get help. Kaleb began by interrupting the group to make sure he understood where Victor was when he got hurt by the train, and how he got medical help. In response, Geoff then made an attempt to explain how the health care system worked:

79  Kaleb:  Wait, when [Victor] jumped off was he in Mexico?
80  Mrs. K:  What?
81  Kaleb:  When he jumped off the bus, I mean the train, and he had to go to the hospital, how did he pay for it?
82  Mrs. K:  I wondered that same thing.
83  Geoff:  He didn’t pay for it because what I think they do is, the hospital just takes them in and they pay them later. ’Cause I think they took him in and they had no idea who he was, and then what happened when the police officer was on a coffee break or something, he just ran out. And that’s why his leg was bleeding when he got into the Suburban.

Both Geoff and Kaleb approached this problem with a clear middle-class perspective. First, Kaleb wanted to know about the restitution for services rendered by the hospital (line 82). Second, Geoff had the idea that payment can be rendered later (lines 84-85). They expected that people injured in an accident would be rushed to the hospital for immediate treatment, which probably matched their own life experiences. The actual situation of trying to stow away on this train without food or money was lost, at this moment, on them. Mrs. K’s reaction after watching this excerpt in our interview indicated how she perceived Geoff and Kaleb were approaching this issue:
Further, Geoff and Kaleb approached the issue of having money to pay for health care from a rather non-narrative perspective. Geoff’s explanation was based on the logic of the situation, and not the narrative sensibilities of the situation, of which the affect would be an essential dimension – particularly the fear of not being able to get the health care needed to help a loved one or the shame of not having health insurance. As Geoff and Kaleb seemed to have missed the emotion associated with Victor’s story, they needed another story to call attention to that emotion among the book club. Story-telling provides the unique opportunity for such an endeavor because stories are constructed in ways that ask the reader/listener to engage with the story-teller through imaginative and emotional means. Engaging in another’s story in this way makes possible for the knowledge of another to be circulated. In other words, it would only be possible for Geoff to completely understand the life of Victor if he follows his life through all his multifaceted dimensions. As the book club discussion progressed, both Mrs. K and Jaime attempt to provide a more multifaceted account of what Victor’s life might be like.

After Geoff’s attempted explanation of how Victor could have been admitted into the hospital without having money to pay for services (lines 84-88), the discussion continued on the
topic of health care and the \textit{mata gente}. Mrs. K first began to broaden their perspective about how health care works for those from a different social class or in different situations than perhaps Geoff’s or Kaleb’s current social class or situation. Then, Jaime, quietly but with clear anger in his voice, told a family story that refuted the possibility that Victor could even survive a fall from the \textit{mata gente}; a story that positioned Jaime as a co-author and cultural liaison with personal knowledge about the danger of an immigrant’s life:

Mrs. K: It’s really interesting that [Kaleb] brought [the hospital care] up because when I read that I thought that that was unrealistic because I don’t think that people that are on those trains, that are sneaking on those trains up North don’t get that kind of treatment. [The hospitals] just go, “oh well, tough luck.” You know, I’ve read stories about people showing up with, you know, their arms off at people’s doors, and the people that live close [to the train] trying to help them to survive with really bad injuries, and there were no ambulances.

Jaime: There was this guy.

Mrs. K: Could you talk louder?

Jaime: There was this guy, who was related to us, but he was coming to over here, and he fell off the train and the wheel cut off his leg. He was related to us.

Mrs. K: Do you know what happened to him? Did he get to go to the hospital?

Jaime: No. He died right there.

Mrs. K: He died right there.
Jaime: ’Cause they got cut right here {makes chopping motion to his upper thigh}.

Kaleb: ’Cause of blood loss.

Mrs. K: Definitely.

Jaime: Yeah, he lost a lot of blood so he died.

Mrs. K: Wow. And I think that’s more like the stories I’ve read. There isn’t that kind of [emergency] help.

Jaime expressed quiet anger in his telling of his deceased relative. The anger could be heard in the intensity of his voice, and his restatement that this story was about a relative (lines 107-109). Particularly, the quick telling through curt sentences: “he fell off the train” and “the wheel cut off his leg” (line 108). Two simple phrases to convey the suffering involved in this story. Similarly, Jaime’s quiescence in telling his story matched his personality, as revealed in Mrs. K’s request for him to “talk louder” (line 106), but it was also indicative of the content of the story and his associated anger; this was a story not to be shouted and applauded, rather it was one that was personal and tragic. His story lacked the drama of Hobbs’s textual telling of Victor’s experience with *mata gente*. Yes, Hobbs is a professional novelist, and he employs dramatic devices for obvious reasons, but his telling does not match the flesh and blood of Jaime’s experiences, who was present in the room. It seemed that Jaime had an impression of the fright in that he embodies some of the emotion Victor might have felt when he was injured by the train in the novel, and his telling of his relative’s story added a dimensionality to the experience of Victor that seemed to be missed by his book club peers. It also seemed that Jaime has felt similar emotions when he heard about the train killing his relative. Jaime’s understanding was in direct opposition to how Geoff and Kaleb seemed to feel or think about this
plot event. In his family story, the *mata gente* destroyed methodically, coldly. When I asked Jaime about this story, he said he told it because “it’s not easy to cross, you risk your life and everything” and he wanted his peers to know “how hard it is in Mexico. How hard it is to cross. And how Mexico is so poor.” Jaime used his anger about the *mata gente*, a particular aspect of some immigrants’ journeys, to tell a more complex story to his book club peers about the lived experiences of some immigrants who are similar to his relative killed by the train. It seemed important to him that his peers have the true story of immigrants like his relative, and how many immigrants risk their lives in their attempts to move to the United States. The nature of his knowledge was projected through the affective sensibilities of his narrative. His narrative offered a nuanced perspective on what happens on the *mata gente* that the novel did not. His peers were given another opportunity to imaginatively engage in someone’s story, particularly the sense of danger and death associated with the immigrants’ attempts to ride this train, as well as the idea that they attempt this journey because of the hope associated with coming to a place with more opportunities.

