UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S HISTORICAL SENSE-MAKING: A VIEW FROM THE CLASSROOM

By

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S HISTORICAL SENSE-MAKING: A VIEW FROM THE CLASSROOM

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The social studies curricular community has always disagreed about what children should and can learn, how they should learn, and what teaching should look like. For the most part, these discussions have been uniformed by careful study of how children understand and make sense of the past. This study describes and explains a group of third and fourth graders' construction of meaning in an inquiry-oriented social studies classroom. In so doing, I offer into current debates an empirical study of children's sense-making. Moving back and forth between three focus students and the class as a collective, I offer a description of the dynamic interaction between what children brought with them (i.e., knowledge, values, beliefs, and ways of knowing), our classroom discourse, and the narratives students created.

This study took place in an urban school with a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population. As both the teacher and the researcher, I was responsible for creating the teaching context and studying my students' sense-making. Much of the data collection took place during the normal course of instruction. In addition to taking daily field notes, I collected children's written work, journals, and projects. I engaged in more intensive data

collection by periodically interviewing a sample of six focal fourth graders who represented a cross-section of abilities and backgrounds.

Standing at the intersection of multiple streams of overlapping intellectual work, the analyses were informed by recent calls to attend to both the subject-specific nature of history teaching and learning and to the constructed nature of meaning (both for individuals and within the disciplines), and to consider the situated nature of knowledge and cognition. Each chapter explores these theoretical realms empirically, demonstrating how children's historical sense-making is subject-specific, constructed, and situated in multiple contexts.

In this study, I argue that in order to understand the subject-specific, constructed, and situated nature of children's historical sense-making one must draw upon multiple disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. The analyses I offer emerged out of the dialectic between my examination of the record of a year of teaching and reading from various fields including the works of historians, philosophers of history, socio-linguistics, social scientists, and cultural psychologists.

To the children in this study, my greatest teachers.

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Introduction

> Mrs. Rose, I understand why we study math. We need to know math so we can balance our check book. I understand why we need to know how to spell. We couldn't get a job if we couldn't spell. And we have to have language arts and English so we know how to read and write. But Mrs. Rose, why history? (Bill[1], 1996-1997 school year)

My student Bill, a thoughtful fifth grader who always willingly participated in class, asked me this question at the beginning of our study of American history. Like many upper elementary students, he found history to be boring and irrelevant (Goodlad, 1984). He apparently made no connection between "all those dead people," as he called them, and the present. Bill's assessment of the need for and value of learning history is not surprising given what we know about traditional history teaching (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984; McNeil, 1986). Students suffer through monotonous lectures, outline chapter after chapter of textbook prose, and fill notebooks with information about names, dates, and events -- most of which they appear to quickly forget (Ravitch & Finn, 1987).

Bill's appraisal of history stands in sharp contrast to the role that reformers contend history can and should play in schools. They point toward its indispensable role in helping future citizens develop political intelligence and judgment, a sense of national and personal identity, and an understanding

[1] The names of all students and adults are pseudonyms.

of the relationship between the past and the present. Standards, frameworks, benchmarks, and other curriculum documents make similar assertions about the potential power of a high quality social studies education.

As an instructor of a social studies methods course for preservice elementary school teachers at Michigan State University, I once asked my students to consider what it might mean to teach history for understanding. To this end, we evaluated history and social studies standards, curriculum statements, and other reform proposals. While many of my students became excited about the possibilities outlined in these proposals, they remained skeptical about the feasibility of such goals. Like many prospective teachers, they complained that "people from MSU" were hopelessly theoretical and out of touch with the daily realities of classroom life (Tom, 1997). Furthermore, the child development majors in my class who knew a little about Piaget argued that the call for students to learn about history in the early elementary years disregarded what we know about children's cognitive development. Children at this age, they maintained, could not understand the distant past nor could they engage in the critical thinking skills which the various reforms set forth.

With these charges, my students unwittingly joined the wider debate about social studies. The social studies curricular community has always disagreed about what children should and can learn, how they should learn, and what teaching should look like. For the most part, these discussions have been uninformed by careful study of children's historical understanding. The purpose of this study is to describe how a group of third and fourth graders

made sense of the past. I do so in order to offer into the debates an empirical study of children's historical sense-making.

I begin this chapter by briefly discussing the larger picture in which discussions of history education take place. I follow that with a description of the teaching experiences that motivated me to conduct this study. I then explicate my research questions and methods, setting them in the context of current debates over children's historical thinking. Finally, I provide an overview of each chapter.

Competing Rhetorics: What Should be Taught and How

The purpose of social studies has historically been and continues to be to promote "good" citizenship (Allen, 1996; Hertzberg, 1981; Jenness, 1990; Lybarger, 1991). However, reformers and the general public disagree over what it means to be a good citizen. Some believe that good citizens should be obedient and well-behaved. Others believe that good citizens are critical and take action to effect change and promote social justice. Depending upon their view of good citizenship, reformers hold varying positions regarding what knowledge is of most worth, what values, beliefs and skills a "good" citizen should possess, and how social studies or history should be taught. As such, the history of social studies proposals reflects a continual struggle over how to help students become the kinds of citizens reformers envision (Allen, 1996).

A related but somewhat separate debate concerns the disciplines traditionally associated with the social studies curriculum. Some argue that the social sciences should take center stage, while others maintain that history

should be the primary focus (Jenness, 1990). In recent years, there has been a movement to include more history in the social studies curriculum (i.e., Gagnon, 1989). Yet even amongst these proponents, the question of what should be taught and how it should be taught remains a "battleground of political and pedagogical issues" (Cohen, 1995, p. 1).

Some curricular reformers such as Ravitch and Finn (1987), Hirsch (1987), and Bloom (1987) believe that history should play a vital role in helping students develop a strong national identity. To this end, they believe that schools should teach a single historical canon that emphasizes our common history as Americans. Multicultural reformers, however, argue that the effort to define a single canon excludes the multiple histories which can be told about our nation's past, marginalizing minority groups, the working class, and women. These critics argue that the "core body of knowledge" currently taught in schools promotes cultural hegemony by privileging the Eurocentric history of Great White Men (Banks, 1996; Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985).

Critical theorists argue that school history helps reproduce existing economic inequalities by promoting capitalist ideologies and by presenting students with sanitized versions of history devoid of conflict and controversy (Anyon, 1979; Apple, 1982). Thus, multicultural reformers and critical theorists call for the inclusion of the histories of groups that have traditionally been excluded from the social studies curriculum.

The debate is more complicated still. Not only do reformers disagree about what should be taught, they also disagree over methods of instruction.

Some scholars argue that students should be engaged in disciplined historical inquiry so that they will develop the critical thinking skills necessary for effective political participation (Newmann, Secada & Wehlage, 1995). Others contend that students should participate in the decision-making process (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Some emphasize the role of lively storytelling in socializing students to accept mainstream values, beliefs, and ideas about our nation (Egan, 1988). Others argue that history instruction should focus upon social education goals by using history to highlight democratic concepts (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997). Still others maintain that history instruction should focus on social justice issues and provide an impetus for students to become change agents themselves (Hasbach, Roth, Rosaen, & Hoekwater, 1995).

These curricular debates continue to rage, not only amongst educational reformers but also in the popular media (Cornbleth, C. & Waugh, D.; Nash, G., Crabtree, C. & Dunn, R., 1997). While much of these debates center around theoretical issues, several researchers have attempted to describe various approaches to social studies teaching in practice. Building on the work of Evans (1989), Brophy and VanSledright (1997) characterize the approaches of three teachers, labeling one as a storyteller, another as a scientific historian, and the third as a reformer. The practices of these teachers reflect what they believe the purpose of history instruction should be and resonate with the larger debates over the form and content of history instruction. For instance, the storyteller believes that all students should learn the story of their nation (pp. 45-71). The scientific historian values teaching students about history as a

discipline, and the reformer seeks to use history as a means of getting students to rethink the past in light of social justice issues (pp. 195-249).

The Reality: What History Teaching Looks Like

While the instruction of the teachers Brophy and VanSledright (1997) studied seem to parallel the competing approaches called for by reformers, most agree that typical history instruction does not meet the various goals which have been set forth. Even though few large-scale empirical studies of social studies instruction at the elementary level exist, we do know some things about modal teaching practice (Wilson, in press). Often referred to as the de facto curriculum, teachers rely heavily upon social studies textbooks, particularly at the fifth grade level (Brophy, 1992; Stodolsky, 1988). They emphasize rote memorization of names, dates, and events (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984).

At the same time, however, in her study of 19 elementary classrooms, Stodolsky (1988) found that teachers used a wider variety of instructional activities during social studies than they did in math classes. Although both subjects were very teacher-centered, there were more opportunities for group work during social studies instruction. Among other activities, students in social studies classes played games, engaged in research, watched films, and made crafts. Still, they spent most of their time listening to the teacher, reading aloud, and answering teacher-directed questions (Stodolsky, 1988). Alleman and Brophy (1993) found that although teachers often attempt to

integrate social studies with other subjects, the activities often lacked any educational value or did not promote social education goals.

What is Historical Understanding?

Based on their assessment of modal practice, most reformers agree that teachers do not generally teach history for understanding. Current reforms uniformly call for teaching for understanding (Cohen, McLaughin, & Talbert, 1993; Wiske, 1998), yet the language they use belies deep and long-standing disagreements regarding the nature of historical understanding. What it means to "know" or understand history has varied over time and continues to be the subject of much debate amongst historians, philosophers of history, educational reformers, and researchers (i.e., Booth, 1994; Collingwood, 1946; Hempel, 1962; Mink, 1987; Novick, 1988; Sexias, 1995; VanSledright, in press).

The National Standards for History (1994, 1996) which grew out of the Goals 2000 project, represent one view (though influenced by multiple discourses) regarding what it means to know and understand history. I present the view of historical understanding embodied in these Standards because they influenced the goals I had for my own students as well as the learning opportunities I created. In addition, the Standards represent the only contemporary semi-consensus among a large group of historians and educators over the meaning of historical understanding. However, because it remains contested terrain, I situate their position within some of the larger historic debates over historical understanding.

Objectivity. To begin with, historians and philosophers have long disagreed about whether or not history is or can be objective. Some have argued that the role of the historian is to "let the facts speak for themselves" (Elton, 1967; Ranke, 1973). Others, often referred to by their opponents as relativists, stress the human element of historical inquiry, highlighting the role the historian plays in selecting facts and asking questions (Beard, 1935; Becker, 1955). More recently, postpositivist writers have called into question the distinction between history and fiction, blurring the boundaries between the two (Jenkins, 1991; White, 1978). For these authors, history is made, not found.

Like many contemporary writers, rather than treating history as something which is discovered, the authors of the Standards (1994) distinguish between what happened in the past with what historians write about it, stressing the socially constructed nature of history:

> Students need to realize that historians may differ on the facts they incorporate in the development of their narratives, and disagree as well on how those facts are to be interpreted. Thus, "history" is usually taken to mean what happened in the past but written history is a dialogue among historians not only about what happened but about why and how it happened, how it affected other happenings, and how much importance it ought to be assigned. (p. 26)

According to these authors, written history is contested and constructed, an ongoing dialogue of real people with different "perspectives, beliefs, and points of view" (p. 27) who select what to include and exclude from their narratives. It is a dialogue about explanations, cause and effect, and significance.

The nature of explanations. While the authors of the Standards draw

attention to the idea that historians argue over why and how things happen, they fail to address the fact that historians and philosophers of history disagree about the very nature of historical explanations. For example, some have claimed that historical explanations are (or should be) the same as explanations in the natural sciences, conforming to the model of deduction or induction used in generating scientific explanations (Hempel, 1962). Others maintain that explanations in history are fundamentally different from those in the natural sciences (Collingwood, 1946; Dray, 1959; Hexter, 1971). The latter reject the idea that there are universal laws from which historical explanations can be deduced (Collingwood,1946; Dray, 1959; Hempel, 1962; Hexter, 1971). Some authors distinguish between reasons and causes. These writers argue that causes imply an inevitability, whereas reasons explain why something occurred without treating events deterministically (Dray, 1959). Others maintain that historians explain by simply collecting as much data about past events as possible (Walsh, 1969). Still others equate historical explanations with the reenactment of the thoughts which motivated the actions of historical actors (Collingwood, 1946).

The authors of the Standards also reject the notion of covering laws or laws of historical development, arguing that "nothing is more dangerous than a simple monocausal explanation of past experiences and present problems" (p. 26). Instead, they call for students to "analyze cause and effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation" (p. 27). Similarly, they state that students should be able to compare competing historical narratives, "demonstrating

how an emphasis on different causes contributes to different interpretations" (p. 27).

Human agency/determinism. Finally, some historians have treated the unfolding of events as though they were inevitable, a reflection of laws which guide the evolution of human history (Engle, 1908/1969; Marx, 1888/1969). Others stress the role of human agency and free will (Berlin, 1969; Collingwood, 1946). Some emphasize both, seeking to understand the structural factors which constrain human behavior as well the intentions of historical actors (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994; Seixas, 1995).

The authors of the Standards highlight the contingent nature of history, stressing the role of human action and our capacity to make choices that influence the course of history:

> [W]ell-written historical accounts can also alert students to the traps of lineality and inevitability. Students must understand the relevance of the past to their own time, but they need also to avoid the trap of lineality, of drawing straight lines between past and present, as though earlier movements were being propelled teleologically toward some rendezvous with destiny in the late 20th century.
>
> A related trap is that of thinking that events have unfolded inevitably – that the way things are is the way they had to be, and thus that humankind lacks free will and the capacity for making choice. Unless students can conceive that history could have turned out differently, they may unconsciously accept the notion the future is also inevitable or predetermined, and that human agency and individual action count for nothing. (p. 26)

In light of these beliefs, the authors want students to "challenge arguments of historical inevitability" and to understand "the importance of the individual in history, the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs and the role of chance, the accidental and irrational" (p. 27).

What Can Children Understand?

Just as reformers take positions within the contested terrain of historical understanding, so too do researchers. Those who have investigated history teaching and learning conceptualize historical understanding in multiple ways, making it difficult to compare one study with the next (Wineburg, 1996). As Wineburg explains in his review of the literature:

> History, though bearing the same name in these reports, is rarely the same thing. Historical understanding can mean anything from memorizing a list of dates to mastering a set of logical relations, from being able to recite an agreed upon story to contending with ill-structured problems resistant to single interpretations. (p. 423)

These various conceptualizations of historical understanding shape the questions researchers ask, their analyses, and findings. The majority of these studies have not investigated the kinds of understandings called for by the Standards. Therefore, many of these studies do little to inform the ongoing debate about whether or not children can understand in the ways espoused by the authors of the Standards and other reformers.

Much of the earlier research conducted in the Piagetian tradition treated historical thinking as though it were identical to reasoning in the natural sciences, measuring children's ability to engage in deductive thought (Booth, 1994). Yet the Standards (1994) provide a very different image of historical reasoning, calling for students to "elaborate imaginatively upon the evidence" (p.30). Moreover, those researchers who define historical understanding as facts to be learned offer little insight into whether or not children can understand history's interpretive nature.

At the elementary level, the small but growing body of contemporary research typically uses the school curriculum as a starting point for assessing students' understanding. For example, Brophy and VanSledright (1997) have studied what children know about Native Americans, explorers, the colonies, the American Revolution, and westward expansion both before and after instruction on these topics. Focusing on key ideas traditionally taught in fifth-grade United States history courses, they derived their interview questions from curriculum guidelines and the district's adopted textbook series. Similarly, McKeown and Beck (1994) compared fifth and sixth graders' prior knowledge about the period before the American Revolution with the prior knowledge they believed students needed to make sense of the textbook's account of this time period.

These researchers both found that students brought differing amounts of partial knowledge, confusions, misconceptions, and accurate knowledge with them to the study of history. Brophy and VanSledright (1997) noted that children tended to conflate bits and pieces of historical information from various eras. However, the students had fewer misconceptions and conflations after instruction. McKeown and Beck (1990, 1994) concluded that children did not have enough prior knowledge to form coherent narratives from simply reading the textbooks. The textbooks, they argue, assume more knowledge than the children typically had.

Brophy and VanSledright's (1997) and McKeown and Beck's (1990, 1994) research may help teachers better link instruction to what children know

by enabling them to identify and eliminate common misconceptions. These studies do not, however, help us understand whether or not children can move beyond searching for the "one authoritative interpretation," as the authors of the Standards urge. These researchers do not problematize the nature or breadth of school knowledge, but simply accepted its operational definition as what traditionally appears in textbooks. In contrast, the authors of the Standards (1994) view teachers' reliance on textbooks as an obstacle to helping students develop more sophisticated historical understandings:

> One of the most common problems in helping students become thoughtful readers of historical narrative is the compulsion students feel to find the one right answer, the one essential fact, the one authoritative interpretation. "Am I on the right track?" Is this what you want?" they ask. Or worse yet, they rush to closure reporting back as self-evident truths the facts or conclusions presented in the document or text. . . .
>
> These problems are deeply rooted in the conventional ways in which textbooks have presented history; a succession of facts marching straight to a settled outcome. (p. 26)

Since most of the research has not adopted the view of historical understanding promoted by the Standards, the question of whether children can develop the kinds of understandings they call for remains largely unexamined.

In setting forth their ambitious goals for students, the authors of the Standards explicitly reject more pessimistic assumptions regarding children's capacity for historical thought embodied in the traditional elementary social studies curriculum known as "Expanding Horizons," acerbically described by Ravitch (1987) as "tot sociology." This curricular approach assumes that students' learning must start with their worlds; children study their family,

neighborhood, and community, gradually expanding outward as they get older. In the fourth grade they sometimes study state or local history and then receive their first formal exposure to chronological American history in the fifth grade. However, as Crabtree (1989) suggests, the expanding horizons curricular approach has been based more in folklore and myth than in empirical study.

In contrast to the creators and supporters of the expanding horizons approach, the authors of the Standards (1996) are optimistic about children's capacity to understand the past, arguing that infusing history into the early years will expand children's "world of understanding far beyond the 'here and now.'"[2] Specifically, they refer to the "widespread and growing support of more and better history in the schools, beginning in the early grades" as one of the "encouraging signs of this decade." Furthermore, they maintain that "history -- along with literature and the arts – provides one of the most enriching studies in which [young children] can be engaged" (National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), 1996)

Despite their enthusiasm for including "more and better" history into the elementary curriculum, they too make many assumptions about what children are capable of understanding. The authors assert, for example, that even very young children can understand times and places far removed from their own lives, explicitly stating that, "[c]hildren can, from the earliest elementary grades, begin to build historical understandings and perspectives and to think

[2] These standards are published at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/usk4-toc.htm. There are no page numbers referenced.

historically" (NCHS, 1996). Yet, these assumptions are no more grounded in large bodies of empirical research than the expanding horizons curriculum (Barton, Downey, Epstein, Levstik, Seixas, Thornton & VanSledright, 1996; Barton & Levstik, 1996; Seixas, 1993).

Similarly, the Standards' authors assume that children are capable of understanding history as a social construction, rather than a literal representation. However, current research suggests that most children (and adults) view knowledge (history and otherwise) as being fixed, certain, and knowable (Cohen, 1988; Gabella, 1994, 1998; Wineburg, 1991). The understanding for which the reformers call would require students to move from viewing historical knowledge as facts which correspond to objective reality to understanding its socially constructed nature. Yet, we do not know when and if children can make this sort of epistemological shift.

Again, research provides us with little insight. Those who have conducted studies on epistemological beliefs disagree about whether or how those beliefs are related to cognitive development, age, gender, and education (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Hofer & Printrich, 1997; King & Kitcherner, 1994; Perry, 1970; Schommer, 1994). Some argue that peoples' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowing are an "artifact of the socialization process," reflecting various experiences both inside and outside of school (Cole, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schommer, 1990). Others maintain that people's views of knowledge reflect innate cognitive apparatus that develop over time (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Montgomery, 1992). Those

who believe that experiences play a decisive role in shaping one's view of knowledge maintain that instruction can have a significant impact on student learning (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Moore, 1994). It is to the role of teaching that I now turn.

The Role of Instruction

The Standards' authors clearly take the position that instruction can influence children's ability to understand the past, arguing that it is the teacher's responsibility to create conditions that foster historical understanding. To this end, they make claims about the kinds of opportunities students should experience and the effect that those experiences will have on children's thinking. In the earliest grade levels they state:

> History becomes especially accessible and interesting to children when approached through stories, myths, legends, and biographies that capture children's imaginations and immerse them in times and cultures of the recent and long ago past.
>
> In addition to stories, children should be introduced to a wide variety of historical artifacts, illustrations, and records that open them to first-hand glimpses into the lives of people in the past: Family photos, letters, diaries, and other accounts of the past obtained from family records, local newspapers, libraries, and museums; field trips to historical sites in their neighborhood and community; and visits to "living museums" where actors reenact life long ago.

All of these resources and activities, they claim, will help children formulate questions for study and support historical thinking, such as:

> the ability to marshal information; create sound hypotheses; locate events in time and place; compare and contrast past and present; explain historical causes and consequences; analyze historical fiction and illustrations for their accuracy and perspectives, and compare with primary sources that accurately portray life, attitudes, and values in the past; compare different stories about an era or event in the past and the interpretations or perspectives of each; and create historical narratives

> of their own in the form of stories, letters such as a child long ago might have written, and descriptive accounts of events.