As a co-author of the dangers associated with immigrating, Jaime used stories, which are inherently full of emotion, to get that message told. He knew that people die trying to come to the United States. His anger about this fact was disclosed in another story he told his peers during the book club discussions. This story was about his uncle’s tragic experience with a border patrol, which Jaime told to the group after Victor and Rico from *Crossing the Wire* have trouble with the border patrol when attempting to cross the Mexico border into the United States:

120 Jaime: I had an uncle who was like 20-years-old. He came, well he didn’t make
121 it over cause there was this like immigration cop that supposedly he was a
122 coyote. So [my uncle] was crossing, [the immigration cop] like let the
people cross. So when he was crossing he told the other cops and they shot, they started shooting at [the immigrants].

Mrs. K: Did they shoot him?
Jaime: Yeah.
Mrs. K: Was he killed?
Jaime: He was killed. He was shot two times in the back.

This story invited Jaime’s book club peers to imaginatively perceive the death of his relative. That imaginative engagement demanded that his book club peers (re)consider the life of an immigrant in particular ways, namely that his uncle was betrayed by the immigration cop (lines 123-124) and died by being shot in the back (line 128). During our interview, Jaime told me that he “used to say that crossing over was very easy but after [my uncle] it made me realize that crossing was hard.” Again, Jaime embodied the anger he felt about his uncle being shot, but also left it open for other book club members to feel anger when telling his story about the deception of the “immigration cop” posing as a coyote (lines 123-124) and the death of his uncle, especially the detail of his uncle “being shot two times in the back” (line 128). In other words, Jaime extended an invitation to others to feel a particular way about his uncle, and, in association, about Victor in Crossing the Wire. He used story-telling to express that anger and sadness to the book club, rather than labeling the border patrol officers in the novel as evil or mean or unfair. In other words, providing an alternative story to the one told in Crossing the Wire positioned Jaime as someone who knew about immigration in a way that helped to complete the story about Victor and Rico. Hobbs, the author, often pointed out through his story the danger involved in attempting to illegally cross the Mexico/United States border, as well as the factors that push people to attempt such a dangerous journey in order to financially support
their families. Yet, Hobbs did not explore (at least adequately enough for Jaime) the ultimate sacrifice that many immigrants make in trying to find better opportunities to help their families. Jaime used his stories to ensure that his book club explored this aspect, to broaden and emotionally deepen the story of immigration for his peers, and to invite his peers into his life—a life that includes real, lived stories of immigration that augment the fictional stories discussed in his book club group.

The empathy of Kaleb, Geoff, and Ernesto. Jaime’s stories about his relatives killed in their attempts to emigrate from Mexico to the United States (lines 107-117 and 120-128) called for empathetic responses. Yet, it is also true that not everyone is prepared to extend empathy or compassion in every situation, to every story s/he hears. As I mentioned, Geoff’s and Kaleb’s initial responses to the experiences of the character Victor from Crossing the Wire lacked emotional insight, or the knowledge to make a compassionate stance about Victor’s situation. This was prior to Jaime positioning himself as a co-author and telling some of his family’s immigration stories, stories that tragically humanized the fictional story of Victor. These stories, along with other stories told during the book club discussions by students and teachers, seemed to inform other group members on what it meant to consider feeling when it comes to another’s story. Kaleb began that work in the moment by engaging in Jaime’s story through his clarifying comment about how Jaime’s relative was killed by the mata gente (line 115). Kaleb continued to consider emotion as the book club unit on immigration progressed.

Kaleb is a White student with mercurial moods. He would often enter the classroom at the beginning of class smiling and laughing with friends, but could quickly become irritable at any perceived transgression from a peer or from the teacher or at a requested task that he did not want to pursue. Sometimes being asked to read would make him grumpy, and sometimes he
would gladly curl into a corner of the room and read his novel avidly. According to formal assessments, Kaleb was a proficient sixth grade reader, but his school work often reflected his particular mood on that day. He and Geoff were fast friends and sat next to each another almost every day.

Although reluctant to be interviewed, Kaleb somewhat opened up while discussing the stories Jaime told during the book club discussions. Kaleb articulated his empathy for Jaime, as well as his compassionate opinions about immigration policy:

129 Mark: What did you think about [Jaime’s] story?
130 Kaleb: It’s sad. To lose part of your family like that. I think the wall is a waste of money because people will always get in.
131 Mark: You mentioned amnesty to me. Can you talk more about that?
132 Kaleb: That we should give amnesty to all the people who were already in the country. I think this is a good idea.
133 Mark: Why do you think it’s a good idea?
134 Kaleb: Because they get, I mean, they’ll get, like the illegal people, they can get to, to, to get them, ’cause if like they are saying bad stuff. Like people are trying to get them to do bad things like sell them drugs, and if they don’t buy it, then they’ll tell la migra or they’ll get abused.
135 Mark: Abused? By who?
136 Kaleb: Their husband.
137 Mark: And they can’t tell anybody?
138 Kaleb: Right, because they’ll get sent back.
Kaleb began with an emotional evaluation of Jaime’s story about the death of his uncle, calling the story “sad” (line 130). As Marcus (2002) would explain, this emotional marker then led to his explanation of how he might solve such problems, namely tearing down the wall and providing amnesty to undocumented immigrants. In other words, Kaleb saw the situation as sad, which was a way for him to identify that there was a problem with how immigrants are treated, and that evaluation led to his compassionate ideas about how he would help alleviate the issue. Further, his recognition that immigrants could be forced into buying drugs and being abused (lines 136-139) illustrated his emotional insight into the possible life of an undocumented immigrant. These possible hardships were reasons Kaleb used to support why he believed amnesty would be a “good idea” (line 134). Empathy for someone else, brought on at least in part by Jaime’s stories, contributed to Kaleb’s perspective on these policy stances.

Similar to Kaleb, the stories told by Jaime (and, later in the unit, by Ernesto) seemed to foster Geoff’s empathy for certain immigrant experiences. Geoff was one of the top students in this sixth grade class, both in his attitude about school and in his aptitude on formal assessments, which indicated that he read well above grade equivalency. He was also an enthusiastic participant in class conversations, and often helped other students with their school work. His articulation of how the health care system works in response to Victor’s hospital experience (lines 84-88) was indicative of how he approached a problem or issue raised in class, with confident knowledge and logical explanation. Our conversation during his interview after the immigration book club unit was completed, however, revealed a nuanced perspective on immigrants’ experiences and on immigration policy from Geoff.

Geoff was one of the few students who did not really like having to read with a book club. His primary complaint was that everyone in the group was usually in a different spot so it
made it difficult to have a discussion without revealing some future plot event. I inferred from his comments that he meant that everyone else was usually behind where he was in the story, which made it frustrating for him during the book club discussions. Yet, when I asked him about the *Crossing the Wire* book club, he responded quite positively:

Geoff: We had detailed discussions about the book and certain things that happened in the book and we kind of linked it up with stuff that happened in real life and other stuff, so it was kind of like an historical fiction. So, that’s what’s fun about those kinds of books because you can kind of link it up to your own experiences or other people’s experiences.

It was clear that Geoff valued the chance to take the fictional story and “link it up” (lines 147-148) with stories from the lives of his peers. When specifically discussing Jaime’s story about his uncle, Geoff explained that it made him realize that the novel “wasn’t this author just writing about something, it was linked to real people’s experiences. That was kind of cool.” Albeit, Geoff’s descriptors – fun and cool – were still lacking the emotional empathy that other students in this class were using, but he was beginning to understand the emotional dimensions that the reading and telling of these stories held for some of his peers. This understanding led to compassionate insights about the nature of immigration, as he outlined later in his interview:

Geoff: I learned how it was, reading the book, it was just amazing what these people went through. The dropping corn prices and how they were really poor and how they would need to send fathers and sons across this dangerous border to go to an equally dangerous place.

He revealed here that he had possibly complicated his perspective of what it might mean, what it might feel like, to make the decision to emigrate from the familiar place of home to the
dangerous place of another country. The perspective Geoff articulated here, after the immigration unit was over, was significantly different from the logical description of how Victor navigated the hospital. Geoff moved from a dispassionate explanation of how Victor obtained medical treatment to an affective description of some factors that push people to immigrate. By indicating his amazement (line 149) that people would attempt such a dangerous journey (lines 151-152), he demonstrated compassion for an immigrant, which was missing from Geoff’s previous contributions to the book club discussions.

Ernesto’s empathy for Jaime manifested itself through his own border crossing story. Like Jaime, Ernesto is a Mexican American, English language learner, and he named Jaime as one of his friends in the class. Ernesto came to this class later in the first semester, and, therefore, his formal reading assessments from the beginning of the year were not available. He was a quiet student during his initial days in the class, but began to contribute more during small group situations as the year progressed. Ms. M remarked on his leadership skills during the book club after the immigration unit, as he got “really into it and [was] a leader. We were working on the, we’re doing like a reader’s theater for [The Green Book] because that’s a shorter book, so we’re writing a play, and he took like four roles.” Ernesto was also a constant contributor to the immigration book club discussions.

He, too, told a few stories to his book club peers while they were talking about Crossing the Wire. For example, he told this story about him and his mother crossing when he was an infant:

Ernesto: When I was little, like one-year or like six-months, we were in Mexico. I was born here but then we left back when I was four-months, and then
when I was six-months we went back, and then my mom was holding me.

She was about to get caught but she didn’t.