The authors (NCHS, 1994) also maintain that having children actively engage in systematic and disciplined inquiry will help students understand the constructed nature of history:

> students will better understand that written history is a human construction, that certain judgments about the past are tentative and arguable, and that historians regard their work as critical inquiry, pursued as ongoing debates with other historians. By their active engagement in historical inquiry, students will learn for themselves why historians are continuously reinterpreting the past, and why new interpretations emerge not only from uncovering new evidence but rethinking old evidence in light of new ideas springing up in our own times. (p. 29)

Appealing as these lofty claims are, they too are not grounded in empirical evidence. In part, this is because the studies that do exist of elementary age children's historical understanding have not been conducted with students who experienced Standards-like instruction. Brophy and VanSledright (1997) studied students, for example, of a teacher who used a traditional storytelling approach. She neither helped students understand the way historians construct historical arguments nor helped them assess the nature and quality of evidence upon which historians rely. Instead, she presented a single and correct version of the past which students were expected to know. Hence, it is not surprising that the students conveyed their historical knowledge in story-like narratives "delivered primarily as factual information" (p. 253).

However, a few studies have investigated elementary age children's thinking in less traditional contexts. VanSledright and Kelly (1998) studied a

group of sixth graders in a class where the teacher used multiple sources such as biographies, historical fiction, and other secondary sources, deliberately choosing this site because of their belief that the use of multiple sources might promote historical understanding. Echoing the claims of the authors of the Standards, VanSledright and Kelly speculate that:

> [s]tudents, for example, might encounter different versions of similar events, which could produce cognitive dissonance that would create the need for resolving disparities. Or, information obtained from a variety of sources could require judgments about significance and reliability in order to determine which source(s) would be best to use. In much the way historical thinking involves weighing evidence, searching for patterns and inconsistencies, and constructing different ideas about what might have taken place, use of different sources could promote corollary thinking and focus information gathering. (p. 242)

VanSledright and Kelly (1998) examine whether or not these students exhibited any of the reading and reasoning practices which Wineburg (1991,1994), Leinhardt and Young (1994), and Greene (1994) identified as being characteristic of historians. They found that simply having students use multiple (sometimes conflicting) sources did not cause students to raise questions about the validity and reliability of evidence. In their interviews, however, students did show emerging signs of critical reading and advanced historical thinking. When pressed, for example, some students found the author's point of view important in judging a source's reliability. A few students raised issues related to bias in historical accounts and the role that the author's point of view might play in the selection of information.

The researchers concluded that the students' uncritical stance toward the multiple sources reflected the view of knowledge promoted by the teacher's

assignments. The teacher provided students with topics; students were expected to find "answers." In this classroom, historical research consisted of copying information verbatim rather than comparing and contrasting varying accounts. VanSledright and Kelly's (1998) research highlights the idea that simply providing students with multiple sources will not necessarily help them understand the interpretive nature of history or gain critical reading skills. They suggest that teachers must explicitly assist students in recognizing conflicting accounts and developing explanations for differing interpretations. The teacher in this classroom did not share these goals.

In a related study, Barton (1998) investigated fourth and fifth graders' ideas about evidence. In contrast to the teacher in VanSledright and Kelly's (1998) study, the teachers in this study emphasized "active involvement, open-ended assignments, and students' construction of meaning" (p. 410). Specifically, they wanted students to understand how historians use evidence to construct narratives and to highlight that there can be multiple interpretations of the same event. To this end, in one unit, the students read twelve different accounts of the battle at Lexington Green, evaluating each for its reliability.

Contrary to VanSledright and Kelly's findings (1998), Barton's (1998) subjects were able to skillfully evaluate the reliability of evidence, identifying issues such as bias, motive, and one's politics as factors which would affect authors' accounts. As they critiqued various sources, students drew upon their personal experiences with disagreements, bias, and memory that they had developed outside the context of school history. They did not, however, transfer

these understandings to gain insight into how historians construct narratives. In particular, they made no connection between evidence and the claims historians or they themselves made. When students were asked who they thought fired the first shot at Lexington Green, they reached conclusions based on their opinions of what "must" have happened, rather than the evidence which they had examined. Students specifically stated that they did not rely upon the evidence because none of the sources were completely reliable. Dismissing all sources because of their fallibility, they were left to rely upon their intuition. They assumed that historians reached conclusions the same way that they did.

Barton's study sheds light on both what students bring with them to school as well as some of the challenges teachers might face in introducing students to multiple interpretations. Students' experiences outside of school helped them understand that behind accounts lie willful authors. This same realization, however, led students to rely upon their own opinions in coming to conclusions, completely disregarding the lack of an evidentiary basis for their claims.

In sum, disagreements still exist regarding children's ability to develop the historical understanding described in the Standards, as well as the role instruction plays. Some researchers, like Brophy and VanSledright (1997), continue to emphasize the way in which children's cognitive development constrains their ability to engage in abstract historical thinking:

> fifth graders' readiness for historical study is limited by not only their prior knowledge but also by their cognitive development. The students'

> questions and comments in class, their written KWL responses and work on assignments, and especially their oral responses to our interview questions consistently reminded us that they were still primarily concrete thinkers, not very skilled at abstract thought. (p. 252)

The researchers go on to assert that, "it is unrealistic to argue that the elementary history curriculum should be developed primarily as socialization of students into history as an academic discipline" (p. 254).

Other scholars continue to place a greater emphasize on the role that context and/or culture play in shaping students' understandings, without making claims about the limitations of elementary students' level of cognitive development. For example, Barton (1998) attributed children's difficulties in learning to use evidence to several factors:

> their lack of previous experience with such skills, their exposure to history primarily in the form of narratives, or their perceptions that the use of historical evidence has little importance in the wider culture. (p. 426)

The disagreements among researchers are likely to continue. As long as their studies conceptualize historical understanding differently, it is unlikely that their findings will lead to some sort of consensus (Wilson, in press; Wineburg, 1996). Moreover, the lack of reform-oriented teaching contexts makes it likely that much research will continue to investigate the historical understanding of children who encounter traditional instruction.

A View from the Classroom

As a teacher, this ongoing debate left me dissatisfied. Furthermore, since social studies had taken a back seat in my own classroom (as it does for most elementary teachers, e.g., Stodolsky, 1988), I had no personal "existence proofs" that the kind of teaching and learning envisioned in the reforms were

possible. I (like my preservice teachers) was left wondering whether the kinds of understanding described in the Standards were too abstract for elementary age children. I decided to return to elementary school teaching so I could figure out what it might mean to teach in a reform-minded way. For the next two years, I taught social studies to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders.

Armed with an optimistic stance regarding children's capacity for complex historical thought, I shared Booth's (1994) concern that there is a danger in limiting our expectations of what children can do. I believed that my ability to help children develop more sophisticated historical understandings rested on my skill in scaffolding students' learning, a skill I was just beginning to develop. This required me to attend to students' ideas as I tried to figure out both what my students brought with them and how I could build upon those ideas.

Educational researchers have sometimes claimed that students have little experience to draw upon in understanding history. For example, Brophy (1995) notes that:

> Children acquire a great deal of mathematical and scientific knowledge through their everyday experiences, and they develop emergent literacy knowledge through social interactions and observation of parents and older siblings. However, children's informal learning experiences ordinarily do not teach them much about the past. Instead they depend on information communication from parents, teachers, books, and audio-visual media to acquire historical knowledge. (p. 98)

VanSledright and Brophy (1992) argue that children "lack an experiential knowledge base. . . . from which to draw information for developing historical constructions and understandings" (p. 841). Their work highlights the many

misconceptions children have about the past. But, it also points to the fact that children do bring much with them to their encounter with formal history in school. They are not blank slates (Barton, 1995; Levstik & Barton, 1996; Wineburg, in press). Children, like adults, as Seixas (1995) notes:

> encounter everywhere traces of the human past in artifacts and relics, documents, the built environment, landscapes, or, on a more complex level, institutions and languages. . . [They] experience accounts of the human past, in innumerable presentations of the past that we confront outside of formal history-learning through family stories and the media, including television news, film, historical fiction, historical references in advertising, and popular commemoration. (p. 766)

As I taught, I began to witness the way in which my students' personal, cultural, and popular knowledge and beliefs influenced their sense-making. Sometimes strengths, sometimes limitations, these sources shaped students' understandings as they encountered new content.[3]

For instance, while teaching a unit entitled "The First Americans," I asked my sixth graders what evidence would convince them that the first Americans had migrated from Asia over a land bridge (the textbook presented this as fact not theory). Many of the students cited the textbook as a good source of evidence (they specified that the answer was, in fact, on page 41). However, after some probing, Sue asserted that "the textbook was probably written by a white person, so they wouldn't know who the first Americans were." Half Chippewa, Sue explained that the elder tribe member at Native American camp had told her about the tribe's origin myth, a myth that held that her people originated in the Western Hemisphere. In this instance, Sue's cultural and

religious beliefs conflicted with the information in the textbook. This gave her confidence to challenge the textbook's veracity as she pointed out the limited knowledge of the author.

Later in the semester, however, Sue encountered information that did not conflict with her prior knowledge and her initial skepticism did not reappear. The textbook stated that John Cabot wrote in his journal that the islands around Newfoundland were "teeming with fish." I presented the students with two secondary sources that stated that John Cabot did not keep a journal. Sue stated that the textbook had to be correct because "you could go to jail if you put things in textbooks that aren't true."

Similarly, in another instance, an African American student's beliefs about "white people" influenced the way she assessed a document's credibility. The students were discussing Samuel Champlain's journal in which he described the native people he had encountered. In it he wrote that the natives "talked to the Devil." Marcia, an African American student who frequently voiced her disdain of our textbook's perspective, drew upon her knowledge of the way European people have treated minorities in the past to make inferences about Champlain's credibility regarding the Iroquois:

Joe: It is a journal and he was there.

Marcia: Are you saying that it is believable just because he was there? He wanted to make them look bad and to make himself look better. Then he could treat them bad. Just because he was there doesn't mean it was the truth. We shouldn't believe a word he says.

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[3] I draw here on experiences with students prior to the year in which this study was conducted. These examples, then, are anecdotes meant to illustrate.

Kim: Why would he lie? It says it in the book.

Marcia: He's devious.

Trissa: That's prejudice! That's prejudice!

Shari: What evidence do you have to support that he is devious?

Marcia: Look what they (the Europeans) did to the Jewish people and the black people.

Jeff: The Indians should have written a book about him.

Shari: Why isn't there a book?

Mary: They didn't have a written language. I don't think we should believe him until we have more evidence.

Melissa: We can find out by word of mouth.

Tricia: But, the story can change with time. (Teaching journal, 11/95)

My experience with both Sue and Marcia highlighted the need to further explore the way in which my students' epistemological beliefs influenced their sense-making as well as their ability to "understand" in the ways called for by current reforms which challenged traditional notions of authoritative knowledge.

Sue's experiences outside of school with her tribe provided her with the foundation to challenge the authority of the textbook. She viewed the textbook as having an author who she assumed was not Native American and, therefore, not an authority on matters related to her people's history. At the same time, her experiences of "doing school," reinforced beliefs about the authority behind textbooks. Similarly, Marcia's distrust of Europeans made her

estion Champlain's motives for painting what she considered to be a gative portrait of the Native Americans and to highlight his biased point of w. At the same time, however, Marcia's beliefs limited her ability to develop re nuanced and subtle analyses. She did not believe anything about any t written by a "white person." She consistently rejected arguments to the ntrary, even when those arguments came from other African American dents who accused her of making generalizations that they viewed as ejudiced." While other students began to search for "more evidence" and a variety of criteria with which to assess the credibility of various sources, rcia's views remained impervious to challenges.

Research Questions

Through interactions like these, I became convinced that students are able of complicated historical thought and can engage in actively structing historical narratives of their own. During my second year back in class teaching, for example, my fourth and fifth graders examined and qued primary and secondary sources while conducting an extensive oral rview project concerning life in their city during the Great Depression, World r II and the Civil Rights Era. Students encountered multiple (and conflicting) rpretations of the same time period which they highlighted in a video duction which aired on the local cable channel. However, I continued to ieve that the limitations in my own students' understandings could be ibuted to my lack of knowledge of how students make sense of the past and w to best help them acquire new understandings.

Around the same time that I returned to teaching, several researchers began to investigate the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which historical understandings develop (Epstein, 1994, 1997; Gabella, 1994, 1998; Levstik & Barton, 1996; Seixas, 1993; Wertsch, 1994; Wineburg, in press). Drawing upon social constructivist theories of cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Levine, Resnick, & Higgins, 1993; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1994), these researchers assume that:

> human thought and learning can only be understood by placing them in the multiple contexts -- interpersonal, structural, cultural and historical -- in which they occur. To understand how people think and learn, then, one must understand the social, cultural and historical basis of that thought. Rather than attempting to examine an individual's privately constructed meaning, one must look to the way in which social interaction, structural and cultural processes and historical heritages shape meaning. (Levstik & Barton, 1996, p. 533)

These researchers attempt to understand children's historical sense-making on their own terms. Rejecting the explicit contrast of children with historians, they opt for a more phenomenological approach without explicitly stipulating ahead of time what children's understanding ought to look like.

Through these studies, researchers have sought to determine the way in which students' values, beliefs, sources of knowledge and experiences shape the way they make sense of the past. They found that students derive much of their historical understanding from family stories and popular culture (Barton, 1995; Levstik & Barton, 1996; Seixas, 1993; Wineburg, in press). Epstein (1994, 1997) concluded that, based on their prior experiences, African American students were likely to regard their family members as more credible sources than their textbooks, while European Americans found the textbook to

be believable. In addition, African American and European American students understood the historical significance of events quite differently.

While my own teaching experience and these research results and findings all point to the important role that the thinkers' "local and present position" play in their sense-making (VanSledright, in press), there was little research in the field which I could draw upon to inform my own practice related to this issue. As VanSledright (in press) notes:

> the question of who this learner is, what s/he brings by way of temporal bearings to the task of historical thinking, and what implications this might have for history teaching and learning and the development of historical understanding -- is left generally unexplored. (p. 2)

In particular, very few studies provide portraits of how students draw upon knowledge, beliefs, and values that they acquire outside of school as they learn new information in schools.

In Barton's (1995) study on the situated nature of historical understanding, he attempts to make a connection between what children bring with them and the meanings they construct in school. He describes, for example, the way children's views of the present shaped their encounter with new topics. As children studied immigration and the Civil War, they imagined what life would have been like if those events had not taken place. However, Barton does not bring the reader inside of the classroom. As a result, the reader does not get a sense of how children constructed meaning in the context of their own discourse community. Nor does the reader get a sense of the way in which students' values, beliefs, and experiences shaped and were

shaped by that community and its discourse practices. While Barton provides excerpts of his interviews with pairs of students, he does not provide any examples of classroom dialogue (although he does state that the teachers did give students opportunities to discuss their ideas as a class).

I became convinced that I needed to study how my students made sense of history more systematically, in ways I had been unable to given the pace and pressures of everyday teaching. At the outset, two questions guided my inquiry:

> What kinds of historical understandings do children develop in the context of a particular inquiry-based social studies class?
>
> How do various factors including a student's prior knowledge, values, experiences, cultural beliefs, family background and classroom and school contexts shape the way in which they make sense of the history?

The Setting

Located in the capital city of a midwestern state with a large industrial base, the elementary school site in which I conducted this study has a racially and socioeconomically diverse population. Fifty-five percent of the students are African American, thirty percent white, eleven percent Asian, and one percent Native American. Affiliated with a nearby university, Walker Elementary serves as a professional development school, a place where teachers and university faculty work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning through joint inquiry (The Holmes Group, 1990). In addition, the school plays a central role in the university's preservice teacher education program as a field site for novice teachers' learning.

In my role as the professional development resource teacher, I provided release time for the Walker teachers to plan for instruction and collaborate with school and university colleagues. Through this work, I established a collaborative relationship with Pam Smith, a veteran teacher of nine years who holds a master's degree in literacy. I conducted this study in her classroom.

The Teaching Context

In the tradition of a growing number of studies where researchers use their teaching as a site to investigate student learning (Ball, 1993; Heaton, 1994; Lampert 1985, 1990; Lensmire, 1994; Roth, 1993; Theule-Lubienski, 1997; Wilson, 1990, 1995), I taught social studies three days a week to eight third graders and twelve fourth graders in Pam Smith's multiage classroom. Of the twenty students, 60% were African American, 25% were Mexican American or Guatemalan American, and 15% were European American. Mrs. Smith co-planned with me on a regular basis, coordinating and integrating her language arts curriculum with my social studies instruction. Over the course of the year, she read the children historical non-fiction and fiction that related to the topics the students were investigating with me.

In much the same spirit as Brown's (1992) design experiment, I saw my work as teacher-researcher as one who "engineer[s] innovative environments and simultaneously conduct[s] experimental studies of these innovations" (p. 141). While several teacher-researchers have focused studies on their teaching practice, my primary inquiry concerned students' historical sense-making. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term historical sense-making

to refer to "the process of finding meaning in facts sought and encountered, or relating (and relating to) a web of actors, events and interpretations" (Gabella, 1994, p. 140).

My study allowed me to create a teaching context that provided students with tools for sense-making that they typically do not acquire in traditional social studies classrooms. Conducting research in my own classroom also enabled me to create a context that provided me with a source of data to which other researchers would not readily have access. Most classrooms (regardless of the subject) lack extended classroom discourse in which children speak to each other as well as the teacher (Cazden, 1988). In such classrooms children's sense-making remains largely private, making it difficult to "see" the way in which the immediate social context shapes their understandings. In contrast, my students engaged in extensive discussions as they collectively and individually constructed meaning. As their teacher, I was able to record these conversations for later analysis.

I do not, however, present my classroom teaching as a case of "best practice" or as an instantiation of the kind teaching called for by the Standards -- although this is how many readers might choose to read this work. This, as Ball and Lampert (1999) point out, is a typical interpretation of teacher-research. Having written extensively about their own experiences trying to teach mathematics for understanding, they found that people often cited their teaching as "exemplary of the NCTM Standards" (p. 373). They found this troubling for their purposes, like my own, were not to pose as models of

instruction use their power as teachers to create laboratories in which they could examine questions of teaching and learning.

I view teaching as a work-in-progress, not as a matter of getting things "right." The kinds of learning opportunities I provided for my students reflected my ideas about what constituted "sophisticated historical understandings," my beliefs about what was worth knowing, constructivist theories of learning, and my limited knowledge about how to help students acquire such understandings. All of these ideas guided my teaching and shaped the choices I made. However, my thinking about these issues evolved over the course of the year I was teaching as well as through the process of conducting this research.

When I began this study, my ideas about historical understanding resonated with the National Standards (1994). I believed that since there are multiple stories and interpretations of the past, there are also multiple ways of understanding the same events. As Bruner (1996) notes:

> Understanding something in one way does not preclude understanding it in other ways. Understanding in any one particular way is only "right" or "wrong" from the particular perspective in terms of which it is pursued. But the "rightness" of particular interpretations, while dependent on perspective, also reflects rules of evidence, consistency, and coherence. Not everything goes. There are inherent criteria of rightness, and the possibility of alternative interpretations does not license all of them equally. (p. 13-14)

Bruner's definition of understanding reflects the idea that "all 'truths' are relative to the frame of reference which contains them" (Bove, 1990, p. 56). Still, "not everything goes." Instead, Bruner argues:

> [u]nderstanding is the outcome of organizing and contextualizing essentially contestable, incompletely verifiable propositions in a disciplined way. (p. 90)

History, then, represents a disciplined means of understanding the past even though the claims people make are tentative, contestable, and change over time as historians offer new interpretations in light of emerging concerns. They engage in disciplined systematic inquiry, using certain rules of evidence and means of justifying claims.

I believed, like Bruner (1996), that it is the role of schools to aid children "in learning to use the [culture's] tools of meaning making and reality construction" (p. 20). In the case of history, the culture is a diverse set of professional historians. It was in this spirit that I provided my students with the opportunity to engage in a year-long systematic, disciplined inquiry into the questions, "Why have people moved to Michigan and what was it like for them?" While the methods we used in answering these questions were not isomorphic with those used by historians, they bore some initial resemblance to some historians' tools.

In contrast to traditional social studies classrooms in which teachers feed students the product of historians' work, my students constructed their own historical narratives. Through our investigation, we developed particular ways of answering our inquiry question, ways of knowing which evolved as students participated in and contributed to the development of the historical practices established by our classroom community. Students conducted oral interviews, used evidence to support claims, subjected their claims to the

scrutiny of their peers, and developed shared understandings about the kinds of explanations that "made sense." In light of the norms we established, certain claims or explanations were considered reasonable, others were not. Not everything counted as "correct" or "right." We developed "criteria of rightness" and ways of dealing with competing reality claims.

My beliefs about learning also informed my teaching practice. Influenced by constructivist learning theories, I believed that what people bring with them -- their knowledge, values, and beliefs -- shape the way they make sense of new information and ideas. In enacting this belief, I asked the children questions that required them to make their thinking public. Doing so not only subjected their ideas to the evaluation and scrutiny of their peers but also allowed me to build upon the understandings they brought with them.

My desire to make my students' histories a part of the curriculum influenced the choices I made as well. The general curriculum for fourth grade social studies is Michigan history and geography. In an attempt to connect both the curriculum to the children's lives and the children's personal family histories to larger historical narratives, I chose migration to Michigan as the focus for our inquiry. I knew that since all the children lived in Michigan, each of their families would have a story to tell about why they first settled here, stories that would often and inevitably connect to larger social, economic, and political trends. I did not, however, know what specific stories they would bring.

We launched our investigation by studying when and why Native Americans first came to this region. After learning about the French fur traders

and missionaries, we explored Michigan's early settlement by the English. Next, we examined three groups who settled in Michigan during the 1800s and why: settlers from the East, European immigrants, and runaway slaves from the South. Beginning in February, we turned our attention to the 20th century, focusing on the impact of the automobile industry on migration. The students spent the remainder of the school year on an oral history project. For the next four months, they crafted interview questions, conducted (and videotaped) interviews, analyzed their "data," and wrote historical narratives about why people came to Michigan and what it was like for them during this time period.[4] Our year-long investigation led to the creation of a video entitled "Coming to Michigan: A Journey Through the Ages." The students both wrote the narration for the video and selected clips from the informants' testimonies to support their claims. Like the year before, the show aired on local television at the end of the school year.

A Note on Data Collection

Much of the data collection for this study took place during the normal course of instruction. I collected the students' written work, journals, and various projects. I also audio-taped class discussions and kept a journal in which I recorded my lesson plans, reflections, and observations. In addition, I engaged in more intensive data collection by periodically interviewing a sample of six focal fourth graders who represented a cross-section of abilities and

[4] The children interviewed 14 people: 9 relatives, 4 members of the community, and the children's classroom teacher. Of these 14 informants, 10 were African American, three were immigrants (from Mexico, Guatemala, Germany), and finally, their classroom teacher was a white Southerner.

backgrounds. Some of these interviews were semi-structured, while others were more informal as I used the interviews as an opportunity to follow-up on particular ideas students articulated in their journals or in class discussions. I interviewed each focus student at least five times for between 45 minutes to an hour each time. I chose not to interview third graders since several of them frequently left the class to work with volunteers on other subject areas.

Overview of the Chapters

The next three chapters reveal the understandings my students developed as the stories they told about the past became more "disciplined." The purpose of this dissertation, however, is not to make claims about the kinds of understandings elementary age students are ultimately capable of developing. My students' sense-making was both enabled and constrained by the learning opportunities I provided them as well as by the prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs they brought with them. Still, this study does shed light on the debate over young children's capacity for complex historical thought. In the end, readers are likely to judge for themselves how "mature," "sophisticated," or "genuine" my students' understandings were. They will do so based on their own views of historical understanding.

I do not explicitly compare and contrast my students' reasoning with those of historians, highlighting their deficiencies or strengths. Rather, I use the writings of historians, historiographers, and philosophers of history as lenses through which I might "see" and "hear" the children's sense-making. In

conceptualizing the growth of historical understanding, Seixas (1995) draws upon recent academic historiography for a similar purpose. He notes:

> Recent academic historiography has been shaped by the same cultural conditions that provide the seedbed for contemporary, naive, or novice historical thinking (Seixas, 1993a). For that reason, I conjecture, it provides insights into naive or novice historical thinking in our own time, which might be more difficult to uncover with other tools. (p. 768)

The following chapters are first and foremost about the construction of historical meaning -- about how a particular group of children made sense of the past in the context of a social studies class which provided students with particular tools for sense-making.

One of the principle ways people make sense of experience -- of organizing and contextualizing propositions -- is through narrative: "by telling a story of what something is 'about'" (Bruner, 1996, p. 90). This is particularly true in the field of history, as much "of historiography has been and continues to be in narrative form" (Mink, 1987, p. 184). But it is equally true of children:

> Storytelling is the most ubiquitous of human activities, and in any culture it is the form of complex discourse that is earliest accessible to children and by which they are largely acculturated. (Mink, 1987 p. 186)

Nelson and her colleagues (1989) found that children recount experiences in story-like form when they are as young as two years old, formulating temporal-causal sequences of events. Hence, narrative provides a window into the meaning my students constructed, standing as a product of their intellectual work in organizing and contextualizing information. At the same time, narrative served as a tool of thought, "a primary cognitive instrument" they used in the

process of sense-making (Mink, 1987, p. 187). In all three chapters, my analyses focus on the narratives students constructed.

Building upon the research which has begun to investigate the situated nature of historical understanding, I place students' thinking in the multiple contexts in which it occurs (e.g., interpersonal, cultural, and historical). In each chapter, I highlight the values, beliefs, and cultural tools children brought with them which shaped their understandings. I move back and forth between foregrounding and backgrounding individual students' sense-making and the class's collective construction of meaning, highlighting the relationship between the two.

In Chapter Two, I introduce three focus students, emphasizing the interpretive frameworks which influenced the stories they told. I do so by showing how these children selectively combined and ordered information, filling in gaps and making connections to create particular plots and realities, based on their individual life histories, concerns, curiosities, worldviews, and values. In Chapter Three, I bring the reader inside of the classroom, providing a portrait of my students' work together as they constructed narratives about why people came to Michigan and what it was like for them. In this chapter, I focus on how the norms of discourse we established shaped students' understandings, constraining what stories could and could not be told. I explore how students' storytelling became disciplined by our cultural norms as the class collectively negotiated meanings.

In Chapter Four, I return to my focal students once again as the primary unit of analysis, describing the narrative explanations they developed about prejudice and discrimination in Michigan. Specifically, I examine the reasons students offered to account for people's actions and attitudes, as well as how those attitudes changed over time. This chapter also explicates the way in which the students' interpretive frameworks and our norms of discourse influenced the stories they told. All three chapters are interrelated. I treat each analysis, while it could stand alone, as a building block for a more holistic argument about the situated nature of children's historical sense-making which I explore in Chapter Five. Taken together these four chapters provide the reader with a fuller sense of the meanings my students constructed as well as the various factors that contributed to the development of those understandings. In Chapter Six, I leave the classroom and students to reflect on the story behind my study. In doing so, I explicate my developing understanding of the relationship among research, subject matter knowledge, and practice.

As I tell my students' stories, I recognize that doing so is itself an interpretive act and that what it is I "see" is the product of my own interpretive framework, a framework which has developed and changed over the course of the year through both reading and interacting with my "data." In the end, it is my story about their stories (Geertz, 1995) and the "object of interpretation" -- to paraphrase Bruner (1996) -- is my students' understanding (p. 90).

Chapter Two

What They Find Worthy: Children's Interpretive Frames

> History is what one age finds worthy of note in another.
> Jacob Burckhardt

The idea that people's analytic or interpretive frameworks shape their understandings has become common place across disciplines. Anthropologists, as Geertz (1983) notes, have long had "a keen sense of the dependence of what is seen upon where it is seen from and what it is seen with" (p. 4). Weber (1994) highlighted the role that a person's point of view plays in the construction of social reality:

> All of the analysis of infinite reality which the finite human mind can conduct rests on the tacit assumption that only a finite portion of this reality constitutes the object of scientific investigation, and that only it is "important" in the sense of being "worthy of being known." (p. 535)

Weber argued that our attention on reality is guided by values that shape what we "see." For example, Kuhn's (1962) history of science revealed the role that paradigms play in shaping research agendas and findings of scientists. Recently, cultural psychologists, such as Bruner (1996) have adopted a similar view: "The meaning of any fact, proposition, or encounter is relative to the perspective or frame of reference in terms of which it is construed" (p. 13).

Philosophers of history have also pointed to the role subjectivities play in determining the realities we construct. Specifically, they have turned their attention to the study of narrative, examining the way historians combine events and create interrelationships to tell their particular stories. Mink (1987), for

example, argues that:

> [w]hen it comes to the narrative treatment of an ensemble of interrelationships, we credit the imagination or the sensibility or the insight of the individual historian. This must be so, since there are no *rules* for the construction of a narrative as there are for the analysis and interpretation of evidence. (p. 199)

Constructing narratives, whether about the past or the present, requires making choices. As Gee (1992), a linguist, explains:

> Putting "facts" into a sequence means making choices about "billions" of "happenings" that could be reported as "facts," making choices about what will count as a fact and which facts will get into the sequence and which will be foregrounded and which others backgrounded. That is to say, it means emplotting the world. (p. 65)

My students constructed different versions of the past, even though they encountered a common set of historical texts in class. They "emplotted" the world differently, telling their own stories. This is not surprising, for as Seixas (1997) notes:

> Students do not swallow whole what this year's teachers and textbooks tell them is historically significant. Rather, they filter and sift and remember and forget, adding to, modifying, and reconstructing their frameworks of understanding, through their own often unarticulated values, ideas, and dispositions. (p. 22)

The stories my students told about the past reflected their own values, beliefs, ideas, and dispositions -- their own interpretive frameworks.

The students' interpretive frameworks were, in part, shaped by the times in which they lived. As students of history know, the "life and times" of historians matter. They shape the questions historians ask and the narratives they construct. So too, the life and times of my students influenced their historical sense-making. Epstein (1997) makes explicit the similarities between the way historians make sense of the past with the way teachers and learners do so:

> Just as historians' interpretations of the past are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they live, so too are those of teachers and learners. (p. 28)

The times in which the students lived provided them with values and beliefs which I explore in detail in this chapter. My students' values and beliefs about the world served as a basis for comparison between their present reality and what they "saw" in the past.

In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce three focus students, describing their interpretive frameworks and how these shaped the meaning they constructed[1]. In future chapters, when I explore the class narratives we created and the children's individual theorizing, images of students' interpretive frameworks will inform the pictures I paint of our work together.

Jessica

Jessica was smaller than most of her classmates, but what she lacked in size, she made up in presence. A powerful and positive force in the classroom, Jessica earned the respect and admiration of her classmates. Kind and thoughtful, Jessica attracted other children to her like a magnet. When her regular classroom teacher gave the children the chance to choose three classmates to sit by, every single child picked Jessica as one of their choices.

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[1] For the purpose of this analysis I have chosen to focus on three of my six focal students. I selected these students because they each come from interracial backgrounds: Two had white mothers and a black father, while one had a black mother and a white father. I wanted to avoid the tendency to essentialize students' sense-making by attributing their interpretations of the past primarily or solely to their racial backgrounds. While the students' racial backgrounds clearly played an important role in the sense they made, focusing on children from similar racial backgrounds allows one to see the differences in the children's sense-making (without being able to simplistically attribute those differences solely to the children's racial or ethnic backgrounds.) In addition, these three students represent a range of academic abilities and brought with them varying amounts of cultural capital related to the study of history. Furthermore, they come from different economic and educational backgrounds. Both of Jessica's parents had graduate level

Sometimes the other children teased her for talking too much and sharing her ideas too often, but her enthusiasm was contagious. Confident, yet humble, Jessica rarely mentioned her own achievements. A straight A student, her standardized test scores were amongst the highest in the class. She scored in the high 90th percentile in both reading and math. Outside of school, Jessica took dance classes, played the piano, and regularly frequented the local bookstore to add to her growing collection of novels. An avid reader, Jessica consumed books as though they were candy.

Leadership runs in Jessica's blood. Her grandfather, one of the first African American lawyers in the city, was the president of the local chapter of the NAACP during the 1950s and 60s. Her father and many of his brothers and sisters followed in their father's footsteps and have become lawyers. Jessica's mother, who is white, has a background in theater. She currently trains businessmen around the country to help sharpen their presentation skills.

"I enjoy hearing stories from the past because it is the history of my family"[2]

Jessica brought to our class a wealth of knowledge about the past based on family stories, television shows and movies, and historical fiction and non-fiction. Her family's history shaped her interest in the past, the content she found worth pursuing, and the questions she found worth asking. The past provided Jessica with lessons on how to live in the world. It shaped the kind of person she wanted to be, the role she wanted to play in society. It gave her a vision of how

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educations, while only one of Michael's parents finished high school. One of Josh's parents completed college, while the other took a few college courses.

[2] Throughout this study, I use quotation marks to signal when I am borrowing the words of my students.

to make a difference, to actively create the future of which she dreamed.

Jessica explicitly connected her interest in the past to her own family's history at the very beginning of the year. In September she wrote:

> I enjoy hearing stories from the past because it is the history of my family and to me it is interesting. It can be funny and sad but cool to hear the silly things and the weird things and that is why I like stories of the past. (J., 9/8/97) [3]

Stories about the past were a central feature of Jessica's family get-togethers. Her grandfather would regale the family with stories of his days as the NAACP president, stories Jessica had heard "hundreds of times." At these gatherings, Jessica learned of her grandfather's exploits in helping to desegregate an urban school district, in suing a local hotel which refused to provide accommodations for a black basketball team, and in forcing the local school districts to hire black teachers. She frequently shared these stories with the class to highlight a point or to use as an example of concepts we were discussing such as rights, equality, or discrimination.

Through our inquiry project, Jessica discovered that her family had a long legacy of resisting injustice and fighting for equality. When we first conducted our initial survey of the students' relatives, Jessica found out that her ancestors had escaped from a Southern slave plantation to freedom in Canada. They eventually returned to Michigan after the Civil War. When we studied the early 1900s, Jessica learned that her great grandfather had been an active political leader in the state. She brought in copies of several newspaper articles about

[3] I use "J. " to reference students' journals, "I." for interviews I conducted with students, "C.D." for class discussions, and "S.I." for student interview of community members.

his achievements. The first President of a local branch of the NAACP, he also worked in the Office of Director of Negro Affairs and was a member of the executive council of the Negro division of the Republican National Committee. Through his political activities, the articles stated, he "won state and county-wide recognition as an outstanding member of the Negro race."

When we studied immigration at the turn of the century, Jessica learned about her great grandmother, an Italian immigrant who made a living renting out her small home to boarders. Jessica also attended to the struggles immigrants faced. She wanted people to know that:

> A lot of immigrants went through very hard times. They faced prejudice, they had the worst houses and their working conditions were lousy. I would like people to know about this because it interests me and maybe it interests other kids as much as me. I really like learning about this topic because I like to learn about my background. (J., 2/2/98)

Over the year, Jessica regularly read books which contained themes similar to the ones embedded in her family's stories. She chose books which emphasized the oppression and exploitation people faced and people's efforts to make our society more just. She read about the collective struggles of African Americans as they sought to gain their freedom and civil rights. She read every book she could find on slavery and the Underground Railroad, including The Story of Harriet Tubman: Freedom Train (Sterling, 1954), Get on Board: The Story of the Underground Railroad (Haskin, 1993), A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl (MisKissack, 1997), and I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl (Hansen, 1997). She read books about the immigrant experience which highlighted the hardships, obstacles, and prejudice they faced as they sought to make a better life for themselves.

Jessica's beliefs about the purpose of learning about the past were clearly shaped by the stories she heard at home and read on her own. For Jessica, the purpose of history was to learn about "mistakes of the past" and how people worked to overcome them:

Shari: Are there things which you have learned about the past that you think are important to know about?

Jessica: When the Civil War happened.

Shari: And why do you think that's important to remember?

Jessica: Because that's when slaves became free. They got to be free. They weren't owned anymore.

Shari: Is there anything that you know a little about but that you would want to study more about the past?

Jessica: People who wanted to get rid of slavery -- abolitionists.

Shari: You're reading a book about that right now, aren't you?

Jessica: Yeah, I thought the chapter I read last night was interesting because it's about this lady who opened a school for black girls even though the county or something didn't want it. So, therefore, it was against the law and people from the county would throw rocks at the house and they burned part of the house and they threw rocks at the girls and one of the girls on the way to school, this kid he blew a horn into her ear and she couldn't hear anymore. And like all the people who owned stores wouldn't let her buy from them anymore because she had a black school. And the doctor wouldn't see the girls. One girl got hit in the arm by a rock and the other girl couldn't hear from that one ear and the doctor wouldn't see them because they were black.

Shari: Was the teacher black?

Jessica: The teacher was white.

Shari: Did anything happen to her?

Jessica: No. Well, she got arrested once.

Shari: Why did she get arrested?

Jessica: Because it was against the law to have a school for blacks unless like your county or something, the community, agreed that you could, then you could.

Shari: What would you want to tell people about what you learned from that book?

Jessica: I would tell them about that lady I read about last night. (I., 12/18/97)

Jessica wanted to tell people "about that lady," the lady who broke the law in order to educate blacks. The woman and her story provided Jessica with an example of the "special things people did that helped correct" the mistakes of the past such as slavery.

At the end of the year, Jessica continued to see the past in terms of mistakes made and actions taken to overcome them:

Shari: Do you think history is important to learn about?

Jessica: Yes, because I think we should learn about things that happened and we can learn from the mistakes we made before and we can learn about the good things that have happened.

Shari: Could you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by we can learn from the mistakes?

Jessica: Like slavery and things, like we can learn back then, that was not a good thing and that will keep other people and the people to come from making the same mistakes we did before.

Shari: And how about the other part. You said that we can also learn about good things.

Jessica: Um, we can learn about special things that people did that helped correct those mistakes. (I., 5/21/98)

Jessica viewed the problems of the past such as slavery as vivid reminders of

how things ought not be, of how things must never be again.

Just like her grandfather and other people she had read about in the past, Jessica envisioned herself as the kind of person who would do things to "correct mistakes" in society. For example, one day when I asked the children what they thought they would have done in the face of segregation in the 1920s Jessica wrote nonstop for nearly an hour and then returned after lunch to finish her essay. She outlined her plan for protest:

> What I would do is if I were white I would stick up for blacks and where blacks could not go, I would not go, where they could go, I would go and I would be supportive of them and I would try not to be disagreeable with blacks and I would try to help them get their rights back like getting a good education and getting the kind of job that would pay them a decent amount.
>
> What I would do if I were black, I would do what I thought was right. I would stand with my friends and I would let the whites who were against me know that I was not afraid to go to jail or die for what I thought I deserved like the right to go where I pleased just as the whites did and not be told I was not allowed to do this or go there, that I could not drink from this water fountain or get this job because I was black. I would stay with anyone who was trying to get me and my friends' rights back. I would try to show that I would not be afraid and run, but I would not use violence to show that I would stand up for all the blacks who lost their rights because whites thought us less because of our color. I would be in all the protests against whites and when there were meetings to talk about what we could do to make our rights happen.
>
> I would make an army of people who would be peaceful but who would help me get my message that blacks were not going to be pushed around. I would get my education the best I could and teach all blacks who were denied education all I knew so that they could make a better life for themselves and for their families. I would write books and rewrite them 400 times and pass them out so that blacks would know that there were people who wanted to make things better. I would make signs, have rallies, and make speeches till all knew that I was working to make a better life for the generations to come. I would go to churches and preach what I wanted to happen. I would go to court to try and get things like fair trials and rights that say I can drink from the same fountain and go to the same restaurants and if I can't go whites can't go, if I can go, whites can go too. If my white friends were with me, I would ask them to ask all the

> people they knew to protest with me. And I would make all I knew to come with me and be with me and say that they knew I was right. And I would try to get any whites with blacks and make it known that whites and blacks can mix and be together. The way I would fight is with my words and signs and speeches and protests. And I would use public facilities in which I could not go for places where I made the speeches and the protests. Even if I went to jail, I would want it to be from a place I was not to go but I still made part of a speech and had a protest and was taken to jail. But as soon as I got out I would just keep on making speeches and, leading protests and fighting till I died. Plus, I would quit my job and this would be my job, my life, what I was meant to do and I would not let anyone make me be discriminated against and segregated and made me stop what I was doing. Make me mad if you dare is what my sign would say because if they said I was dumb or stupid for trying to get me and my family rights I would make even more speeches, go to more churches, more rallies and probably go to jail even more. I would stay on a course to make my world a better place. Why I would do these things is because I would want to be known as someone who stands up for what they believe in. (J., 3/12/98)

Jessica wanted to be known as someone who "stands up for what they believe in." Clearly, she inherited her family's strong sense of fairness and a desire to improve the world and to act against injustices. Her deep and abiding interest in history is rooted in this heritage. Learning about people who helped correct mistakes provided her with a blueprint of how to make a difference in the world and how to work collectively to effect change.

Jessica believed, however, that racial discrimination was a problem of the past, a mistake which had largely been corrected. In a group interview at the end of the year, she said that she did not think that people who came to Michigan in the 1980s or 1990s would tell stories of discrimination "because I have never heard, seen, or read about any discrimination of people not being able to get jobs or anything like that in the 80s and 90s." Jessica imagined that there might be isolated instances of discrimination, but she was certain she would hear about them in the news:

> I don't think [discrimination] would happen. It might happen once or twice, but I don't think it would happen more than once a year. I mean like in Michigan it wouldn't. I think if something like that happened then we would hear about it, cause I think people would sue and you would hear about it in the newspaper or in the news if it happened. (I., 5/8/98)

Racial problems were not a part of Jessica's direct experience. She had not "heard, seen or read about" instances of it in Michigan and even at the end of the year, it was hard for her to imagine contemporary discrimination.