In our interview, I asked him why he told that story to his book club, and he claimed that he “wanted to tell the story ’cause Jaime told his story.” Similar to Melosa and Iliana in the Lupita Mañana book club, Ernesto wanted to support Jaime through the telling of another border crossing story. The motivation behind Ernesto’s telling was his empathy for Jaime as he told his stories to the book club. After watching the video of Jaime, both Mrs. K and Ms. M remarked on Ernesto’s reaction during Jaime’s telling. Mrs. K was impressed with how “focused” Ernesto was on Jaime, and Ms. M remarked, “when [Jaime] was talking I was watching Ernesto. He was definitely listening, you know, looking at [Jaime].” For a student who was often labeled “antsy” by the same teachers, this type of reaction seemed to illustrate Ernesto’s respect for what Jaime was revealing to the group. Then, based on his desire to tell his story because of what Jaime told it would also seem that Ernesto had compassion for Jaime and his relatives. By sharing that his mom was close to being caught but escaped, Ernesto was also telling Jaime that he and his family was not alone with their immigrant past.

The empathy generated in the Crossing the Wire book club was indicative of how other book clubs began to consider the life of an immigrant. Jaime used story-telling as a way to participate in the book club discussion, which afforded him an opportunity to add dimensionality to the conceptions his book club members had about immigrants. Because stories have emotion, and emotion involves complex thought about subjects and objects (Nussbaum, 2001), the added dimensionality of Jaime’s stories appealed to the compassion of other book club members. This was evidenced in Kaleb’s and Geoff’s observations after the book club unit was completed, as well as the solidarity Ernesto illustrated through his own story of border crossing. Empathetic
participation in stories is natural because life-telling calls for such participation as the audience comes to know the life of the characters. This idea was embodied through the kind of participation Jaime invited through his stories, as well as how his book club peers chose to participate in making judgments about immigrants and immigration policy – an idea I return to in the next chapter.

Complicating One’s Narrative

Taking on roles of story-teller as co-characters or co-authors provided the opportunity for Iliana, Selena, and Jaime to position themselves in a new light that, based on my classroom observations, they were previously reluctant to shine upon themselves in other classroom situations. This new light illuminated their stories as ones that went beyond the canonical perspectives often associated with immigrants and immigration, namely that immigration is a human endeavor fraught with sadness and hope, danger and success, death and life. By reading the stories of Lupita and Salvador, of Nadira and Aisha, of Victor and Rico, along with discussing these stories with their teachers and peers, they were able to complicate their own narratives in that they could contribute to the book club discussion by extending the fictional stories in multifaceted ways. Specifically, their personal stories contributed a human, lived face to the fictionalized accounts of the characters in the various novels. Iliana’s, Selena’s, and Jaime’s stories invited imaginative engagement from their book club peers because they asked their audience to step into the shoes of their relatives – to know what they knew and to feel what they felt from their border crossings. Further, their lived experiences, as told through stories of relatives, enhanced the fictional stories through the story-tellers embodiment of the fear, anger, sadness, abandonment, and hope evoked by the stories they told. Their own narratives became intertwined with the fictional stories of immigrants. Through story-telling, they became cultural
liaisons for students who did not have the same immigrant cultural knowledge. The act of story-telling circulated these emotions among their book club peers, resulting in personal associations with each other, as well as empathetic understandings of each other, evidenced by the stories other book club members told inside and outside the book club discussions, and the reactions of other book club members to Iliana’s, Selena’s, and Jaime’s stories during the interviews.

The story-tellers and the practice of story-telling in these book clubs also engendered imaginative ways of seeing other people that cultivated going beyond the facts of a person’s story. For instance, Iliana’s story asked her book club peers to envision the life of an immigrant through Iliana’s own familial history. As a story-teller, she told about her history through narrative, instead of simply relating the fact that her mother and older brother are immigrants, and the narrative evoked a “poetic seeing” (Nussbaum, 1995) in which her peers participated. This poetic seeing involved understanding the emotive dimensions of Iliana’s relatives’ lives that facts cannot embody. This understanding enhanced these book club members’ affective sensibilities about the lives of distant others. And, hopefully, this knowledge of others with emotional insight and empathetic reasoning became part of these readers’ process of engaging in others’ stories, both fictional and lived.
Chapter Six

Implications and Future Directions

My study explored the expressive ways of reading two teachers endorsed in their sixth grade Language and Literacy class, and how these ways of reading were taken up by the sixth grade students in this class. In brief, I found that these students used story-telling as a way to respond to story-reading that afforded them opportunities to explore the lives of fictional characters, the lives of their school peers, and their own lives. This exploration often was characterized through emotional expressions, and interlaced with an imagining about the affective dimensions of living. This was true because of how stories function to convey the particular emotional consequences of relationship and action for fictional characters, as well as how stories evoke emotive personal responses in readers and listeners. Further, through story-reading and story-telling in this book club unit, feeling became the vehicle for entering the complex world of a specific group of people – immigrants. Of course, discussing immigrant lives and immigration issues was a primary purpose of these teachers when they chose to create this particular thematic book club unit, yet I found that the ways in which these students made sense of the topic of immigration was through the understanding of the lives affected by immigration. In other words, they attempted to navigate the immigrant lives through affective dimensions. In this way, story-telling was a sophisticated interpretive response to literature because it was indicative of these students’ capability of negotiating the emotional subjectivities of another. Story-telling was a pathway for these students to develop a more nuanced perspective on what it means to be an immigrant. Specifically, this perspective involved these
students’ articulation of their empathetic reasoning about immigration because they were emotionally invested in immigrants’ stories, both fictional and real.

For the teachers in this sixth grade English language arts course, I found that their curricular and instructional decisions influenced and supported specific ways of responding to and discussing literature. Namely, the teachers prompted students to respond with personal thoughts, feelings, and wonderings prior to the book club discussions. Then, they used the students’ responses to these prompts as the basis for the book club discussions in ways that encouraged the students to tell personal stories and ask about the lives of their school peers. Finally, the teachers modeled the discursive practice of story-telling so that their students could envision what it meant to respond to literature expressively. Although the teachers did not explicitly acknowledge that delving into the affective sensibilities of characters and peers was the purpose of these practices, this was the effect of their curricular and instructional decisions.

Based on these findings for students and teachers, I delineate in this chapter the implications of my research for how the field of education literacy studies might conceive the function of story-telling as an expressive response to literature, as well as how the implications of my study inform secondary school literature curriculum and instruction.

**Research Implications**

I consider there to be two major implications of my work for the field of education literacy studies. First, story-telling for these students reading in a book club was a specific mode of response to literature that seemed to create unique experiences for the development of emotional insight and empathetic reasoning (see Figure 6-1, the bolded numbers). One of the most significant themes that emerged throughout my study of student book club reading was the students’ willingness and ability to tell stories in response to fiction, as made possible through
the facilitation of these teachers, and that their stories were imbued with the emotional understanding of each other. This type of understanding tended to add dimension to the characters through testimonies (on behalf of the characters) by the students, as well added a transparency to the affective lives of readers during the book club discussions. Story-telling, then, made it possible for many of these students to imagine what it means to live an immigrant life, in all of its contexts, and develop empathetic perspectives about the social, cultural, and political issues that affected those lives.

Figure 6-1. Book Club Members' String of Processes, Reading Further

For example, certain students in this sixth grade English language arts class I studied expressed their insight into the emotional dimensions of the fictional characters’ lives. They were prompted to consider this “content” of the stories, both in their reading logs and in the weekly book club discussions. By content, I mean that discussing the affective sensibilities of
characters, as well as school peers, is not often the purpose of literature study in English language arts classrooms, at all levels. Instead, literature study that assists students in finding textual evidence in order to analyze theme, plot, setting, and point of view is privileged by accountability standards (see the Common Core State Standards Initiative, http://www.corestandards.org). Reading literature with feeling showed the importance of reading stories to these students in the “now”, or in the immediate, local social/cultural context of their own experiences. Reading in the book clubs was no longer something to be done in preparation for a test or in preparation for high school or for college, as if the work asked of the students is always in preparation for some distant future task, which devalues the students’ present. Reading and telling stories instead became important in the “now” as these students came to understand the idea that story-reading and story-telling can broaden and deepen their own narratives and worldviews – work that is exigent to building relationships across cultures – and that is work valuable to the present of daily living.

Therefore, the emotional participation of these students expanded what was possible for them to take away from their literature discussions. Many of these students came to see the crisscrossed, networked aspect of their lives and the lives of immigrants, or how they were linked through the experience of the human condition despite their social, cultural, and/or political differences. Many of them, such as Iliana and Selena, could envision their own pasts intersecting with the lives of the fictional characters. These students took on the roles of co-characters and/or co-authors; roles which might not have been available to them if story-telling was not a legitimate mode of literary response in their book club discussions. The field of education literacy studies should consider how reading with emotion and imagination can expand the possibilities for young readers, as I have described, in English language arts classrooms, as
these possibilities can be construed as more equitable ways of engagement for youth of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds.

A second implication of my research was the consequences of reading and telling stories on the kinds of understanding that these students acquired about themselves and the issue of immigration. The teachers and students in this sixth grade class took many risks while reading and discussing stories of immigration in their book clubs. The teachers not only chose a controversial theme of study, but also constructed a reading space designed to elicit their students’ personal stories of moving to the United States. The students, then, took the risk of disclosing family stories that revealed actions involving possible civic repercussions and, in this particular time of United States history, possible criminal repercussions as well. Inherent in these risks and stories was the human endeavor of imagining and comprehending the affective dimensions of others’ lives. Building this type of knowledge about how affect ripples through a life, as well as making perspicuous how affect is the “connective tissue” (Weinstein, 2003) bringing people together, were important consequences for how these teachers and students engaged in reading in this English language arts class. Further, considering their own affective sensibilities in response to reading and discussing stories of immigration led to more complex emotional insight and empathetic reasoning about immigrants and social policies on immigration issues. In particular, deepening their story-telling insight led to a particular type of empathetic reasoning, or an understanding rooted in feelings as the basis for negotiating the subjectivities of another, about how immigrants are compelled to live, as well as the topic of immigration as it is perceived within society. The students’ talk about immigration was laced with their own affective sensibilities, or how they made sense of the feeling evoked by the topic. They used their discussions in which they imagined the emotional lives of fictional immigrants and the
immigrant pasts of their peers’ families to (re)consider how they reasoned about the treatment of immigrants and immigration policies. In other words, through story-telling they developed empathetic ways to think about a vital component of United States history and contemporary society.