Instead, Jessica identified a different set of problems in the present. An essay she wrote for the school end-of-the year assembly reveals her view of the salient social, economic, and political problems of the day:

> I am dreaming of a better world where everyone can get along. Where no one is poor and everyone has good food and good water. I am dreaming of a world where there is a cure for cancer and aids. Where there is not any violence or people who use drugs. Where everyone can speak their minds and be listened to and considered. That is what I dream will happen some day. (J., 6/8/98)

Jessica dreamed of a society in which there was economic justice, "where no one is poor," and everybody receives the basic necessities of life such as food and water. She wanted an end to the violence and drugs of which children today are intimately aware. Jessica ended her essay on a political note, reflecting her desire for power to be shared more broadly. A democrat at heart, Jessica envisioned a world "where everyone can speak their minds and be listened to and considered." Jessica dreamed of a future which she played an active role in shaping through her own actions and by working collectively with others.

<u>Stories about Mistakes and the "Special Things" People Did to Help Correct Them</u>

Jessica's values and beliefs about the purpose of learning about the past provided her with a lens for seeing and sense-making. She paid attention to

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what she considered to be mistakes. Jessica's view of the way the world should be defined what she perceived as a "mistake." She valued equality, freedom, peace, and economic and social justice. She focused on events in the past where there was an absence of these values or what she viewed as violations of democratic principles. She then sought to understand how such mistakes could have occurred. Finally, she tried to figure out how people worked to solve them.

As the class worked to create a collective narrative which explained why African Americans came to Michigan by way of the Underground Railroad, Jessica simultaneously sought to create her own narrative which made the actions of the slave owners and slave catchers understandable to her and shed light on why blacks, in particular, were excluded from the American creed. When we read the Declaration of Independence, Jessica was quick to point out that the people who wrote "All men are created equal" were not including blacks. "They just meant white men," she told the class, "Blacks were slaves when they wrote the Declaration of Independence" (C.D., 12/15/97). This, she believed, was an example of a "mistake," a mistake Jessica struggled to understand. She wondered why whites "pick[ed] blacks to be slaves in America" (C.D., 12/15/97).

After watching segments from a video about the Underground Railroad called Roots of Resistance, Jessica began her answer:

> They chose blacks to be slaves because they thought they were inferior. There was slavery because they didn't need to pay the slaves. (J., 12/19/97)

The video mentioned both of these causes of slavery. While these explanations provided Jessica with insights into both the ideological beliefs and the economic motivation which led whites to enslave blacks, she was still dissatisfied. She

struggled to explain why whites would have thought blacks were inferior in the first place.

In an interview two months later, Jessica revealed how she had made sense of this unanswered question:

> Jessica: White people found this civilization in Africa and they just thought, "These people are different from us and I think they aren't worth as much as we are, we could take them to our country and they could work for us because they don't amount to what we do and so therefore, it would be right to take them to work for us."
>
> Shari: Why do you think they thought that?
>
> Jessica: Because sort of like being prejudiced, they felt that other people didn't amount to what they amounted to and they had never seen black people and they thought, "There is not this kind of civilization in America, they don't have what we do, that must mean they don't amount to what we do and there are only black people in Africa, so obviously Africa is where people are different and it's probably okay for us to take them." (I., 2/20/98)

Although we had not studied Africa or the slave trade, Jessica constructed a story which helped her understand the "mistake" of slavery. She reasoned that, based on their view that Africans "aren't worth as much as we are," the whites must have convinced themselves that "it would be right to take them to work for us." Jessica imagined that they must have come to this conclusion based on their perception that the African's civilization was less developed. Rather than demonizing the white slave owners and slave catchers by telling a tale of good and evil, Jessica told a story which helped her understand how human beings could act so unjustly, how they could reason their way into exploitation despite the American creed.

At the same time, Jessica interpreted the story of the Underground

Railroad as being a story about resistance to oppression and civil disobedience, a story of "special people" who worked to correct the "mistake" of slavery. Before we began to study about the Underground Railroad, Jessica already knew about the role that blacks played in helping others escape. When I asked the students what they knew about the topic, she wrote:

> I know that people went on the underground railroad to escape slavery. I know that Harriet Tubman was a famous black who helped slaves escape to freedom. I know this from books that I read last year. (J., 12/15/97)

When I asked Jessica why she thought white people were willing to risk helping out on the Underground Railroad, she highlighted the idea that breaking the law allows one to "make a statement":

> [They helped out on the Underground Railroad] because they thought other people were doing the wrong thing and they thought even if they lose their stuff, they're helping someone else get free. And also, if they got caught they could also make a statement about it because they could make it more public even if they got caught, they could say, "Yeah, okay, I want to prove that I'm not gonna stop just because you can take my stuff and arrest me doesn't mean I'm going to stop doing this and trying to make it right." (I., 2/20/98)

The class had learned that the abolitionists were morally opposed to slavery and that they could be arrested if they were caught helping free runaway slaves. But neither the video we watched nor the books we read as a class mentioned the issue of getting arrested as a means of purposefully gaining attention for a cause. Drawing upon her knowledge of social action, Jessica imagined that the abolitionists were willing to take the risk of being arrested because doing so would afford them the opportunity to make their cause "more public." They stood up for what they believed in and fought for what they knew was right. As such, the story of the Underground Railroad served as an example of the way in which

"special people" helped close the gap between the nation's ideals and reality. Over the course of the year, Jessica continued to focus on "mistakes" and the actions people took to correct them.

Josh

A sensitive boy, Josh always looked out for the feelings of his classmates. Having frequently been teased about his pronounced lisp, Josh cared about how people treated each other. He "knew how it felt to be called names." Josh was the first (and only) child to begin wearing a WWJD (What would Jesus do?) bracelet to class, an accessory that gained popularity in the late 1990s. More than simply a fad for Josh, the question seemed to provide him with a tool for reflecting upon his own actions and those of others. As his third grade teacher wrote:

> Josh is sensitive to the feelings of others. He has a strong sense of fairness. He prefers us to use what he considers an unbiased way to choose groups, helpers, and students to answer questions, etc. (1st quarter report, 1996-97)

A reluctant writer, Josh preferred to share his ideas orally. A teacher from a prior year identified the same pattern, noting on his quarterly evaluation that, "Josh is much more confident articulating his ideas. Conveying them on paper is more challenging" (1st quarter report, 1996). His journal entries were typically short, sometimes only a sentence or two. Occasionally, he simply drew a picture to express an idea.

Josh was sometimes hesitant about sharing his ideas verbally as well. In interviews, he often began an answer by saying, "I don't know." I came to realize, however, that after a long pause Josh would typically launch into a

thoughtful response. Josh identified his own tentativeness in a story he chose to tell about himself when I asked the children to write about something that happened to them in the past:

> Before I was one years old I started walking but I did it on my knees. I did it so much my mom had to buy kneepads so my knees wouldn't turn black. When no one was looking I would walk on my feet until I was good at it. Then when I was really good, I would just walk everywhere on my feet. It did not hurt my knees. But my knees did turn black and they still are. (J., 9/10/98)

At parent-teacher conferences, Josh's mother repeated the story, joking that "Josh has always been like that." The story seemed to be one that was told and retold, illustrating Josh's cautious nature, a trait exhibited at an early age.

While Josh's reading scores were just slightly above average, the comments he made in class often revealed the great depth of his thinking. Moreover, he demonstrated a keen ability to make connections both across topics and between his own experiences and the information he encountered in school. Josh's response to a question I asked about a song which encouraged "Yankees" to move to Michigan in the early 1800s reveals the kinds of connections he often made:

Shari: If you were living in the 1830s, would you trust the information in this song if you were trying to make a decision about moving to Michigan?

Josh: Maybe.

Shari: Why or why not?

Josh: Well, one reason is that most people write songs that aren't true. Sometimes people write songs so they can make money, like advertisements for a store. They advertise with the song so people can come to the store so they make money. And the people who wrote this song wanted to make people come to Michigan and maybe they just wanted

to make money with people coming to Michigan.
(I., 12/18/98)

Josh knew from his own experience that advertisements were not always truthful -- they aimed at making money. It stood to reason then, according to Josh, that the people who wrote this song many have had a similar motive. Other teachers also noted Josh's tendency to make connections between ideas. His third grade teacher highlighted this on his quarterly progress report, noting that "Josh is able to connect concepts and link them to his prior knowledge."

"I want to remember everything because I might have it in a test one day when I'm in college or something"

Unlike Jessica, Josh did not, at first, appear to have an obvious framework for making sense of the past. After each unit, Josh would typically write the same pithy comment about what he thought was important to remember. About the Underground Railroad he wrote, "Everything" (J., 1/22/98). About immigration he wrote, "I want to remember all of it" (J., 2/2/98). He wanted to remember "[e]verything about what life was like" for the people we interviewed about coming to Michigan (J., 3/5/98).

Since Josh hated writing, I assumed that his short responses reflected his desire to write as little as possible while still completing the assignment. But even in an interview where Josh was inclined to elaborate on his answers, he mentioned his desire to "remember everything":

Shari: Why do you want to remember everything about the tribes in Michigan?

Josh: I want to remember everything because I might have it in a test one day when I'm in college or something.

Shari: Are there any other reasons why you might want to remember this stuff?

Josh: Cause my dad said that when I grow up and have kids, he said kids ask a lot of questions so I would need to know.

Josh believed he needed to learn about the past so he could do well in college or so he could tell his children the information in the future – neither of which seemed related to current concerns.

Although Josh identified remote reasons for studying the past, he seemed genuinely interested in our investigation. He stayed after school on many occasions to work on the filming of our video production. He also came to the Michigan Historical Museum after school where the children filmed themselves in front of various exhibits as a backdrop for narrating the script they wrote about why people came to Michigan. Standing in front of the logging exhibit, he told about how his grandfather had migrated to Michigan from Finland to chop down trees because "Michigan was a popular logging state."

Moreover, despite Josh's contention that he wanted and needed to remember everything, as one might expect, he did not do so. He remembered some things and forgot others, selectively filtering information. He, like Jessica, had his own lens for doing so which reflected his values and his beliefs about why it was important to know about the past.

<u>"If Martin Luther King and nobody tried to change anything..."</u>

Just as Josh made connections across concepts and ideas, he also made connections between the past and the present. As the year went on, those connections became clearer. Josh linked events from the past to the present, noting the impact of those events on the contemporary world, a world which, like

Jessica, he viewed as being free from racial problems. Also like Jessica, Josh's family history shaped his view of the present. Josh came from an interracial family. His mother is black, his father white. In referring to racial discrimination, he, like Jessica, told me that "all of those problems are solved" (I., 5/8/98). For his family members, "those problems" had been solved. Josh's mother, a college graduate, worked for the Department of Corrections, an area which we had heard in class had not been open to blacks in the past. Similarly, his grandmother finally got a job as an English teacher after initially being turned down "because of her color" (I., 5/8/98).

Josh contrasted the past with the present in ways which were highly relevant to his own life. When we talked about whether and how things had changed since the 1960s Josh was, uncharacteristically, the first to raise his hand. He confidently told the class:

> Schools aren't segregated, the housing isn't segregated, and you can go into a restaurant and have fun and be happy and you can have any job you want, if you're qualified. (C.D., 4/23/98)

Josh could "have fun and be happy" and get a job someday if he was qualified for it, while his grandmother could not (even though she had a teaching certificate). Proof of that lay in his mother's and grandmother's triumphs over past prejudices. Josh valued what he perceived as the current state of racial harmony and equal opportunity.

A critical feature of Josh's thinking involved his belief that events are contingent upon the actions of people who were faced with choices about how to act. The choices people made affected the outcome of history. Viewing the significance of events in terms of their consequences, he often imagined "what

might have been" if people had not made those choices:

> If Martin Luther King and nobody tried to change anything, there wouldn't be any Tiger Woods or Michael Jordon or any black famous people like Michael Jordon or anybody like that. And my mom and dad wouldn't meet because black people couldn't marry white people, because my dad is white and my mom is black. (I., 1/26/98)

Josh saw the actions of people like Martin Luther King, Jr. as being directly responsible for his current life and the life of others.

Josh also imagined the course of history without the negative impact of hatred:

> [I]f there weren't people being prejudiced, then we probably wouldn't have had any wars and then we wouldn't have had discrimination or segregation and then it would be almost like it is now. Because there is maybe a little bit of prejudice going on now, but there's not discrimination or segregation. (I., 5/8/98)

If there had not been "people being prejudiced" then life would have always been like it is today, free from racial problems and the wars which Josh associated with those problems.

As I looked back over Josh's journal entries from the beginning of the year, it seemed that his ideas about the contingency of history on the actions of individuals influenced his thinking early on. For example, when I asked the class to predict what they thought would happen after Europeans first came to Michigan, Josh imagined the possibility that Europeans and Native Americans might have lived in harmony if Europeans decided to love the Indians:

> I think the book says that the Indians' lives would soon change forever because people will take their land <u>unless</u> they love them. (J., 10/21/97)

Josh anticipated that if the Europeans who came to Michigan loved the Indians, they might not take the Indians' land. Only Josh entertained the possibility that

things might not turn out as the rest of the class expected.

Linking the Past to the Present: Stories of Caring Choices

The stories Josh constructed often linked seemingly disparate events together in order to provide an explanation for how the problems of the past were eventually solved. As he constructed stories about the past, he noted caring choices people made along the way which he believed had a positive impact on the course of history. Although I never directly asked Josh about this and have no evidence to test my hunch, I can not help to wonder whether there was a connection between Josh's WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelet and his attention to issues of caring choices.

In contrast to Jessica's story about the Underground Railroad which emphasized the important role of civil disobedience in effecting change, Josh constructed a coherent story in which the choices of caring individuals eventually led to freedom by linking the Underground Railroad to the North winning the Civil War. He first articulated the connection between the Underground Railroad and the Civil War in an interview:

Josh: The Underground Railroad is important to know about.

Shari: Why do you think that is important to know about?

Josh: Because if it wasn't for [the Underground Railroad] they probably wouldn't have escaped and they wouldn't be free and then they probably wouldn't have had enough blacks to have the war.

Shari: Why did they need blacks to have the war?

Josh: They needed some blacks cause the blacks could help fight. (I., 2/10/98)

At the time, I was not clear about how Josh had connected the Underground Railroad with blacks fighting in the Civil War. Over three months later, Josh's response to an interview question reveals more explicitly the connection he made. He told me that of all the things he had learned over the course of the year, he wanted to remember the role that blacks had played in fighting for their freedom during the Civil War. He explained:

> Even though they only had one more state to go to get to Canada to be free, they fought so they would get freedom. They didn't just like go to Canada. (I., 5/8/98)

We had not actually discussed the fact that ex-slaves fought in the war, although the class had seen pictures of black troops when they went to the Michigan Historical Museum.

A closer look at the path of Josh's reasoning provides a portrait of how he connected one event to the next to tell a story that explained the end of slavery. Josh knew that slaves could be returned to the South if they were caught. He also knew that the number of blacks living in Michigan had increased in the years before the Civil War ended while the Underground Railroad was active. He, like many other children in the class, inferred that their numbers increased during this time period as a result of blacks escaping to freedom on the Underground Railroad. He further inferred that the blacks who fought in the war must have been ex-slaves. Based on this assumption, Josh viewed the fugitive slaves as being faced with a choice: They could flee the country and live in freedom or they could stay and fight for the freedom of those who were still enslaved. Josh concluded that they had made an altruistic choice, a choice which Josh inferred had helped win the Civil War.

Josh also viewed the abolitionists as making choices which were motivated by love and a sense of caring for fellow human beings. He described why he thought the abolitionists helped on the Underground Railroad:

> They risked their lives because they cared about stuff. Like they cared about African Americans because they know they are as good as they are so people cared about them. And because almost all blacks had to lose their lives because of slavery. (I., 2/10/98)

Josh connected human agency, the act of "risk[ing] their lives," to the capacity of human beings to empathize with the plight of others, others who were of equal worth or "as good as they are."

Josh selectively remembered things about slavery, the Underground Railroad, the abolitionists, the fugitive slave laws, the role of blacks in the Civil War five months after we studied this topic. One might expect that he would have forgotten details such as the Fugitive Slave Law. We had only discussed this in passing. But, for Josh, this information contributed to his overall narrative about why the North won the Civil War and the role that the choices of runaway slaves played in this victory. It was as if he, and the other children, were weaving a grand narrative over the course of the year. Each piece of selected information contributed to their narratives. Throughout the year, Josh, and others, told similar stories that explained both the past and the present, making connections between events and filling in gaps to make sense of the past.

Michael

Hardworking and conscientious, Michael took school seriously. He always completed his assignments on time, keeping them neatly organized in his social studies folder. He cared deeply about his grades. Unlike most of the other

students who were typically content with my comments and questions in their journals, Michael wanted to know how well he was doing. He often mentioned his concern about grades both orally and in writing. For example, at the end of his journal he wrote, "P.S. I hope I get a good grade" (J., 10/15/97). Or, " P.S. I want a good grade" (J., 10/19/97). Sometimes Michael took it upon himself to evaluate his own work by putting an A+ at the top of his paper. After taking two pages of notes related to an interview the children had conducted, Michael wrote, "I give myself an A+ because I did good" (J., 4/2/98).

Despite the importance Michael placed on grades, he struggled with reading. As his third grade teacher noted:

> Reading is something Michael avoids. We need to keep encouraging him. He does not seem to like to read for fun. He has a hard time just sitting and reading at DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time. (Third Grade Quarterly Report, 1996-1997).

Michael's test scores were average, although they had improved considerably each year since the first grade when he scored in the 4th percentile. Doing well in school was an integral part of Michael's identity and he worked hard to improve. His teacher described him as a "serious learner."

At the beginning of the year, Michael reluctantly participated in class discussions, yet he actively engaged with ideas in his writing. Michael loved to write, often filling several pages with notes. He even envisioned himself becoming an author one day:

> Authors are very smart and some day I might be an author and write things that were never. What do authors do in their spare time? How do authors get their ideas? Where do authors go to get their ideas? What do authors do if they want to be an author someday? (J., 11/6/97)

He often mentioned how much he liked to write as an aside in his journal:

> What I like best about journal is you get to write a lot which I like to do. Also you get to know more by asking questions. And you get to write down your own ideas on paper unlike a book when you just sit there and read, no fun at all. (J., 5/7/98)

While I encouraged the students to ask questions in their journals and in class, Michael made it his practice. Throughout the year, he sprinkled his journal with questions when he wanted to "know more."

Michael's writing skills were a valuable asset that his classmates came to admire. They frequently commented on his extraordinary ability to take copious and accurate notes, often turning to him to remind the class about what a particular interviewee had said about their experience coming to Michigan. The stories he heard through the oral history project provided him with a repository of information that he lacked at the beginning of the year, and his participation increased in skill and confidence. Adept at repeating stories which our interviewees told -- often almost verbatim -- Michael eventually began to eagerly share his ideas and questions with his classmates.

<u>"I think blacks would like to know how their parents were treated"</u>

At times, particularly before we began our oral history project, Michael's interest in the past seemed connected to his desire to do well in school. Like Josh, he identified all information as being equally important without using any historical criteria for assessing its significance:

> I think the information that we got on immigration is informational because I think people would want to know about this. People would want to know about what is going on in Michigan with them coming from where they lived and leaving from where they lived. I think everything is important to learn about because everything on Michigan is informational. I think this is informational because things on Michigan history is good to know about so it will give you a better education and make your mind think better and

make your mind focused on what is going on in class.

> Why I think Michigan in the 1800s is important to know about because if you are in school and you are a kid you would want to know about this because you were not alive in the 1800s so you would want to know a lot about it. Now I am going to tell you what I would remember to tell my friend. I would remember everything is important you need to know a lot about the 1800s. I would want somebody to tell me everything they knew because I would think what they had to say would be important. I would like to know because I would like to know what they learned so I would know more and I would know about more in social studies in school and be proud about myself and what I know. (J., 2/4/98)

In contrast to Josh who, at first, only imagined reasons in the distant future for knowing about the past, learning information served an immediate function for Michael. It helped him get a better education, to focus his mind, and make him "think better." It contributed to his self-esteem by making him feel proud for knowing things.

Michael's interest in acquiring knowledge led him to pay careful attention to whatever we studied. Typically, he included more details and facts in his notes than any of his classmates. This, in turn, provided an entry point for making more personal connections. For example, when I read the class Jacob Lawrence's book, The Great Migration (1993), Michael included over twelve descriptive details in his journal which he gleaned from the book and our discussion:

> The reason African Americans left from the South to the North was because there were floods and bugs and bugs were eating the cotton crop and the land was being destroyed. They were treated badly still over 51 years past when slavery stopped. Segregation is when whites are separated from blacks and they had to go to separate schools and separate public bathrooms, cafeterias, and separate neighborhoods and separate drinking fountains and separate buses. I think it is really unfair how they made the blacks do all separate things and I think all blacks should have equal rights and you can do all the very same things and they should not have to go to the back of the hot dog place and the whites

could just walk in. (J., 2/6/98)

Michael's final comments convey his own values. Segregation was unfair. He believed that all people should have equal rights and should be able to do "all the very same things." Judging segregation laws as unfair, Michael implicitly distinguished between the past and the present in moral terms. Although Michael did not explicitly say so in this journal entry, he implied that things were better now.