Acquiring empathetic reasoning is essential to cultivating compassionate judgment about others’ lives within a more ethical and just society (Nussbaum, 1995). The emotional and imaginative participation in the book club discussions provided a vehicle for circulating thought on/about immigration. These students continued to contemplate the issues raised in the novels and how these issues affected them long after the book club discussions were over. As Nussbaum (1995) explained, fiction “acknowledges the moral importance of the play of the imagination” (p. 35). In other words, reading and telling stories can allow for the reader to consider how to treat others as s/he would imagine s/he would want to be treated. These students’ imaginative engagement with the fictional stories of immigration presented in the novels, and then similar engagement with peers’ stories during the book club discussions, instilled in these students the moral importance of rethinking their conceptions of immigrants, as revealed in their discourse. This rethinking then often led to more compassionate and empathetic responses to immigration.

Marcus (2002) argued for a more sentimental citizenry, claiming that the rational-only citizen will not be moved to action without emotion. That citizen “will not react when presented with spectacle and therefore will not invest in learning what significance the situation may hold” (p. 141). Further, emotion is part of any reason to act in the presence of a group, or why people bind over situation and spectacle. This link between emotion and reason is what disrupts comfortable habits, stimulates public deliberation, and puts new understandings into action. In
this particular English language arts classroom, reading stories of border crossing, students without immigrant pasts were exposed to stories that asked them to rethink their previous conceptions of immigrants. Their dispositions about the topic were affectively disrupted as they witnessed both the fictional stories of the characters and the lived stories of their peers, which were made possible through the teachers’ facilitation of the story-telling response practice. These stories seemed to complicate the students’ conceptions in a way that asked them to rethink/reconsider their ideas about immigrants and immigration. To put it another way, previously unquestioned perspectives about immigrants and immigration were called upon for deliberation. Specifically, these students presented a diversity of conceptions. Some talked about the dangerous lives immigrants lead in order to have hope for a better life in a new place. Some talked about the cruelties put upon immigrants by people in positions of power, such as policeman, immigration officials, and employers. Others lamented upon the inequities associated with citizenship status. Of course, many remained silent participants, and there were a few instances of derogatory sentiments, which teachers and/or peers immediately refuted. In other words, the work done by the students presented in chapters five and six is only representative of their own perspectives, and it would be disingenuous to imply that this evocative approach was true for all the students in this class, or in the other classes taught by Mrs. K and Ms. M.

Yet, some of the students were explicit about their reasoning about, or emotional and empathetic understanding of, immigration issues. In the Ask Me No Questions book club, Danielle was one student who seemed to contemplate the issues presented in the novel outside the space of the book club discussion. In her reading log and classroom interactions, she often made evaluative comments about how the fictional immigrants were treated in the story,
particularly how society officials acted toward these characters. In her interview after the book club unit was over, Danielle expressed her empathetic reasoning about these immigration issues as she made compassionate, ethical judgments about distant others. Based on my interview with her, Danielle had not come to these judgments prior to reading this novel or participating in these book club discussions. Of course, it is impossible to say if she would or would not have come to the same conclusions by reading the novel on her own, but it is possible to say that the book club discussions facilitated her decisions in some fashion. Particularly, she came to the realization that certain groups are not “very accepting” and are treating certain immigrants “really badly.” Her empathetic perspective that the way certain groups are treated was brought on by her participation in the book club discussions – specifically the discussion about undocumented immigrants’ options for higher education, the crossing of borders, and prejudice against Muslims. These discussions were more powerful for Danielle because of the type of response the teachers invited and privileged in this book club. In other words, since the teachers encouraged students to share their own stories, as well as told their own stories, and stories are inherently fraught with feeling, Danielle was able to imagine on a deeper level the lives of immigrants. She then, in her interview after the book club, extrapolated her imaginative understanding of these lives to the lives of yet unmet others. To put it another way, Danielle was pushed to rethink the normative conceptions of an immigrant with an empathy brought on through her newly nuanced sentimental considerations. The stories shared in this book club put a personal face on the issue for Danielle, which allowed her to come to compassionate judgments about the lives of immigrants – from the novel, imagined border crossers, and her peers. For her, immigration became an issue of people, instead of an issue of policy.
Jaime interpreted the notion of an immigrant life from a different perspective. His ideas were rooted in his familial experiences of immigration, which he presented through stories of tragedy. For him, immigration was also an issue of people, one that resulted in the inequitable opportunities for living in safety and without impoverishment. His interpretation of immigrant as one of danger and pain was vital to overall conceptions of immigration for his book club peers. Providing the space within the book club discussions for his stories resulted in the possibility of others to witness a more complex narrative of an immigrant life. Story-telling as an expressive approach to responding to literature, then, for Jaime was the chance to remove the shadows that often hide the realities of immigration. In fact, Jaime, and other students in this classroom, were in a suitable position to accomplish the task of creating more complex narratives of immigrants because, if education is about helping students recognize the common human condition in diverse others, then students with diverse social/cultural backgrounds, like those in my study, should be leaders in this endeavor (cf. Campano & Ghiso, in press). This opportunity was a significant consequence for reading and telling stories in this classroom.

As I approached this study following the ideas of Fairclough (1995) on the critical nature of discourse, it would be remiss not to note the critical nature of reading with emotion and literary imagination. It seems that if reading and telling stories is going to make a difference in people’s lives then it would be essential to cultivate students’ emotional, imaginative, and empathetic discursive participation in English language arts classrooms. This cultivation is vital because emotion, imagination, and empathy can lead to new perspectives and reasoning about social, cultural, and political issues. For instance, the sixth grade students in the classroom I studied developed nuanced perspectives of immigrants and immigration.
These students, such as Danielle and Jaime, seemed to take a critical look at the way some immigrants are treated based on general characteristics. Further, these students tended to move beyond received wisdom or official accounts of immigrant life through their exploration of the affective sensibilities of the fictional characters attempting to immigrate in the novels, as well as exploring their own stories and stories of their peers. This meant that, for these students, emotional investment in others’ stories led to realizations about the status of immigrants in society, what was problematic about that status, and why that status was perpetuated. This is not to say that these students necessarily were moved to action or worked to change the canonical view of an immigrant life, yet they did alter their own perspectives, which is a necessary step in creating future change.

As demonstrated through the various excerpts from these sixth grade students, storytelling as a way to respond to story-reading can lead to sophisticated interpretations of literature, if one purpose of reading literature is understood as the ability to imaginatively enter the lives of distant others. These students showed that they were able to critically engage with a text. Research into the teaching of literature should remember that every reader, based on their own experiences, no matter however limited, is able to think, feel, and wonder about a fictional story in nuanced, introspective, and incisive ways. This is not to say that a single reader's interpretation may be "incorrect" or "immature" (although I deplore describing readers in such deficit terms), and that a reader might need another reader's assistance in considering a text. Yet, this is why discussion and social interaction around texts is a vital step to literature "study" – hence, the importance of the book club discussions for these sixth grade students, as these discussions provided an opportunity to talk further about their initial reactions to the literature. Many of the students in this study also revealed their ability to consider an alternative
perspective or worldview of immigration. In this way, these teachers’ approach to literature instruction, encouraging students’ expressive responses through discussion, afforded opportunities for developing students’ affective responses to stories and for student response through story-telling, perhaps making these students better prepared for living and encountering the stories of others in life.

**Implications for Secondary School Literature Curriculum and Instruction**

The implications for reading with emotion and using story-telling as a way to examine and respond to story-reading are multifaceted. For English language arts teachers, delving into the affective dimensions of characters and peers contributes to what counts as legitimate story-reading and discussion practices, in addition to traditional discussion of comprehension and literary elements. Balancing these approaches to literature curriculum and instruction was a tension for these teachers, as exemplified in their various instructional activities. Yet, they were able to navigate this tension, and my study contributes to helping new and experienced teachers see possibilities for a comprehensive approach to literature study in public school classrooms.

As mentioned, story-telling as a response to story-reading could be construed as a type of more socially/culturally responsive engagement. This would be true for linguistically diverse students because social language skills develop more quickly than academic language skills (Freeman & Freeman, 2009). For these students, a book club discussion centered on storytelling could be a more comfortable and, therefore, a more equitable discursive space. Literature discussions that only focus on academic literary interpretation might continue to marginalize linguistically diverse students. In this specific sixth grade classroom, linguistically diverse students were primarily Latino/a (nine of ten), which is a group historically and currently disenfranchised in United States society. If teachers do not attend to linguistic differences, in
this case when it comes to literature discussions, then these students will continue to be devalued in the classroom. Latino/a students, as all students, have storied experiences that would greatly contribute to the themes and issues presented in multicultural literature, but they have to be given a place in the classroom. Teachers need to consciously make space in their curriculum and instruction for those stories to be heard.

Therefore, as part of a comprehensive literature curriculum, my study suggests that it should be common practice for teachers and students to talk about literature in personal, life-affirming, relationship-building ways. For students who are not schooled in traditional ways of responding to literature, story-telling may be a more culturally appropriate response. In other words, story-telling can be a way of demonstrating comprehension, rather than summarizing plot or evaluating characters or outlining internal/external conflicts. More important, story-telling in response to reading fictional stories can demonstrate a comprehension that moves beyond the surface features of a text, and builds on understanding emotional dimensions of character and life. Also for teachers, encouraging students to respond through story-telling can open affective pathways that may build alternative connections between their students and themselves.

Discussing literature should provide an opportunity for teachers and students to come to know each other that can alter the dominant power structures in a classroom. It can build a culture of care, as in “I care about your stories because I care about you.” Perhaps, through this approach, the nature of schooling would become different. The curricular and instructional reasons supporting book clubs in the classroom would become more nuanced. Empirical reasons, then, supporting book club curriculum would include two areas of research. First, there are previous supports from research on book clubs that have primarily focused on improving teacher practice or improving student performance in surface-text comprehension. Second, then, my study
contributes reasons for making imagination and emotion a content of book club discussions. Teachers should be given access to both areas of research in order to assist them in building arguments for how they conceive and construct reading curriculum and instruction in their classrooms.