Michael's immediate family experience stood in contrast to the relationship between blacks and whites depicted in the book. Like several of his classmates, Michael came from an interracial family. In his world, blacks and whites are now friends, even husband and wife. In an interview in June, he expressed the view that racial discrimination no longer existed in Michigan. He supplied evidence from his own life that there were no longer problems in automobile factories. According to Michael, his dad, a factory worker had "never been discriminated against" (I., 5/8/98).

Michael's experience in an interracial family seemed to motivate him to understand the historic relationship between blacks and whites, how things were different in the past, and when relationships began to improve. When we studied the Underground Railroad, he asked:

> I have one question or more. My first is when did blacks and whites start being friends and how did blacks get to school? (J., 1/15/98)

Although Michael seemed motivated to understand these relationships, he had little to draw upon in terms of personal knowledge of his family's history or history more generally. He never shared family stories in class nor did any of his

relatives come to be interviewed. Thus, unlike Jessica who used her family stories to make sense of the curriculum, Michael used the curriculum to make sense of his history.

Michael adopted the stories of our interviewees as representative of the collective experience of African Americans. After listening to another child's grandfather speak of segregation in restaurants and hotels, Michael explained why we should put that information in our video:

> I think [the video] should be about how it was like in Grand Rapids, how [blacks] weren't allowed in restaurants or hotels or motels. Because I think blacks would like to know how their parents were treated so they would know and some blacks weren't alive in the thirties so they would like to know what it was like for their parents. (J., 3/5/98)

Michael assumed that his imagined audience, blacks, would want to know how "their parents" were treated, even though the story he had heard was only about one person. "I know I do," he added.

When Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) investigated how people use history in their own lives, the researchers found that black Americans tended to blur the distinction between "I" and "we." When they spoke about "we," they were typically referring to the experience of black Americans, whereas when white Americans spoke of "we," they were typically referring to their own immediate families. Michael seemed to be doing the same thing here, using "their parents" to broadly represent the collective African American experience.

At the end of the year, Michael reiterated that this was the reason why it is important to learn history:

Shari: Do you think history is important to learn?

Michael: Yes, so people that weren't alive back then, like when their

parents and grandparents were living, they would know about what it was like.

Shari: And why do you think that is important to know?

Michael: Cause they would never know what it was like and they would think it is important to know about their grandparents and their parents. (I., 5/21/98)

Michael seemed to assume that by learning about the experiences of other African Americans, he (as well as the television audience) could make inferences about what life must have been like for his own relatives.

Stories about What Life was Like "Back Then"

Like my other students, Michael's assumptions and beliefs about human behavior and the way the world works framed his view of the past. When people behaved in ways which were inconsistent with his expectations, he asked questions aimed at understanding what people were like "back then." In particular, he wanted to understand the beliefs and desires that motivated their actions. Over time, Michael began to develop expectations about how people would behave in the past, given his developing ideas about the norms and values of the times. He worked to construct stories which helped him make sense of the world of the past, a world he wanted to understand.

Michael asked questions when people's actions did not fit with his expectations about human behavior in the present. For example, in response to learning that during one of the riots in the 1960s blacks broke store windows, he wondered, "Why would blacks break the store windows if they liked stores?" (4/23/98). Michael assumed that people "like stores" because you can "buy things there." Hence, he viewed the actions of blacks who broke store windows

during the riots as incomprehensible (given his current beliefs about people's attitudes toward stores).

Similarly, when Michael learned that a school district in Michigan would not hire a black teacher in the 1950s, he asked:

> How do they know that black teachers aren't better than white teachers in teaching? I got a question for those people that wouldn't let somebody get a job because of their color and they don't even know if she is a good teacher or not. (C.D., 4/17/98)

Michael believed that the most qualified person should (and would) get the job. Given this assumption, he viewed the school's refusal to hire blacks as illogical, irrational, and unwarranted (If they did not know whether someone was a good teacher, how could the school make reasonable hiring decisions?). Michael wanted to understand the motives and beliefs which caused the school district not to hire blacks. He constructed stories which provided him with answers to his questions, stories which often allowed him to once again view the behavior of the people in the past as being rational.

In other instances, Michael asked questions which reveal the stories he told himself about how he expected people to behave during a particular time period. For example, in response to his classmate's suggestion that she would have gone to the President if she had experienced segregation in the 1920s, Michael asked:

> Why would you want to go see the President because the President was white? So why would they want to get the President because he will not do anything about it because he was white and he probably will not do anything about it? (J., 3/12/98)

Based on the image Michael had begun to construct about people's attitudes toward blacks in the 1920s, he surmised that a white president would have been

indifferent to the plight of blacks. He imagined his classmate going to see the President to complain about segregation only to be rebuffed. In the world of Michael's envisioned past, the proposed actions of his classmate did not make sense.

In contrast, Michael described a plan of action that made sense to him, given his knowledge of the times. First, Michael imagined what he might have done had he experienced discrimination if he were a woman during "those days." He then compared it to what he thought he would have done if he were a man:

> If I was a woman back in those days I would stay home and cook and clean. I would cook and clean because some restaurants don't serve you so what is the reason for going there if you don't even get served or anything? If I was a man back then I would work and fight for justice or equal rights and get money from my job so then I would afford food. (J., 3/12/98)

Michael assumed that the woman's role during the early 1900s was to stay at home and "cook and clean." It would not make sense for an African American woman to do otherwise since if she went out she would not be served. Instead, Michael reasoned that men would have had the role of "fighting for justice or equal rights." Based on his understanding of the norms and values of the time, he expected women would behave one way, men another.

Similarly, based on his assumptions about the negative attitudes of blacks and whites towards each other in the 1960s, Michael was confused when he learned about a local school board's decision to integrate the schools through busing:

> Why would if the white people didn't want to live with the black people and the black people didn't want to live with the white people, then why would they start busing? (C.D., 4/17/98)

He assumed that neither blacks nor whites wanted to live with each other (evidenced by the fact that they lived in separate neighborhoods). Based on this inference, he could not understand why they would want to go to school together. By asking this question, Michael learned that the school board had ordered busing against the wishes of many individuals.

Michael's beliefs about what would constitute rational human behavior in the present framed the questions he asked and the stories he told. He asked questions when people's actions did not fit with his expectations about human behavior in the present or in the past.

A First, and Temporary, Conclusion

Jessica, Josh, and Michael told different stories about the past they encountered. Jessica constructed stories about "mistakes" and the way groups worked collectively to overcome injustices. Josh told stories about the impact of particular events on the course of history, emphasizing the contingent nature of the present. He highlighted the individual choices people made rooted in love and compassion for their fellow human beings. Michael asked questions and told stories when people's behavior seemed irrational to him. He searched to understand the values, beliefs, and desires which motivated people's behaviors, particularly behaviors which conflicted with his own expectations of what life and people were like.

The children's stories reflect their individual life histories, but they are also deeply rooted in their cultural heritage, a heritage which provided them with many of the values and beliefs which framed their normative views of the good society. Jessica valued political power and emancipation. Josh cared about individual

choices, love, and compassion. Michael valued rational behavior. All three children valued equality and believed in the equal worth of all people. These values and beliefs about the way the world should work framed what they attended to in the past and the stories they constructed.

Furthermore, the stories each student told depended on a view of the present, for as Seixas (1994) notes, "significance always emerges out of a particular kind of relationship between ourselves in the present and various phenomena in the past" (p. 284). All three children shared similar views of the society in which they lived. While they did not see themselves as living in a utopian world free from pain and suffering, for the most past, they saw racial problems as being a thing of the past. Other problems -- pollution, crime, violence, wars and poverty -- defined their social reality. Hence, the stories they told about the past were also framed by their assumptions about the present. Jessica and Josh focused on how things changed over time. Michael contrasted the past with the present as he sought to understand what life was like "back then."

Based on my prior experiences teaching at Walker and at a local middle school with large populations of minority and low-income students, I anticipated that interviewing the students' relatives and community members would help them make sense of current racial problems. In some ways, this group surprised me since many of my students in the past had had a much less sanguine perception of race relations in America. For example, when I asked a class of sixth graders what they might tell people from another country about American culture, one student stated that she would tell them that American culture

"sucks." Another wrote that she would tell them "to go back to their own country because it's probably better than here." A third proclaimed that she would tell them that the "taxes were too high and that poor people cannot afford to pay for parking meters because they keep raising the prices." These children had not adopted the story of progress or American exceptionalism that Barton and Levstik (1997) found most of the middle school students they interviewed held. Their lived experiences were in direct conflict with those narratives.

But, this was not the reality that my current students experienced, nor were there any strong oppositional voices in the class or amongst the interviewees which challenged their conception of the present. For the students in this class, the story of U.S. racial relations ends happily, at least for now. It is a tale in which Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream has come true and their lives provide the evidence. Thirty percent of my students come from interracial families in contrast to one-half of one percent of marriages nationwide (Shipler, 1997). They live in integrated neighborhoods. Their friendships cut across racial and ethnic lines.

Most of the parents of African American children in my class had achieved the American Dream economically as well. The vast majority were solidly middle class. They worked in government jobs, managerial positions and other white-collar professions such as law, teaching and business. Most of those employed in blue-collar jobs worked in well paying union jobs in local automobile factories. While the poverty rate for the total school was about 46%, only 20% of my students were on free or reduced lunch. Out of those 4 students, only 1 was African American.

At the end of the year when I asked the children what they thought the most important thing they learned was, Alicia made clear the differences the children saw between the past and the present and how changes had affected their own lives. She read her journal to the class:

> I think that we should remember that Michigan was segregated because now we should be thankful that blacks and whites can join together as a team. Now the schools and restaurants are integrated and we can all be put together. (J., 5/20/98)

But, I get ahead of myself. The purpose of this chapter was to describe the interpretive frameworks that children bring to school, using three focal students as examples. And, indeed, these three students made sense of the world differently.

While I use these students as the focus of this analysis, had I focused on other students, I would have similar stories to tell. Some students, like Jessica, took lessons from the past. Vanessa, for example, wrote after learning about slavery that she thought "everyone should be treated equal and don't look at people on the outside look on the inside" (J., 1/22/98) Like both Jessica and Josh, others highlighted the choices and sacrifices people made to help bring about change. As Larry stated, "What I want people to remember is all these people took a risk to get arrested for helping on the Underground Railroad" (J., 1/22/98). Some, like Michael, explicitly contrasted the past with the present, citing changes as being important to remember. Doris wrote, "We should remember slavery because we don't have to worry about it anymore because it's over" (J., 1/22/98). Regardless of whether the students wrote about differences, highlighted lessons or exemplary moral behavior, they did so with a view of the

present in mind, a view which embodied their ideas and values about human behavior as well as their beliefs about their own social realities.

I have many unanswered questions. I do not, for example, know whether these interpretive frames are typical of fourth graders in general. Nor do I know what the full range of interpretive frames were in my class, or what factors -- like culture -- shaped the development of those frames. What I do know is that the students' interpretive frames shaped and were shaped by the work of our group as a collective. In the next chapter, I explore the way our classroom discourse influenced the students' sense-making.

Chapter Three

Becoming Members of a New Discourse: Acquiring Tools for Historical Sense-Making

This chapter focuses on how my students constructed and negotiated meaning within the context of our classroom community. Over the course of the year, the students worked together to create a video production, "Coming to Michigan: A Journey Through the Ages." Bruner (1996) refers to such joint products which represent the result of collective cultural activity as "works" or "oeuvres." Such works, he argues, are not simply products of groups, they help make a community.

Through our work together, the students became members of what Gee (1992) calls a new "Discourse." Gee (1992) defines Discourse as being:

> composed of people, of objects (like books), and of characteristic ways of talking, acting, interacting, thinking, believing, and valuing, and sometimes characteristic ways of writing, reading, and/or interpreting. . (p. 20)

People become members of Discourses by serving apprenticeships in social settings where they share bodies of knowledge, stories, values, and beliefs. As the teacher, my role entailed helping to establish norms and providing opportunities for the students to engage in social practices that allowed them to answer our inquiry question: "Why have people moved to Michigan and what was it like for them?" This investigation shaped what it came to mean to "do history" in our class.

The nature of the students' participation in our inquiry project changed over the course of the year as they gained access to additional resources and as

their historical knowledge grew. At the outset, we relied primarily upon secondary sources to answer the question. The students learned new ways of reading, writing, listening, and speaking that laid the foundation for our work in the second half of the year. They made inferences to explain historical phenomena, challenged their classmates' ideas, supported claims with evidence, offered reasons to support their thinking, compared and contrasted textbook accounts, asked questions of textbook authors, used speculative language, and constructed their own written narratives.

From February until June, students conducted oral interviews in which they asked relatives and community members why they came to Michigan and what it was like for them. They crafted questions, conducted interviews, analyzed data, compared multiple "texts," constructed their own historical narratives, and critiqued their classmates' and textbook narratives -- practices which allowed them to participate more fully in the kind of work historians do as they create narratives.

As the nature of their participation changed, what students were able to learn changed as well. As Lave and Wenger (1991) note, "learning is not merely situated in practice. . . . [L]earning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). Lave and Wenger (1991) equate learning with "increasing participation in communities of practice" (p. 49). My students' developing historical understandings can only be understood in light of the social practices in which they engaged. Through our joint work, the students acquired *new* ways of knowing, tools for sense-making that influenced the meanings they

constructed.

This chapter, a history of our Discourse, is organized chronologically. I begin with a description of our early work investigating the first inhabitants of Michigan. In this section, I highlight the way in which the Discourses the students brought with them influenced their sense-making. Furthermore, I examine some of the conflicts between those Discourses and the ways of knowing I was trying to promote. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the second half of the year as the students engaged in their oral history project. I describe the historical understandings the students developed through this project by situating their learning in the practice of "doing history." To accomplish this, I bring readers inside of the class to see and hear how the children collectively constructed narratives about life in Michigan.

Getting Started

October 15, 1997: Making Sense of Conflicting Accounts

When I began the school year with my third and fourth graders, I knew that most children (and adults) view knowledge as objective and certain. I assumed that my students would view history as facts about the past and perceive the textbook as an authoritative source beyond question. I also assumed that most students had given little thought to the sources of historical knowledge (e.g., Brophy & VanSledright, 1997). Indeed, early in the year when I asked them to consider how we could find out who lived in Michigan 200 years ago, students had few ideas other than reading books and asking questions. One student mentioned interviewing parents, something we had just done.

Like Dewey (1910/1991) who argued that children need to gain "knowledge of the ways in which anything is entitled to be called knowledge instead of mere opinion or guesswork or dogma" (p. 188), I wanted students to understand the grounds upon which historians base their claims. So, before moving to the textbook, I asked my students to imagine the sources of information that historians might use to write their books. With some prodding, the children speculated about the kinds of sources upon which historians might rely. Some mentioned the oral tradition, suggesting that "their parents' parents might have told them and their parents might have told them." Others guessed that historians might use old newspapers, magazines, older people, bones, and things cavemen used like arrowheads. At the end of this lesson, I introduced the term "evidence," explaining that historians did, in fact, use all of the sources they had mentioned (and more) and that they called these sources "evidence."

While I wanted my students to become familiar with evidence, primary sources are not readily accessible to elementary age children. As Husbands (1996) notes:

> The length, the conceptual and linguistic difficulties of many sources, and in some cases their sheer boredom, make it impossible for pupils to make any realistic appraisal of their significance. The teacher's normal tactic of editing, cutting, preselecting evidence upon which pupils will practice "historical skills" often results in activities which can scarcely be dignified with the label "history," and in many cases, the "skills" themselves operate at a lamentably low level. (p. 17)

As we began our investigation we had to rely upon textbooks, sources that rarely reference the grounds for their claims.

Typically, teachers only use a single textbook with students. In so doing, Cherryholmes (1988) contends they play a central role in determining how knowledge is conveyed:

> The way teachers respond to textbooks is a decisive moment in teaching, a pivotal point in dealing with meaning and meanings. Such moments continually present themselves. They cannot be dealt with once and for all. Teachers continually choose whether to reinforce knowledge claims presented as authoritative and structured or to expose their partiality. . . . If teaching simply repeats structured assertions of textbooks (test, scope and sequence guidelines, workbooks, computer programs, and so forth), then the dialogue becomes repetitive and noninstructive even though students and teachers might become facile in the discourse. Teaching that moves behind and beyond text through the language, culture, arts and sciences, and politics and economics of society makes the meanings of our words, utterances, and discourses more accessible to us. (p. 72)

I wanted to help my students move "behind and beyond" the authoritative knowledge claims made in textbooks. Yet, most social studies books lack variation, making it difficult to find conflicting accounts or portrayals that clearly represent different points of view.

My class only had access to one set of Michigan history textbooks, Michigan: An Illustrated History for Children (Mitchell & Woodruff, 1987). In an attempt to see if I could locate varying interpretations, I collected several others. As I scoured these books, I discovered that they contained different information about when people first came to Michigan. The class textbook, for example, stated that "Ten thousand years ago people began to roam the woods of Michigan," (p. 9) whereas the second book, From Sea to Shining Sea: Michigan (Fradin, 1992) reported that "Prehistoric Indians reached Michigan at least 12,000 years ago" (p. 13). Despite these differences, each presented the information as a certainty, a settled matter lacking controversy. Yet, I knew from

teaching units on "The First Americans" to both fifth and sixth graders that archaeologists often disagree on such dates.

Although I wanted my students to understand that, as far as we know, Native Americans were living in Michigan long before Europeans (current "authoritative" knowledge), it was not particularly important to me whether they thought Native Americans first arrived 10,000 or at least 12,000 years ago. Certainly for most children, a difference of 2,000 years has little significance (unless the child is steeped in biblical conceptions of the earth's age, in which case, either date would be anathema to their worldview). The different information in the two textbooks did, however, provide me with an opportunity to challenge the idea that textbooks contain the undisputed "Truth," making them impervious to questioning or scrutiny. By presenting the children with two seemingly conflicting accounts, I hoped to create a sort of discrepant epistemological event (e.g., VanSledright & Kelly, 1998). I expected the students would be perplexed by the lack of consistency between the books as they searched for the one "right" answer.

We read the first book together in the typical way teachers use textbooks: I asked the students to find the "answer" to two questions: (1) Who were the first people living in Michigan?; and (2) When did they first come here? The children completed this task with no problems, satisfied that they all knew the answer. I then presented them with the second book and again asked them to look for answers to the very same questions. Being good students who usually do what their teachers ask of them, the children repeated the task. Quite quickly, they

realized that each textbook provided a different answer to the same question. This made no sense to them. We were, they thought, reading "fact books," or "true books," synonyms prior teachers used to describe nonfiction texts.

I put an end to the initial chatter surrounding this confusion by asking them to write about what they thought would explain the two different answers. Uncertain how my students might deal with the conflicting accounts, I worried that they might get angry or frustrated by their inability to offer any reasonable explanation. But they got to work right away and began to busily write about why they thought the books' authors said different things. Their responses are summarized in the following table

A few of the children assumed that information was either right or wrong. It seemed logical, then, for them to conclude that one book was true, while the other was not:

> Alicia: I think they are different maybe because one might be true and one is not. (J., 10/15/97)
>
> Ramon: I think one of the books isn't true because why would a book be called the same topic if it doesn't say the same thing inside of the book. (J., 10/15/97)

By simply dismissing one book, these two children could continue to hold on to their belief that knowledge was either true or false. Neither student provided any explanation for why one of the books might not be true. Having discredited one text, they could continue to perceive the other as authoritative.

While other children did not explicitly challenge the veracity of either account, their explanations implied that one of the two accounts might not be true. Doris speculated that the authors might have gone "to different schools and

learned different things than each other." One of them may have "learned" something that was not true. In contrast, Charles assumed that the authors of the second book were Indian and that they had come to know the information from their relatives who were "here back then." The authors of this book, he reasoned, would have had access to an authoritative source, whereas the other did not.

Several children incorporated their new knowledge of evidence into their responses, hypothesizing that the quantity or quality of evidence the author might have used might explain the differences in accounts. Jay suggested that the person "who wrote Sea to Shining Sea did not get that much evidence." He also questioned the basis upon which the authors made their claims and whether or not they were authorities on the matter at all. In his journal, he asked, "How does he know what he knows? Where did he get to be an author? Is he a historian?" While I had previously asked the students to consider "how we know what we know" about the past, Jay had made the question his own. He wanted to know the basis for the authors' claims.

Like Jay, Nathan also speculated that the quantity of evidence might matter. He wrote that "one got less news on it." Jessica suggested that one of the authors "could only find evidence from so far back," while the other found evidence from further back. Carmen thought that the authors might have said different things because "the books were made in different years." In class, she explained that the second author might have "made some discoveries" since the first book was written.

Like the other children, Michael seemed to assume that textbooks contain "true information." Unlike the other children, however, he did not reject the authority of either book. Instead, he speculated that each book may have been talking about different tribes. One book, he wrote, may have been referring to the Ottawa, Potowatami, and Chippewa (tribes that one book explicitly cited), whereas the other might have been "talking about other tribes." According to Michael's hypothesis, some of the tribes might have arrived 12,000 years ago, while others might have come 10,000 years ago. Hence, both books could be "right," despite their differences.

Five students did not indicate whether or not they thought one account might be true or even better than the other. Unfazed by the discrepancies, they seemed willing to assume that the two authors might just have had different ideas. Brian wondered if perhaps "the two publishing people thought differently," while Carl offered the idea that "they have different theories." Josh matter-of-factly stated that the two books were different "because there were two different authors."