In addition, there is a current tension in the way secondary school teachers are being asked to approach literature curriculum and instruction. On one hand, district, state, and federal standards privilege reading for comprehension, as defined by explicating surface text features such as plot, character, setting, and conflict. Reading for these reasons is what is tested, and, therefore, what secondary English teachers are held accountable for including in their literature curriculum. Further, certain approaches for literary interpretation have recently been lauded as more complex and mature to expressive literary responses (cf. Appleman, 2009; Mellor & Patterson, 2001; Soter, 1999). On the other hand, others have called for more humanistic, expressive approaches to reading literature (cf. Edmundson, 2004; Fleming, 2008). Also, as these teachers demonstrated, there is also a concern that there are other reasons, besides comprehension, that are valuable for students to encounter and develop. As I have tried to show, reading with imagination and emotion is one of these other reasons for reading due to its ability to engender empathetic reasoning about social, cultural, and political issues. Although attending to emotion when reading and discussing literature will not address every aspect of fiction and life, we should resist the current tendency in public schools to suppress this kind of reading. Simply, reading in different ways has different consequences, many of which are equally valuable. English educators should refrain from making hierarchies for approaches to reading, and realize that different discursive spaces require different discursive approaches. Taking various discursive approaches to reading, in all of its curricular aspects, includes a more complex
understanding of literary competence. There are competing traditions in how educators should view literary competence – a literary criticism tradition, a standards/accountability tradition, and an emotional/imaginative/moral tradition – as I have explained. My study suggests that teachers can take a more integrated approach.

Finally, my study has implications for how teacher educators prepare future secondary English teachers. It is the responsibility of those in teacher education to provide preservice teachers with the tools they need to succeed in public school classrooms. Part of that responsibility involves helping inexperienced teachers understand the unique discursive practices of diverse approaches to literature reading and discussion. As I have shown, there are expressive approaches to literary engagement that involve personal introspection, yet also involve outreach into the lives of others. Preservice teachers should be aware that discussion in response to story-reading may include forays into personal story-telling that are more than “self-to-text” connections. In fact, story-telling can be a sophisticated way that students of different social, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds understand fictional characters, as well as come to know their school-aged peers. Providing opportunities to develop and explore this type of literary engagement is often set aside in teacher education courses, due to multiple pressures from state and federal accreditation organizations. Teacher educators need to help teachers become aware of other reasons for reading, such as the ones exhibited by the sixth grade students in my study.

Limitations

My study focused on one book club unit inside an entire school year in which these teachers were working toward social justice goals. By bringing these linguistically diverse students into the same English class, they made clear their broader educational objective – one that wanted the different groups of students in their school to work with one another, as opposed
to working separately alongside one another. Their curricular and instructional choices represented this philosophy, namely how they grouped students both in and out of book clubs, how they proactively ensured that students were not identified as native or non-native English speakers, and the inclusion of immigration as one of their literary themes. Therefore, it is quite possible that these teachers’ overall approach to teaching influenced how these students engaged with each other, as well as how they talked about the topic of immigration. In other words, I want to acknowledge the idea that emotional and imaginative engagement with stories was only one aspect of what happening in this classroom, and, therefore, a contribution to the students’ perspectives and talk about immigration and immigrants and not necessarily the cause of those perspectives and talk.

Also, I do not mean to imply that the students included in chapters five and six were indicative of all the students in this classroom. In fact, the discussions of the book club reading *Journey of the Sparrows* included personal story-telling or responses to the fictional stories in emotional ways less often, although the students, Kristine in particular as shown in chapter five, wrote in their reading logs in expressive ways. These book club members, and other students from other book clubs, were simply not as engaged in the topic of immigration as the members of the other book clubs. This reticence was indicative in their interviews as well. They simply stated that the topic was not interesting or relevant. Perhaps, then, it is important to note that some students are not comfortable or ready to discuss controversial topics in emotional ways. For my study, it also means that my findings and conclusions are necessarily limited to the students who were willing to engage in this work. This limitation does not take away from the work of these students, or the possibilities that approaching literature study and discussion in
emotive and imaginative ways. It simply reminds educators that different students deserve different educational avenues in the hopes of attaining educational goals.

**Future Directions**

English language arts literature curriculum and instruction, specifically the implementation of book clubs, need to include space for both textual comprehension and inter/intra-personal exploration. Teachers and teacher educators often dismiss the notion that youth have contributions to make about contentious topics in our society. This is simply not true. Youth of all ages have critical perspectives on social, cultural, and political topics, especially those immediate to their lives, as illustrated by these sixth grade students’ interpretations of immigration issues and policies. Interpersonal and intrapersonal exploration is vital to this critical work of resistance and change; therefore, it is important that teachers provide opportunities for young students to contribute their voices to the issues that affect them and society. I am interested in helping teachers and students in such explorations through research in emotional and imaginative aspects of other curricular areas in English language arts, as well as how teachers can improve their practice in navigating discursive spaces that evoke the affective sensibilities of their students. Related to this strand of research would be outreach helping teachers build curriculum, design instruction, and facilitate discussion around contentious topics with secondary students of diverse backgrounds. Education cannot ignore the emotional and imaginative lives of youth as it is these aspects that have the possibility to bring people together, in classrooms and in society.
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide for Students


2. What did you learn during the immigration unit? What do you want to know more about? Who helped you learn these things? What helped you learn these things?

3. What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about your classmates? What stories do you remember from the book club discussions?

4. Let’s look at some video excerpts from the book club discussions. What do you think is happening in this discussion? How does it make you feel? What did you think about what your peers said?
Appendix B

Interview Guide for Teachers


2. What factors went into the membership of the book clubs?

3. Let’s focus on the decision to mix students of varying language abilities. In your mind, what have been the strengths of this decision? What have been the weaknesses?

4. Continuing in that vein, how do you perceive the gains students have made this semester/year? What skills do they still need to work on?


6. Let’s look at a series of excerpts from the immigration unit. I would like you to watch the video and react to what you see. For instance, what roles do you see students take up in the discussion? What positions do they take?