October 17: Rewriting the Textbook

The children's responses about the differences in the two textbooks, although underdeveloped, served as a starting point the next day when I began helping them think about some difficulties in "knowing" about the past. When I asked the children to imagine how archaeologists could "know" when people first came to Michigan, one child suggested that "someone back then probably wrote it down." I explained that the people living in Michigan "back then" did not have a

written language. Charles again offered the idea that archaeologists probably knew because "their great grandmother told them." As I tried to help students get a sense of just how long ago 10,000 years actually was, Alicia commented that stories change over time, "like when you play the game telephone."

After some prodding, a student suggested that archaeologists used things like arrowheads and bones to figure out when Native Americans first came to Michigan. Other children wondered how artifacts could help archaeologists know when people came. Obviously, artifacts could not literally "tell" them anything. A dinosaur expert in the class told us that archaeologists probably did tests on the artifacts like they did with dinosaur bones to determine how old they were. I explained that the tests are imprecise and do not give us exact dates, only estimates (upon which people often disagree). We then talked about the possibility that there could still be more artifacts in the ground which were even older than the ones archaeologists had already found. I told the children about an article I had read which described how archaeologists had recently found artifacts that led them to conclude that people had been living on this continent longer than they had assumed. Finally, I explained that since we could not know for certain when the first people came, the authors' ideas are not facts but theories, ideas based on the evidence at hand.

Having had this discussion, I asked my students to consider how the text might be worded if the author were to reveal the uncertainty among experts on this topic: What words might the author use to show that people disagree? How could the author give the reader some insight into the basis for those disagreements? What might the author say about why those disagreements

exist? We discussed the kinds of language people use when they are unsure of something. I then asked the children to rewrite one of the sentences from either textbook to indicate the uncertain nature of these claims. Through this exercise I hoped my students would begin to understand that behind the "uncontaminated language of fact and 'objectivity'" often lie disagreements that reflect the tentativeness of knowledge of the past (Bruner, 1986, p. 129). I thought that by having them rewrite the text, I would sanction the use of speculative language as a valued aspect of our classroom discourse, language that is traditionally missing from school (Bruner, 1986; Wineburg, 1991).

Again, the children did what I asked. The following table demonstrates the range of their responses. The largest group of students (7) simply rewrote the sentence by adding the words "Archaeologists think that" to the beginning of the sentence, "Ten thousand years ago Indians began to roam the woods of Michigan." The other children either continued to write about the information as though it were a certainty or highlighted the disagreement amongst experts.

Those students who treated the textbook as though it contained "true facts" struggled with the task. For them, changing the textbook to include speculative language did not make sense. Doing so was at odds with their view of knowledge. Latesha avoided dealing with the conflicting information by writing "Ten thousand years ago I believe people began to roam the woods of Michigan. It is a theory." When I asked why she believed this information, she said "because it says it in the book." Similarly, Allen copied the information from one of the books verbatim, as children often do. Larry also presented the information with the same sense of authority and certainty that the textbook had. However,

he offered an alternative number of years which neither of the two books had mentioned, stating that "13,000 years ago Indians roamed Michigan." Proposing a sort of compromise, Larry settled the dispute by presenting an arbitrary number of his own.

By incorporating information from both textbooks, two students focused on the disagreements amongst archaeologists, noting that "Some archaeologists think it was 10,000 years ago. Other archaeologists think it was 12,000 years ago." These students offered no reasons for those disagreements. Only Jessica and Brian explicitly addressed what might explain the conflicting accounts, emphasizing the difficulty of determining what happened so long ago. Brian incorporated the ideas of theory and evidence:

> Archaeologists think that people lived here ten or twelve thousand years ago, but nobody knows for sure so you might as well make a guess or a theory after you study the evidence that you have. So that is what an archaeologist does and they still disagree with each other after all this time. (J., 10/17/97)

Jessica explained why we could not be certain about when people came:

> Ten thousand years ago people might have roamed the woods of Michigan. I think it should be written this way because no one knows exactly when people lived in Michigan first because no one could write or record back then. (J., 10/17/97)

Both of these students drew upon our discussions about evidence (or the lack thereof) and disagreements amongst archaeologists to construct sentences that conveyed the tentativeness of our knowledge of the past.

Despite their range of responses, nobody complained about or questioned the assignment I had given them. Yet, the next day when I asked the students to read Michigan: An Illustrated History for Children to see what it said about what

life was like for its earliest inhabitants, Timmy did not want to use the book. He boldly told me that I "should get a true book, a book that has true facts" because "this book is not true." Vanessa expressed similar concerns. She wondered how the people who wrote the book "got these facts." Like Timmy, she wanted to know the "real facts." For her, this book clearly no longer offered that. She worried that "kids could have drew these pictures or made these arrowheads" and that the author "didn't really know the real facts." Skeptical of the textbook's authority, their belief that they could acquire the "real facts" remained unshaken. They simply believed that I, as their teacher, needed to find a better book.

Reflection. The students brought with them multiple ways of making sense of the two conflicting accounts. Their statements reflect the influence of other Discourses. Some children expected the information to be either true or false, right or wrong. By the children's own admission, this expectation was formed, in part, by their prior encounters with nonfiction text in school -- past teachers referred to such books as "true books" or "fact books." These students had done research in prior years in which they were expected to find facts on a given topic and report those facts to the class. The children assumed they would find "facts" in these books as well. As such, they either arbitrarily rejected one book over the other or struggled to find a reason why one or both accounts might be true.

Other children seemed to draw upon a different set of assumptions of how one "knows" something as they made sense of the conflict. These children viewed people as having their own thoughts and ideas. My hunch is that this

stance reflects their prior learning experiences in other subject areas at Walker Elementary School. Children's ideas are central to the discourse in many Walker classrooms. Most teachers encouraged the children to think of themselves as authors, scientists, and mathematicians (not historians, however). In mathematics and science, they share conjectures, develop and test hypotheses, agree and disagree with their classmates. It was not a big leap for them to assume that two authors might disagree, just as they often disagreed with each other. The children had not, however, given much thought to the basis of those disagreements.

Finally, another group of students began to use the language of evidence in making sense of the conflicting accounts. It is likely that these children also had prior experiences with evidence as a basis for knowing. Many watched courtroom television at home. Others had been in science classes where they had to support their developing theories with empirical observations. Having encountered the concept of evidence in other contexts, they assimilated the notion in history class easily.

Through our subsequent class discussion, I promoted the idea that historians use evidence as a means of justifying claims, that people disagree about things that happened in the past and that we needed to use tentative language to convey our knowledge. As Vanessa's and Tommy's comments so powerfully reveal, for some students these norms of discourse clashed with their previously acquired ways of knowing. They did not expect people to disagree. They did not expect textbooks to provide evidence. They did expect textbooks to

speak with authority and certainty. They participated in the tasks I had given them because, as their teacher, I had told them to. Both our classroom practices and their experiences in other contexts, however, shaped their participation in and interpretation of the tasks. The sense students made, therefore, reflects these multiple Discourses (Cobb & Bowers, 1999).

Interlude

Between November and January, the students continued to investigate why people migrated to Michigan between the 1600s and 1800s. We learned about the French, the English, the early settlers who came from the East, runaway slaves, and immigrants. During this time, the children acquired new ways of knowing. No longer did we rely upon a single source to answer our inquiry question. Rather, we used various textbooks, a few primary sources, and information they gathered from a survey they conducted of relatives, friends, and the school staff about why their families came to Michigan. We also looked at census data to note trends in Michigan's population over time and then made inferences about the trends they identified based on their growing knowledge of the historical context.

Based on the information they gathered, the students wrote narratives about why people came to Michigan during these time periods. The students also evaluated each book we used in terms of what authors included (or excluded) about particular topics. For example, as the children searched for information that might allow them to explain the sharp decline in the Native American population in Michigan between 1450 and 1650, they found that only

some books included information about the large number of Native Americans who died as a result of small pox brought by the French. The children speculated about why some books included this information and others did not, looking to the possible motives of the author (i.e., "maybe the author of the book that did not include that information was French and he did not want people to know about it because it would make the French people look bad"), the significance the author may have placed on the information (i.e., "maybe the one author did not think those things were important to write"), and the information or evidence to which the author might have had access (i.e., "maybe he did not know that information," "everyone has different evidence").

On the whole, the children accepted textbook information uncritically. While I encouraged them to question authors, they typically did not have a strong basis to critique a textbook's claims given their own lack of historical knowledge. However, the children did question claims which did not fit with their preconceptions. For example, when one textbook author claimed that the French colonists' tools were superior to those of the Native Americans, Carmen asked how the author could have known that. She used her knowledge of evidence to question the author's portrayal of the French as being better than the Native Americans, a judgment she found to be unfair.

The class also continued to pay attention to how textbooks conveyed information, noting the kinds of language used as well as whether or not authors provided evidence to support various assertions. The students found that authors rarely made reference to the evidence they relied upon. Sometimes we

tried to imagine the kinds of evidence used. For example, after we read the sentence, "German immigrants faced many difficulties when they arrived," in the textbook Michigan: Its Land and its People (Killoran, Zimmer, & Jarrett, 1997, p. 188), the children created journal entries, newspaper articles, interviews, drawings, and letters that they thought would illustrate people facing the kinds of problems described in the text.

All of these activities laid the foundation for our work together as we began to investigate why people moved to Michigan in the 20th century. At this time, the children were able to interview people about their experiences coming to Michigan.

The Great Migration

February 8, 1998: Acquiring Some Background Knowledge

Having learned about Michigan's role with the Underground Railroad, most of my students shared the image of the North as morally superior to the South, unblemished by the legacy of slavery. Based on this assumption, the students had speculated about what might have caused the increase in the number of African Americans living in Michigan just after the Civil War (according to U.S. census data, the number of blacks more than doubled between 1860 and 1880, rising from 6,799 to 15,100 in only 20 years). Most of the children thought that African Americans probably "kept on coming to Michigan because it has been a free state all along and so people might be nicer to them there" and that blacks would have had equal rights here since Michigan had "just fought a war about slavery" (C.D., 1/14/98).

Only a couple of dissenters raised the possibility that perhaps there may have been some people in Michigan who did not treat blacks well. As Carmen asserted, "just because they just had a war, doesn't mean they are going to like them." Jessica wrote in her journal:

> I don't think blacks had equal rights because even though the state was an antislavery state, most people did not agree with that law and after the war people in Michigan still didn't agree that blacks should be treated as equals. I think they still felt like they were in higher positions. (J., 1/14/99)

Jessica based her conjecture on her knowledge that blacks who came to Michigan on the Underground Railroad did not have the right to vote. None of the other children drew upon this information even though we had read about it as a class.

Based on their past comments, I knew that with the exception of Jessica, Carmen, and Charles, the rest of my students would be surprised to learn that blacks living in the North in the 20th century also experienced racial segregation and discrimination. To launch our study of the mass exodus of blacks from the North to the South which began around World War I, I read the class The Great Migration, a children's book by Jacob Lawrence which describes reasons that prompted African Americans to leave the South. My decision to share this book was based on my knowledge that most of our soon-to-be informants were African Americans who had migrated from the South (I knew this from the initial surveys the children had earlier conducted of their family and friends). The book, therefore, would provide students with the background knowledge to ask intelligent questions of our informants.

Before reading the book, I asked the class how they might explain this

great migration. In developing hypotheses, the children drew upon vivid images they had of the continuing racial problems in the post-Civil War South. For example, Jessica stated:

> Even though it was after slavery, people still didn't treat them as equals for a long time after they were not slaves anymore, like even when Martin Luther King was little, like maybe in the 50s, they still weren't being treated fair. Maybe there was a sudden drought or something and probably [African Americans] were still major farmers (cause it is still early in the 1900s). So, maybe it wasn't working out for a lot of African Americans since there was still probably a bit of prejudice and racism and stuff, and so they probably didn't own big farms, like they probably still worked on people's farms. So, maybe the drought would have really affected them and so a lot of African Americans who were farmers might have come. (C.D., 2/8/98)

Although Jessica did not explicitly reference Mildred Taylor's novels on this occasion, she had previously mentioned that she read Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry (1976) and Song of the Trees (1975), two books that chronicle the plight of Southern farmers during the Great Depression. My hunch is that her rather developed hypothesis reflects knowledge she gained from these books.

As I read the The Great Migration, we stopped at various points to discuss Lawrence's claims. Eager to share examples that helped illuminate the ideas in the book, Jessica seemed to draw upon the movie, To Kill a Mockingbird when responding to the statement that "There was no justice for [African Americans] in the courts, and their lives were often in danger":

> [T]hey always had white judges cause there weren't any black judges and so the judge, even if there was more evidence proving that they were not guilty, the judge would still have made up their mind even before they saw the person.
>
> And, I saw a movie once and it was about this black guy, this has to do with the Court thing still. Once he went over to this lady's house. I think he went over there to fix her door or something and she started to kiss

> him. And she was white and he was black and her father walked in and he saw her and the black guy ran out of the house (he didn't like her or anything). He (the dad) beat her. The dad was accusing the black guy of beating up his daughter and no one would really believe him that it wasn't him. (C.D., 2/8/98)

Spurred by Jessica's comments, other children began to share movie "knowledge" that highlighted the dangers African Americans faced. Dejaun recalled a harrowing scene from the movie Rosewood in which the "KKK was going around trying to kill this black guy and they burned their houses down." Several students offered accounts of different scenes from this same movie.

As I continued reading, the children shared other negative images they had of the post-Civil War South, gleaned from other movies, television, and trade books. Several mentioned movies they had seen that depicted blacks and whites going to separate schools. Others spoke of "Colored Only" and "White Only" signs that hung above drinking fountains and outside of bathrooms and restaurants. They had encountered such signs in books they had previously read about Martin Luther King, Jr. Several children chimed in as one student retold the story of Rosa Parks, adding details about how she had to give up her seat for a white person "even though she was there first."

Lawrence's dismal portrait of Southern life confirmed the students' expectations. As I anticipated, however, they were surprised to learn that the North had its share of problems. In the second half of the book, Lawrence states that "although life in the North was better, it was not ideal." He mentions overcrowded and unhealthy housing conditions, segregation, and riots related to competition over jobs. One illustration depicts nine people sharing the same

bedroom. Another portrays angry white workers holding batons fighting with blacks. He shows buildings burning up in flames, and blacks and whites eating on separate sides of a dividing line in a large cafeteria.

In the end, however, Lawrence reinforces the idea that life was better in the North by concluding that, "The migrants' lives had changed for the better. The children were able to go to school, and their parents gained the freedom to vote." Not surprisingly, after discussing the Great Migration and listening to oral interviews of African Americans who migrated North on an audio tape entitled Field to Factory: Voices of the Great Migration (Tarnow, 1994), the children came to the same conclusion: Problems may have existed in the North but, on the whole, life was better.

February 13: Crafting Interview Questions

While the stories about the North piqued their curiosity and began to challenge their basic assumptions, neither of the sources spoke specifically about Michigan. Only Jessica had heard stories from her grandfather about problems he had faced here. Several other children, however, also had relatives who had come to Michigan during this time period, but no one knew much about what life had been like for them. The upcoming interviews provided students with the opportunity to further explore these issues and the questions they crafted reflected these concerns: They wanted to know if Michigan was free from the problems which seemed to plague other areas in the North. They wanted to know if people had equal rights, if they were treated well, and if they were able to get a good education. They wondered whether people were able to have

interracial friendships. More than half the class asked questions specifically designed to find out if people thought Michigan was "better, worse or the same" as the South.

After the children shared their questions with their classmates, I compiled them into one list. Next, the children "tested" the questions out by "interviewing" me. They discovered that the way the questions were phrased led me to provide simple "yes" or "no" answers unless they asked follow-up questions to elicit more details. The class decided to add probes such as "Could you describe your experience?" In the end, the class settled upon the following questions:

Why did you come to Michigan?

What state did you move from?

Who did you come with? How did you get to Michigan?

Where did you live in Michigan when you first moved here?

When did you come to Michigan?

Did anything surprise you about Michigan when you moved here? Could you describe what surprised you?

Did you like it in Michigan? Could you describe what you liked?

What was it like for you in the North compared to the South?
How were you treated in Michigan compared to the South? Did you ever experience discrimination in Michigan? (If yes) Could you describe your experience?

Did you experience segregation where you lived in the South? Could you describe what you experienced? Did you experience segregation where you lived in Michigan? (If yes) Could you describe your experience with segregation in Michigan?

Were you or your children going to an integrated school or a segregated school when you first moved to Michigan?

Did you ever experience people being prejudiced against you in Michigan? (If yes) Could you describe your experience?

Did you or your parents get a better job in Michigan than in the South? What kind of job did you or your parents get?

Did you get a better education in Michigan than in the South? Could you describe what was different?

Did you get a better house in Michigan than in the South? Could you describe what was different?

When you came did you think it was better than the South, worse, or the same? (Compilation of Class Questions, 2/13/98)

The children relished the chance to hear firsthand accounts of why people came to Michigan and what it was like for them. They wanted answers to their questions. Eager to get started, they set up interviews with their relatives. Several students spent lunch hours making and hanging posters around the building to find additional informants. They wrote up an announcement for the school newspaper and read it over the P.A.. Everyone looked forward to doing "real research."

March 6: Analyzing the "Data" by Comparing Accounts

For the first round of interviews about the 1920s and 1930s, the children interviewed five people, all African American, including three grandparents, the deacon at a local church which one of the children attended, and a member of the community. The interviewees came on different days over the course of a two-week period at the end of February. In groups of four, the children left the classroom to interview the person to whom they had been assigned. Each student had the opportunity to directly interview one person. They divided the questions amongst their four group members before the interview so each child

knew ahead of time which questions she or he would ask.

We videotaped each interview so that the whole class could watch all five together. This provided us with a common basis for our discussions and with multiple "texts" to compare. As the children watched the videos they took notes on their "data collection sheets," charts which enabled them to organize and record information about each informant. I worried that the children might view the notetaking as a chore, a school task which diverted their attention from watching the video-taped interviews. But they approached the task with seriousness, sometimes writing three or four pages. Over time, their notes became increasingly important to them as they realized they could refer to them to support claims they made. When I called an assertion into question, the notes provided them with evidence. Dissatisfied with the unsupported claims of their classmates, children began to demand this of their peers as well. They wanted everyone to justify their assertions, providing the class with the basis for claims.

After viewing each interview, we looked across our data collection sheets for similarities and differences between testimonies. Many people's stories sounded similar and confirmed students' predictions that life was better in Michigan. The pay, the schools, and the housing were all better. Brian's grandfather, Mr. Smith, for example, lived in an integrated neighborhood in Hamtramck, just outside of Detroit. His family lived upstairs from a white family in the same apartment and Mr. Smith eventually married a white woman.

In contrast, some informants spoke of experiencing segregation. Mr. Jones, Carl's grandfather, recounted sitting and waiting patiently to be served at

a restaurant outside of Grand Rapids. Ignoring him and his fellow African American boxers, the waitress served everyone around them. Twenty minutes latter, she came over to their table and politely and matter-of-factly told them, "I'm sorry, we don't serve 'your kind' here." Mr. Jones also spoke of searching in vain for a place to stay on Mackinac Island. One after another, each hotel turned him away, refusing to provide him with accomodations "because of his color."

The children had not confronted conflicting historical accounts since our earlier encounter with the two textbooks regarding early inhabitants of Michigan. Alicia was the first to recognize that the interviewees seemed to have had very different experiences. Genuinely perplexed, she raised her hand and observed, "I noticed something weird. Some people said they experienced segregation and other people didn't."

I ended class by building on Alicia's confusion and asking the students to write about what they thought could possibly explain why some African Americans would say they experienced segregation and others would say they had not. I hoped the conflicts would push students to confront some of their beliefs about the "authoritativeness" of their informants and their images of Michigan.

Many children filled a page or more with multiple possible explanations. After compiling their answers, the next day I gave them a chart that summarized the interviews we had conducted and the explanations they generated in their journals (see Figure 10). We used the chart to test their initial hypotheses.

Person	Came in	Came from	Settled in	Did they experience segregation and if so what kind?
Mrs. Jones	Grandparents came to Michigan around 1916	South Carolina	Detroit	Didn't experience segregation where she lived – went to integrated schools.
Mr. Jones	Grandparents came to Michigan around 1916 and 1922	South Carolina	Detroit	Couldn't get served at a restaurant in Grand Rapids. Couldn't get a place to stay at hotels in Mackinac. Didn't experience segregation in Detroit.
Mr. Keys	1920s (he was 9 years old)	Alabama	Outside of Detroit	Didn't experience segregation where he lived, went to integrated schools; had trouble getting served at certain restaurants when he was traveling in Michigan.
Mr. Young	1928 (he was 4)	Nebraska and Wisconsin	Grand Rapids and Lansing	Didn't experience segregation – only discrimination (couldn't get a job as a teacher).
Mr. Flowers	1929 (he was 4)	South Carolina	Lansing	Housing was segregated. Went to integrated schools. Remembers not getting served a drink when he was playing in a basketball tournament.

REASONS THAT MIGHT EXPLAIN WHY SOME PEOPLE EXPERIENCED SEGREGATION IN MICHIGAN AND OTHER PEOPLE DID NOT

1. They were young when they came.
2. Maybe some restaurants allowed blacks and others didn't.
3. Some parts of Michigan had segregation and others didn't.
4. It is hard to remember what happened over 60 years ago and how they lived.
5. Some of them did not go out to restaurants.
6. Some people were prejudiced and some people were not.
7. Some people were dark skinned and others were lighter.
8. Some had more money than others.
9. They came from different places.
10. They looked differently or dressed differently.

Figure 1. Class Chart from March 6, 1998

March 7: Reconciling Conflicting Accounts and Supporting Explanations with Evidence

"It's hard to remember 66 years ago"

The informant's conflicting testimony pressed the children to consider the reliability of the interviewees' recollections. Some people might not remember segregation, Michael explained in his journal, because they had first come to Michigan a long long time ago when they were just children:

> [M]aybe they all remember something different about their child life in Michigan. Because I think it is hard to remember 66 years ago about how they lived their life or how his life was lived. (J., 3/6/98)

Nobody else mentioned this issue in their journals, yet the class found Michael's idea persuasive when we discussed it the next day. Drawing upon their own experiences with faulty memories, the children helped a classmate understand how people's tendency to forget might affect what they had said about segregation in Michigan:

Ramon: Some people might have been young [when they came] and they couldn't remember [whether they experienced segregation] cause they were young. I think they forgot because they were too young to remember what they experienced.

Jay: I don't get it.

Ramon: When they were older they couldn't remember what they experienced when they were younger, like when they were 5 years old or something.

Josh: Jay, how old are you?

Jay: 8, almost 9

Josh: O.K., if you were like 78, it would be kind of hard to remember what you were doing right now.

Alicia: I think I know how to make it easier for Jay to understand. It's like if you came here around when you were 3 or something, you wouldn't remember what you did when you were 3 when you were 8 or 9 cause sometimes your memory goes or sometimes you just can't remember from that far back.

Jessica: It's kind of like things now, you don't remember your activities from when you were a little baby. Like say you went on a trip when you were a little baby, you wouldn't remember much about the trip now.

Vanessa: I want to say something so he can understand it. Like you don't remember things from when you were first born or a baby or anything like that. (C.D., 3/7/98)

The children concluded that Mr. Keys and Mr. Young might have experienced segregation, but could have forgotten about it since they were both young when they came to Michigan.

"Maybe some restaurants allowed blacks and others didn't"

While the children raised issues related to the reliability of the informants' memories, they did not challenge the veracity of their informants' claims that there was, in fact, racial segregation in Michigan. This required many of the children to rethink their predictions about life in Michigan. Even so, several students tried to distinguish the North from the South as they developed explanations about why some people said they experienced segregation and others said they had not.

In contrast to the legally institutionalized segregation of the South, some students suggested that segregation in Michigan might have resulted from the choices of individual people (such as restaurant and hotel owners) who made decisions about whom they would or would not serve. Lisa wrote in her journal

"Maybe some restaurants allowed blacks and others didn't." This explanation appealed to many students. Ramon and Carmen used their own knowledge of differences between people as criteria for judging Lisa's explanation:

> Carmen: I think that makes sense because well, maybe, some people were prejudiced and other people weren't. Some restaurants allowed blacks and others didn't. Because the owner might not have liked blacks.
>
> Ramon: Some people who owned the restaurants were probably prejudiced of their color and so they didn't allow blacks in their restaurants. (C.D., 3/7/98)

My students knew from their own experience that some people are mean, some nice, some prejudiced, some not. Lisa's explanation offered the possibility that segregation in Michigan may have been sporadic, reflecting the whims of individuals who might not have been representative of the entire population. Conveniently, this explanation still allowed the children to believe the testimony of all of their informants. Some people just did not go to the particular restaurants that would not serve blacks.

Some students presented an alternative explanation. "Some people did not go out to restaurants," Ramon wrote in his journal, "so they did not experience this kind of discrimination." Marcus provided support for Ramon's idea based on what Mrs. Jones had said in her interview, "Like Carl's grandmother. She never went out. She just stayed and cleaned and went to church." Mrs. Jones had explicitly told the class that she rarely went out as a child and that she had not experienced segregation as had her husband. Alicia elaborated on this explanation, speculating that some people -- like Mrs. Jones -- might not have gone out because of their economic status:

Maybe some of them didn't go to the restaurants because maybe their parents couldn't find a good job that got that much money. Cause sometimes it costs a lot of money to go out to restaurants. (C.D., 3/7/99)

Drawing upon her knowledge of the context, Alicia inferred that those people who had problems finding good employment might not have had enough money to go out. Again, this explanation allowed the children to continue to believe what each informant had told them. The people who said they had not experienced segregation simply had not ventured into those pockets of society.

Many children suggested that "some parts of Michigan might have had segregation and others didn't." This explanation offered the possibility that some areas, if not all of Michigan, were problem-free (still the favored preconception among the students). Informants who experienced segregation might have lived in areas with high concentrations of prejudiced people:

Ramon: Mr. Jones said that other parts of Michigan had segregation and other parts didn't.

Michael: Well, maybe they lived in different parts of Michigan.

Shari: Do you think that is a good explanation?

Ramon: Yeah, cause maybe some people stayed to their part of the state and other people went to other parts and they experienced segregation.

Shari: Okay, let's look at the evidence. Where did Mr. Jones experience segregation?

Vanessa: Mr. Jones experienced segregation at a restaurant in Grand Rapids and a hotel in Mackinac.

Shari: What did Mr. Young say?

Alicia: No segregation in Grand Rapids. (C.D., 3/7/98)

The idea that segregation varied across regions seemed to explain Mr. Jones'

experiences perfectly. He said that he had not experienced any problems with segregation in Detroit. He even referred to Michigan as the "Promised Land." After looking at the chart, Alicia pointed out that Mr. Young's experience did not seem to support this explanation. Mr. Young stated that he did not experience segregation in Grand Rapids, while Mr. Jones had described his problems getting served at a restaurant in the same city. For the first time, a child directly challenged the veracity of someone's testimony. Josh shouted, "Maybe somebody is lying." There was no response and the class completely ignored the idea. Others went on to suggest four different reasons which might explain the discrepancy:

Carmen: Maybe because they were in different parts of Grand Rapids.

Nathan: Or they were there in different years.

Jessica: Mr. Jones said that when he experienced segregation in Grand Rapids, he said he was right outside of Grand Rapids, and I think that Mr. Young said that he only stayed in Grand Rapids for a short period, so he may have only been there, since he had only been there for a short time maybe he had never gotten out enough to experience it.

Latesha: Maybe he stayed at a different place there. (C.D., 3/7/98)

Dissatisfied with the lack of attention his idea received, Josh blurted out his comment once again. "Maybe somebody is lying," he repeated, a little louder this time. I asked the class what they thought of his idea:

Shari: What do people think of the explanation that somebody might be lying?

Ramon: I think they could be lying because it was so long ago.

Shari: Okay, but there is a difference between lying and not remembering.

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Josh: I meant forgetting.

Ramon: Yeah, forgetting. (C.D., 3/7/98)

Ramon seemed to conflate the ideas of lying and forgetting. After I brought this to the students' attention, Josh and Ramon quickly retreated, agreeing that they meant forgetting, not lying. This was the only direct challenge any child made regarding the interviewees' credibility. But, it is unclear if Josh's comments were, in fact, a challenge. He could have really meant forgetting, as he claimed he did.

"The light skinned people didn't experience segregation"

Most of the children's explanations about different accounts of segregation related to where people lived, what restaurants or hotels they frequented, or whether they went out at all. Jessica was the only student who raised factors that focused on the social, economic, and physical characteristics of individuals which might have led others to discriminate against them:

> I think that the reason some experienced segregation because of where they lived, who their family members were, how much money they made, how light or dark they were or maybe because of what place in the south they came from. They thought blacks were bad if they were from a certain background. (J., 3/6/98)

Although time constraints kept us from discussing each of these reasons, several students agreed that shades of skin color could have accounted for differences in treatment. Ramon highlighted the ability of light skinned blacks to pass as whites:

> I think the light skinned people, the whites thought they were white so the light skinned people didn't experience segregation and the dark skinned people experienced it because they were darker than them. (C.D., 3/7/98)

The students did not think that the evidence at hand supported Jessica's idea at

this point. None of the interviewees were particularly light skinned, and Mr. Smith, the darkest of all, said that he had not experienced segregation in Hamtramck.

Reflection. Asking all interviewees the same questions allowed the students to compare and contrast accounts. This, in turn, lead to the "weird" discovery that not everyone reported the same kinds of experiences, a discovery that did not fit students' expectations. When I had presented the children with the two conflicting accounts about Native Americans, they struggled with issues of textual authority. They did not have any deeply-held conceptions about when Native Americans first came to Michigan. In this instance, the children had to make sense of multiple conflicts that went to the heart of their beliefs about sources of authority as well as their beliefs about the content.

The children trusted the people they interviewed. They viewed them as eyewitnesses who provided firsthand accounts. Yet, those trustworthy people told conflicting stories. Moreover, some stories -- especially Mr. Jones' -- conflicted with the children's assumption that there was no segregation in Michigan. Not only had the children been confronted with versions of reality which clashed with their own beliefs, they had to deal with the competing claims of their informants. As a result, the students simultaneously began to consider methodological issues and to revise their ideas about Michigan.

During our discussion, the children began to grapple with constructing a more nuanced sense of life in Michigan during the 1920s and 30s. Alternative images began emerging, images that were being entertained rather than

dismissed. Segregation may have been widespread or sporadic. Unlike the South where Jim Crow laws mandated separation, there might have been segregation in some areas but not all. Some restaurant and hotel owners might have chosen not to serve blacks, but not all.

Along the way, the students grappled with issues of historical knowledge. They began to see that multiple stories could be told of the past and that those stories were authored by people whose lifestyles, personal backgrounds, and places of residence shaped their experiences. The recognition that memories fade with the passage of time pushed students to consider the possiblity that their informants' recollections might not represent reality. Recognizing this possibility constituted a first step for my students in moving beyond treating informants as unquestionable sources of authority. Josh's comments reveal that he was beginning to grapple with issues of credibility, whether caused by either deceit or forgetfulness.

The children could have dealt with the seemingly conflicting accounts by rejecting some and accepting others. This is what Alicia had, in fact, done when confronted with the two competing textbook accounts about the Native Americans. However, my hunch is that because the students believed all of their interviewees, they looked for alternative explanations. They turned to the norms of discourse we had established as tools for sense-making, using evidence and their knowledge of human beings to develop explanations to account for the varying stories people told.

Moreover, the norm of using speculative language influenced the way the students treated various explanations. They no longer searched for a right or wrong answer to accept with certainty. Instead, they presented possible explanations ("maybe they all remembered something different;" "maybe some restaurants allowed blacks and others didn't;" "maybe some people were prejudiced and other people weren't"). Each explanation offered a possible insight into the seemingly inconsistent accounts. Some explanations matched the evidence; some matched students' assumptions about the world. Others did not. The children used evidence and their commonsense theories of how and why things happen as criteria for assessing whether any particular explanation "made sense." I return to this theme in Chapter Four.

March 10: Constructing Historical Narratives

Shortly after the discussion on March 7, the students confidently began constructing individual narratives about why African Americans came to Michigan during the first quarter of the century and what life was like. I explained that we would eventually use their narratives as the "script" for our video, so they should include what they thought was important for other people to know. While they all drew upon our interviews as common sources, their stories about life in Michigan varied widely. Some children only emphasized the improvement in the quality of life for African Americans. Others focused on both positive and negative aspects of people's experiences. A single child spoke only of problems.

The majority of the class (9 out of the 15 students who wrote narratives) told tales of dreams come true. The migrants left the South, a place of

oppression, discrimination and little opportunity, for Michigan where their hopes of a better life were completely fulfilled. Mr. Jones' reference to the "Promised Land" made its way into most of these students' narratives. Angelita's and Vanessa's (both third graders) narratives were proto-typical instances of this plot:

> There were a lot of places (in the South) between 1920-1930 that would not let black people eat or even go into places. Michigan is one of the biggest promised lands basically in the United States. Many people said that Michigan is the place with the most opportunities to do. A lot of people got paid better in better jobs here and many did not have equal rights in the places where they lived before. Most people came to work in the factories because it paid them the most. Why most of the people came is to get away from all the segregation where they could not go into restaurants and be (like) slaves just because of their color. (Angelita, J., 3/10/98)

Vanessa explained:

> Most people came to the North because they needed better education, well paying jobs, etc. When people came to Michigan it was going great for them. They had well paying jobs and better education. It was better for them because the kids didn't have to work. Some people said that Michigan was a Promised Land. People had better opportunities like better housing. (J., 3/10/98)

Some children, such as Josh, focused on the economic benefits of moving to Michigan:

> Some people came to Michigan to work at Ford Car Factory because Mr. Ford was giving them more money for workers, then when they got there he did give them more money. (J., 3/10/98)

For these children, Michigan was "one of the biggest Promised Lands." According to Vanessa, "things were going great" for the migrants. They got what they came for, as Josh explained, "more money." All 9 of these students devoted their entire narratives to describing how much better Michigan was than the South, making no mention of any problems people faced.

Five children wrote narratives that incorporated both negative and positive aspects of life in Michigan. The main plot of these stories was that people came to find a better life in Michigan and most did, although problems still existed. Carmen told a story in which the migrants came with hopes of achieving economic advancements (which they achieved), but they did not fare as well in the area of equal rights. She divided her narrative into two chapters. First, she described why people came. In the second chapter, she focused on what life was like:

> Chapter 1
>
> Between 1900 –1930 some people came [to Michigan] because their parents needed a job at Ford because in the South they got paid less than in the North because in Michigan they paid $5.00 a day which is more. Or because their parents brought them here so they came with them.
>
> Chapter 2
>
> What it was like for them. Some of the people did not have equal rights. Sometimes they could not even buy a house in some places. Some people did not like them at all. But some people had different colored friends so it was not all that bad. They learned a lot more in Michigan. And they did get better jobs. Sometimes they just did not want blacks around at all. And there was more freedom than in the South. There was no segregation where they lived (only where they traveled around the state). (J., 3/10/98)

In the end, Carmen makes an evaluative judgment, "It was not all that bad," life was better in many ways.

Jessica, like Vanessa, highlighted problems African Americans faced in Michigan. However, she also emphasized the gap between migrants' dream and reality. Their hopes were met with disappointment as they had to work "long hard hours in lower paying jobs which were often also quite dangerous":

> People in the South came to Michigan because they didn't like the segregation in the South. Michigan was the promised land to many. There were better jobs like the jobs at the Ford Companies that paid five dollars a day. There was also a better education for a black, better housing and better chance for a black person to support their family. What it was like for most blacks was a bit different. Blacks did not get paid five dollars a day in the Ford Companies instead they had to work long hard hours in the lower paying jobs which were often also quite dangerous. A woman though could find a job much quicker than a man usually as a servant in a white man's home. (J., 3/10/98)

In contrast to every other child's narrative, Charles did not mention a single positive thing about life in Michigan. Nor did he explicitly compare life to the South as other children had. Instead, he focused explicitly on instances of segregation and discrimination shared by the interviewees:

> When people came to Michigan it was the 1900-1920s. When they came it was a whole different place to them. When they got to the restaurants some people said no they won't serve there kind at the restaurant, so they would just leave and when people would go to Mackinac Island, they couldn't get a place to stay. They would probably say we don't let your people stay here. And if some of the people were on a basketball team, they wouldn't serve them food after they came or they wouldn't get a drink or whatever they get after the game. And people wouldn't let them get a job like a police officer. They wouldn't let blacks get a job as a police officer. They would only let whites get a job as a police officer. And they came here for work for Henry Ford's auto business. Then there was something you get paid for. You got five dollars a day or seventeen dollars a week at Henry Ford factories. (J., 3/10/98)

By referencing problems only, Charles created a vastly different impression of life in Michigan than his classmates. For him, the road to Michigan led to discrimination and segregation. Unlike his classmates who emphasized the high wages Ford offered, Charles matter-of-factly mentioned Ford's wage rate.

March 12: Subjecting Their Narratives to "Peer Review"

For the next class, I typed all the individual narratives on two sheets of paper so that everyone could see and evaluate what their classmates had

written. As the children read their narratives aloud, the other students followed along. I told them to pay attention to whether they agreed or disagreed with their classmates' claims and to places needing clarification. After each student read, the children offered suggestions and asked questions. They encouraged their classmates to remove unsupported statements from their narratives.

When questioned, the children who wrote positive things about Michigan easily rattled off evidence to support their conclusions. Some children did, however, challenge specific claims their classmates made related to life being better. For example, Josh had written that when African Americans got to Michigan, Ford gave them the $5.00 a day he had promised. Several children protested, arguing that none of the informants had ever mentioned whether or not they actually got the infamous $5.00. Since nobody was able to find anything on their data collection sheets to support this claim, the class decided to leave Josh's statement out of our collective narrative.

The five children who claimed that African Americans encountered problems in Michigan also supported their statements with evidence. Carmen related the story of Mr. Flower's difficulty purchasing a home in a white neighborhood. Several children repeated Mr. Jones' stories about being refused service. Charles reminded the children of Mr. Young's inability to get a job as a police officer.

Many children, including Josh, challenged Jessica's assertion that blacks did not get paid $5.00 a day on the grounds that we had no evidence for that either. Jessica defended her claim that blacks got the most dangerous jobs.

She reminded the class of data we had examined that showed that blacks were overwhelmingly overrepresented in foundry and painting jobs, jobs which were considered to be very dangerous and undesirable.

While many students took my earlier request to qualify their statements when writing their narratives to heart (i.e., "Some people came because their parents needed a job;" "Some of the people did not have equal rights;" "Some people said that Michigan was a Promised Land;" "Most people came to work in the factories"), a number of students made sweeping claims. During our discussion, children criticized those narratives in which they thought authors overgeneralized. They encouraged their classmates to use words like "some" or "many of the people we interviewed" to indicate the variety of experiences people had.

The next day, we constructed a collective narrative to serve as our video script. We first compiled a list of reasons why people migrated. We then listed statements that described life in Michigan. The class chose to include only those claims which could be supported with evidence since, as Charles pointed out, "people will want to know what our evidence is" (C.D., 3/13/98). Having come to value the use of evidence in our classroom discourse, Charles assumed that our audience would expect the same. The other children agreed.

The students' collective narrative incorporated both positive and negative aspects of life in Michigan. All agreed that we had evidence to support both ideas. We settled upon the following paragraph:

> In the early 1900s, people came to Michigan to get jobs, especially in automobile factories. Henry Ford advertised that he would pay $5.00 a

> day. This was much more than most other jobs paid, even the other automobile factories in Michigan. Many African Americans came from the South to find jobs in the factories and in search of a better life. In the South, Jim Crow laws segregated blacks and whites in different areas of life. African Americans in the South often couldn't get good jobs, a good education or good housing. The people we interviewed who came to Michigan in the early 1900s felt that life was better in Michigan than in the South. But, things were not perfect. Many still experienced segregation and discrimination. (Class narrative, 3/12/98)

Reflection. Despite the students' increasing skill in constructing and justifying their claims, most of their narratives reflected the assumptions they brought with them. Their initial hypotheses influenced both their characterization and use of data. The students selectively used evidence to support claims, incorporating those ideas that confirmed their hypotheses about life in Michigan for African Americans. In general, those who expected that life in Michigan would be better than the South wrote narratives to justify that claim. These children made no mention of any of the problems people said they encountered even though we had had extensive discussions about people's stories about segregation. Children who anticipated that the migrants might encounter problems incorporated negative aspects of life in Michigan into their narratives. Only the two students who expected that there would be problems with employment discrimination wrote about those problems. This exclusion by most of the children is noteworthy, for almost every interviewee spoke of problems they or other African Americans had obtaining jobs.

The process of subjecting their narratives to public scrutiny promoted the telling of a new story. In creating a single collective narrative, the class moved toward a consensus that represented an adjustment in the plot of the majority of

their narratives. For some, this meant adding the idea that life was better. For others, this meant including problems migrants faced. These were not new claims; all of them had heard these things in the interviews. They simply had not incorporated them into their individual narrative story line. In the end, the children agreed upon our collective narrative without much debate since they all agreed that we had evidence to support every assertion. The use of evidence provided the students with a tool to resolve their competing construals of reality. As a result, they acquired "a reasoned base for the interpersonal negotiation of meanings" (Bruner, 1996, p. 148). The new narrative plot "fit" within the historiographical practice of our class, making it a legitimate story to tell (Gee, 1992).

The process of reviewing and critiquing their classmates' narratives and discussing the supporting evidence legitimized some stories (those for which we had evidence), and delegitimized others (those for which we did not have evidence). Still, the class recognized the limited nature of our evidence, suggesting, for example, that we needed to go back and interview people again to find out if they had gotten paid the $5.00 Ford had offered. They constructed questions to ask the interviewees about this, but we were never able to follow up with them, for our curricular plate was already full.

March 19: Critiquing a Textbook

The day after the children constructed our class narrative, I presented an account that described why African Americans had come to Michigan over the years from a fourth grade Michigan social studies textbook, Michigan: Its Land

and its People (Killoran, Zimmer, & Jarrett, 1997). The textbook discussed many things with which the children were already familiar. It spoke of the Underground Railroad, segregation in the South, and the need for workers in Michigan's factories. After two brief paragraphs about why they came and where they settled, there was a section entitled, "Problems They Faced." This section described racial discrimination in Michigan, overcrowded neighborhoods, poor housing, segregated schools, and tensions between blacks and whites that erupted in rioting. The textbook account can be seen as an attempt to address the commonly-held belief that the North was drastically different from the South. The author directly challenged this idea, stating:

> African Americans often faced serious problems on their arrival in Michigan. They discovered that racial discrimination in Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as in the South. (p. 199)

While the textbook account conforms to current accounts about the North such as Nicholas Lemann's book, The Promised Land (1991), and The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (1996) by Thomas Sugrue, I anticipated that the children would not agree with the claim. The textbook highlighted the problems people faced, but made no mention of Michigan being better than the South in any way. The idea that Michigan was better than the South still continued to frame my students' thinking as evidenced by their individual narratives. Therefore, I expected the students to be confronted with a dual conflict -- a conflict between their interpretation and the authors and a conflict between the textbook as a source of authority and their own growing sense of authority.

We read the textbook as a class without much discussion. After each claim, I asked the students whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The students agreed with all of the information in the textbook until we came to the "Problems They Faced" section. All agreed with the first statement that African Americans faced serious problems upon their arrival in Michigan, offering reasons:

Doris: They know that they could be taken back (during slavery days).

Shari: How about in more recent days?

Carl: Because Mr. Jones couldn't get served and stuff.

Latesha: Couldn't go in some restaurants.

Lisa: Because there was some segregation in Michigan.

Michael: Couldn't go into some hotels. (C.D., 3/19/98)

In contrast, after we read the second sentence, "They discovered that racial discrimination in Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as in the South," the class erupted in a burst of comments. As I had expected, they all vehemently disagreed. In taking on the author's claim, the children spoke with confidence and a sense of authority:

Jessica: But we don't have evidence for that.

Michael: If that happened, how come Mr. Jones said that it was the "Promised Land" if it was almost as bad as the South?

Charles: He might have been in a different area.

Michael: But he said Michigan, he didn't say parts of Michigan.

Nathan: He could have been talking about different times, different years. (The students then looked at the textbook and noted

that the author did not say what time period he/she was referring.)

Josh: Maybe because it said it was the "Promised Land" on an advertisement and the advertisement was just to make people come to Michigan and it was lying.

Nathan: Yeah, like that one song.

Josh: Maybe the guy who was saying that it was the "Promised Land" was just trying to get people for jobs.

Michael: The people we interviewed they said they moved to Michigan and there were more rights and you got a good amount of money for what you worked for.

Jessica: I disagree with the statement too because nobody ever said it got as bad or almost as bad, I think everyone said it was better here. No one ever said it was about the same, almost everyone said it was better.

Charles: All the people that we interviewed said that there were some problems in Michigan, but not almost as bad as in the South. No one we interviewed said that. They said they wouldn't serve you, they wouldn't give you a job or something.

Michael: This is for Josh. If there was an advertisement, he didn't say anyone said there was an advertisement that said it was the "Promised Land." He just said it was the "Promised Land."

Marcus: Everybody we interviewed said its better than in the South because you could get a better job and housing.

Ramon: And less segregation in Michigan than in the South.

Marcus: In the South it's even harder to get a job and better housing and stuff than in Michigan.

Jessica: I think Mr. Jones said that many people, including himself, heard that it was the "Promised Land," he heard it and that's why many blacks came because they heard it was the "Promised Land."

Michael: No. He said it <u>was</u> the "Promised Land." He didn't say he heard it on an advertisement.

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Jessica: I'm not saying that he said it was an advertisement. I'm saying that he might have heard it from other people who had gone up.

Charles: He never said he heard it from other people, he just said it.

Shari: I have a question for you. Why do you think Mr. Jones would say that Michigan was the Promised Land, if at the same time, he also said there was segregation and that African Americans had trouble getting certain jobs? What do you think might explain that?

Marcus: In the South it was even harder to get a job and better housing and stuff than in Michigan.

Carl: I think because you could get a better education, paid more money and better housing and stuff like that.

Ramon: I agree with Marcus and Carl because it would be better to get a better education and a better job in Michigan cause there was more segregation in the South.

Michael: Everything was segregated in the South. In Michigan there wasn't as much segregation and you weren't as far away from whites and there wasn't as much discrimination. You could get a job a lot easier and it paid more for what you did on your job. (C.D., 3/19/98)

Although several students had raised issues related to why the author might have drawn his conclusion, I was still curious about what most of the children thought would explain the difference between their own ideas and that of the textbook. The discussion continued:

Shari: I have a question: Why do you think this historian or this author wrote "They discovered that racial discrimination in Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as in the South?" What do you think might explain why you all seem to have come to a different conclusion?

Charles: I think he said that because he knew different people and he interviewed different people who said that.

Alicia: Maybe he did like us, he did what we did. Maybe he interviewed people that were there around that time and they told him that kind of stuff and he wrote it down for evidence.

Doris: Maybe he had different ideas.

Lisa: From doing what we are doing, we're trying to research other people's ideas and we're trying to come up with our own ideas.

Angelita: That's what I was kinda thinking. The author could have interviewed people and wrote a book.

Jessica: I think he might have interviewed people and maybe he just interviewed people who had experiences where the segregation and stuff was almost as bad as in the South and maybe we just haven't interviewed anyone who has had that kind of thing happen to them.

Michael: There are so many different parts of Michigan. So he could have gone to all different places and put it all together into one book. That's probably why we are disagreeing with him because we only interviewed 5 people.

Carl: Yeah, he could have interviewed thousands of people.

Ramon: But he doesn't say what his evidence was.

Jessica: We don't know who he interviewed. It doesn't say like, "I interviewed 2000 people and most said that it was almost as bad in Michigan as it was in the South." (C.D., 3/19/98)

In the end, the author did not persuade the children. Dissatisfied with his lack of evidence, they did not feel they could meaningfully evaluate his claim.

Reflection. By having the students actively and publicly take a stance towards the author's claim, they had to make sense of their disagreement with the author in a social and public context. This is much different than the tendency to simply dismiss the textbook privately as Epstein (1994, 1997) has found many African Americans do when they confront information in school

which conflicts with what they learned at home or in their communities. The author told a story much different than the children's. Yet, no student told me that the book was not true. No one simply believed the textbook's claim. More significantly, no one told me this time to find a better book.

Rather than treating the textbook as either an unquestionable source of authority or as being untrue, the students critically evaluated the author's claim. At the same time, they tried to understand what might have led the author to make such a statement. Searching for an evidentiary or methodological basis to explain the conflict between their interpretation and the author's, their developing understanding of how one "knows" framed their critique and helped them speculate about why the author drew a different conclusion about the same phenomenon.

Jessica began the discussion by establishing why she disagreed with the author's claim (i.e., we don't have evidence for that). The author did not seem to represent the experience of the people they had interviewed. The children had explicitly asked their informants if they thought Michigan was "better, worse than or the same as the South" and everyone had said it was better. Nobody we interviewed said it was almost as bad, as Charles noted. The author seemed to be making a claim about the experience of all African Americans, but the children's informants did not seem to have "discovered" that Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as the South.

The children tried to explain the discrepancy between the author's claim and their understanding. Nathan and Charles raised issues related to the

different kinds of evidence the author and the class may have used. Josh raised the possibility that the class's "evidence" was problematic. Although Josh had abandoned the idea that some of our informants might be lying, he now suggested that they simply may have been misled by advertisements designed to attract people to jobs. Josh knew there had been a shortage of workers in the North. Nathan offered support for Josh's idea that the informants may have heard that Michigan was "The Promised Land" in an advertisement by drawing upon his knowledge of a pioneer song we had read in October which tried to lure "Yankees" to Michigan with promises of earning a fortune.

After contemplating why the author's claim might be reasonable and why theirs might not be, the class again turned to their evidence to support their original position. Michael reminded Josh that Mr. Jones had said Michigan was the "Promised Land," he had not heard it on an advertisement. The class reminded Josh that the people we had interviewed had said that life was better in Michigan than the South. They offered several examples which illustrated their point (i.e., you could get a better job and housing, less segregation, better education, paid more money).

Throughout the discussion, the children were able to imagine that the author's claim might be reasonable. Although the textbook presented the information in typical textbook fashion -- devoid of metadiscourse, traces of how the text came to be, or citations to the documentary record (Wineburg, 1999) -- the students hypothesized that the author may very well have conducted the same kind of research as they had. Alicia made explicit the connection between

what historians do and what the class had done: "Maybe he did like us, he did what we did, he interviewed people that were around that time and they told him that kind of stuff and he wrote it down for evidence." By imagining the author "doing what we [were] doing," several students made conjectures about what might have led the author to reach his conclusion.

In so doing, they identified the fact that sampling issues might have affected the author's conclusion, although the students did not use the language of sampling. Their understanding was situated in the practice of doing history themselves. Drawing upon our prior discussions, they believed that the informants' place of residence might have affected their experiences. They also inferred that the number and types of people the author might have interviewed could have affected his conclusion. If the author had interviewed "thousands of people" and "most said that it was almost as bad as in Michigan as it was in the South," then the children felt that it would be a reasonable claim to make. Furthermore, the children's insights into reasons for the author's different conclusion allowed them to recognize the limitations of their own position. They had "only interviewed five people," not enough to make claims about large numbers of other African Americans about whom they knew nothing.

May 8: Constructing Narratives Again

Over the next two months, the students interviewed five people who came to Michigan in the 1950s and 1960s, three of whom were African American and came from the South. In addition, the children interviewed Alicia's mother, Mrs. Garza, who came from Guatemala, and Carmen's mother, Mrs. Molina, who

came from Mexico. As they had done previously, the children learned about the historical context and added new interview questions based on that information. For example, the children learned about the use of busing as a means of desegregating Michigan schools. Subsequently, they asked all of the new interviewees if they or their children had experienced busing and what it was like for them. The children learned about Guatemala and Mexico and reasons why people left each country. They tailored specific questions for these interviewees as well. For example, they asked Mrs. Garza if her family fled Guatemala because of civil war.

When we first began our study of the 50s and 60s, the majority of the students expected that African Americans who came to Michigan during this time would not have experienced the same kinds of problems as those who came earlier. Most expected things to get better over time. In contrast, one student believed that because racial problems still exist today, racial problems must have existed during this earlier time period as well. Before we began our interviews, Carl presented this minority position:

Carl: I think there will always be some people who don't like other people cause they're not like them.

Michael: Not in Michigan

Alicia: I think there was, but there probably wasn't as much.

Carl: Some people liked other people and other people don't. Everybody is different. Like there was a story I heard when the mom was prejudiced and the mom separated the kids from the other kids.

Shari: So they wouldn't let the children play together?

Carl: Yup.

Marcus: I think it probably got easier to get a job.

Shari: Why do you think it would be easier to get a job?

Marcus: People change.

Shari: What do you mean by people change?

Marcus: How people think about other people change.

Carl: I got to say something about Marcus. Some people don't change. Some people teach their children to be like they are too. Some people don't change because some parents tell the children, teach their children, to be just like they are. (C.D., 3/25/98)

Although Carl tried to persuade his classmates that "some people don't change," most of the children expected that life for most African Americans would have gotten progressively better even if there were still some problems.

In contrast to their expectations, the stories the African Americans told sounded very much like the earlier accounts. They spoke of similar problems. All of the interviewees stated that life was better in Michigan than in the South. This time, however, when the children constructed narratives, none painted a rosy portrait of life in Michigan. Not a single student wrote a completely positive account as so many had done earlier. Gone were their original references to the "Promised Land." Only two students even used the word "better" to describe the experience of the migrants even though this word had pervaded their earlier narratives. Every final narrative contained references to problems people faced.

Several children stressed the discrepancy between people's hopes and expectations and the reality of unfulfilled dreams, as only Jessica had written in

her first narrative. Michael, Carl, and Nathan together wrote:

> Some people we interviewed said that they came to Michigan to get a job at the automobile factory because they paid good money. They thought they were getting a better house, but they didn't. Many people said that it was hard to get a house in Michigan if you were black. Some of the people that came to Michigan didn't get the job that they wanted because there was still a little bit of segregation here in Michigan. Some people said there was busing for them and their children. Many people said that they were teased when they went to school. (J., 5/8/98)

While all three boys had highlighted positive aspects of migrating to Michigan in the 20s and 30s, they now emphasized only the negative.

The majority of the children (12 out of 17 who wrote narratives) mentioned both negative and positive aspects of Michigan, emphasizing the multiple stories that could be told, stories of success and stories of struggle. Ramon, for instance, had also mentioned only positive things about Michigan in his first narrative. Now he highlighted the similarities and differences in people's experiences. To account for the varying experiences, he drew upon our earlier discussions. Coming to Michigan was a mixed bag depending upon where you lived:

> People came to Michigan in the 50s and 60s to get a job. Life was good in some parts of Michigan, but some were still segregated. Like some people couldn't get the jobs they wanted even though they had a degree like to be a teacher or something. In other parts, people could do what they wanted to do. (J., 5/8/98)

Two children only mentioned the negative aspects of life in Michigan, but assured the reader that things eventually got better. Josh's first narrative had only mentioned ways in which Michigan was better than the South. In his second narrative he made no comparisons with the South and only used the word "better" in his last sentence to show his relief that things eventually changed. He

told a story of "bad times":

> In the 1950s and 60s most people came to get a job. We think [our city] was the main city because most people came here. Most people came here from southern states. Most people were also segregated. Most of the people were discriminated against in many different ways. It was not a good time for blacks because blacks were different in skin color and the affect from slavery. So it seems like the 1950s and 60s was a bad time for most blacks. Good thing it gets better. (J., 5/8/98)

May 8 - 15: The Textbook Revisited

Around the time that the children were writing these second narratives, I interviewed students individually to find out how they had made sense of their earlier disagreement with the textbook's claims about racial discrimination. Because two months had passed since we had discussed the author's claim, I assumed that their responses would reflect their current understandings, not the understandings they had at the time of our discussion. Given their strong initial reaction to the author's statement, however, I expected that they would continue to disagree with his claim.

Despite the emphasis on problems in their second set of written narratives, I still assumed that the dominant image the children had about Michigan was similar to the one they conveyed in our class narrative from the 1920s and 1930s: Even though people faced some problems in Michigan, life was still better here than in the South. I believed this because none of the children explicitly likened racial problems in Michigan to the South in their written narratives, nor had any of the informants done so. In fact, the stories the second group of interviewees told, in many ways, represented the American dream come true. Mr. Williams, Doris' grandfather, worked his way up the corporate ladder to

become one of the first African American supervisors at a local automobile plant. Mr. Wright established a highly successful law practice after being unable to get a job as a lawyer at any white firm in town. Mrs. Cleaves, Josh's grandmother, earned her master's degree in English from the University of Michigan. She became one of the first black teachers in the Grand Rapids public schools after initially being turned down.

Based on my assumption that the children's views had not changed much since March, I envisioned my interviews with students moving quickly from a discussion about why each student disagreed with the author's claim to the reasons they thought would account for their disagreement. To my surprise, when I practiced the interview with four students (individually), each told me that they agreed with the author's statement. They now believed that racial discrimination in Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as in the South. My focus students had a similar response. Four students agreed with the author, two disagreed and one "sort of agreed and disagreed." I wondered about what might account for this substantial change, given their earlier objections. Perhaps, I thought, they did not feel comfortable challenging the textbook's authority without the consensus and backing of their classmates. Perhaps the confidence to critique was based on a sort of strength in numbers phenomenon. This, however, did not seem to be the case.

"Sometimes Michigan was as bad as the South and sometimes it wasn't"

The children spoke at length about why they agreed or disagreed, giving reasons and evidence from interviews to support or refute the author's claim.

Some children continued to rely specifically upon what the interviewees said as evidence. Others extrapolated beyond the interviewees' reports to support the proposition that racial discrimination was sometimes almost as bad as the South, even though no interviewee had directly made this assertion. They reasoned that some of the stories they heard about racial problems in Michigan sounded similar to the kinds of racial problems people described in the South. For example, Jessica explained:

> I agree with the statement because in the South they had a hard time getting good houses and a lot of them had the same problem here and they had a hard time getting a job in the South and they had the same problem here and like the restaurants, they couldn't go in like in the South. (I., 5/11/98)

Many children highlighted both the similarities and the differences between Michigan and the South, complicating the author's portrayal of Michigan. Ramon began by "sort of agree[ing]" with the author, "cause almost the same things were happening in Michigan that happened in the South." He proceeded to give examples of segregation and discrimination in both places. He then modified his position, explaining his initial ambivalence:

> I sort of disagree too because sometimes it wasn't as bad, like most of the time it wasn't as bad. It was only like sometimes like a couple of times a year, but I think people were having a better life in Michigan than in the South because a lot badder things were going on in the South especially after slavery and stuff like that. When Mr. Wright came here there were still a couple of problems that he faced. Like he couldn't get a job as a lawyer because of his color and the basketball players couldn't go into a hotel because of their color, and Mr. Wright he couldn't go into a restaurant because of his color. Well, he could go in but he couldn't get served. (I., 5/12/98)

Like Ramon, Carl noted that, "sometimes it was as bad as in the South and sometimes it wasn't. Most of the time it was better than in the South." For both

boys, these ideas were no longer mutually exclusive. In the minds of Ramon and Carl, the author's story was incomplete, but not entirely inaccurate. For them, life in the North could simultaneously have been better than the South and sometimes as bad.

Michael wavered between agreeing and disagreeing with the author for a similar reason. Uncomfortable with the author's one-sided portrayal of life for African Americans, Michael felt that the author's comparison between Michigan and the South seemed unbalanced. In the end, Michael resolved the conflict between the textbook and his own interpretation by turning to the issue of evidence:

> I disagree with the statement cause there is a lot more evidence from the people we interviewed that it was better in Michigan cause most of the people we interviewed said that it was better in Michigan cause most of the people we interviewed talked about how it was good in Michigan and stuff. (I., 5/12/98)

Larry also turned to the interviewees' emphasis on how much better Michigan was as the basis for his continued disagreement with the author.

"Maybe the author just copied that off a book or something"

Regardless of any particular student's position toward the author's claim, several students reiterated Ramon's concern that the author had not provided the evidentiary basis that would allow them to meaningfully evaluate his claims. He had not "said what his evidence was." Michael wanted the author to explain where he got his evidence:

> Michael: I would want him to tell me where he got it from. That's probably what I would really want to know is where he got it from.

Shari: Got what from?

Michael: The stuff about Michigan that he is talking about in his book.

Shari: What do you mean by "where he got it from"?

Michael: The kind of evidence. Where he got it from, who he interviewed. Like the author that was here, he told us where he traveled to get his ideas for his books. (I., 5/12/98)

Michael seemed to suggest that if he knew where the author got his evidence, he would be better able to evaluate the discrepancy between the author's account and his own. He used the example of an author who had just visited the school and had told the children about how he traveled around the country to get ideas for his books.

Similarly, Larry wondered whether the author might have based his conclusion on secondary sources or his own uninformed opinion:

> Maybe the author just copied that off a book or something or [the author] didn't interview any people or he just guessed or something because so far, everyone that we have interviewed has said that Michigan was a very good place. Not so many bad things happened as in the South. I think maybe the person didn't interview anyone. They just thought of an answer on their own and they just set it down. Maybe that person just wanted to be famous and write a book. Maybe they were just watching those one little shows on Nickelodeon called "Sports Theater" where it showed how blacks were treated badly. I mean like they couldn't play sports and all that. So the author might have seen that so then he might have just set it right down. (I., 5/13/98)

Larry's description of what he thinks the author might have done sounded remarkably like the typical process children engage in when conducting "research" -- they copy information from secondary sources and/or state opinions without evidence (e.g., Barton, 1998). Larry viewed both of these "ways of knowing" as inferior to his own. He had evidence for his conclusion because he

had interviewed people. He speculated that the author, motivated by a desire to be famous, might have relied upon the authority of others rather than his own research.

Despite Carl's agreement with the author, he explicitly rejected the textbook's authority based on its failure to offer evidence:

Carl: He didn't talk about any evidence that he might have had.

Shari: What kind of evidence would you want the historian to mention?

Carl: The person that said that. What the person said in interviews, cause he just said something, he didn't say what people said.

Shari: Why do you think it is a problem that this person didn't include the evidence that they used?

Carl: Cause some people would not believe it. (I., 5/13/98)

Just "saying something" was not adequate for Carl. To be persuasive, to convince someone of your position, you need to provide evidence and this author had not. Therefore, Carl reasoned, "some people would not believe it." Carl agreed with the author because he had independent evidence that the claim was reasonable.

Carl proceeded to reveal how he decides what to believe when he reads a book:

Shari: How about you when you read something?

Carl: Sometimes I believe it and sometimes I don't.

Shari: How do you make up your mind?

Carl: I don't.

Shari: You don't what?

Carl: Make up my mind.

Shari: Tell me more about what you mean by that?

Carl: Sometimes I have evidence on one thing and then more evidence will come in and then I might change my mind. (I., 5/13/98)

Carl's comments reveal his perception of himself as a source of authority, a person who actively decides what to believe or not to believe based on his evaluation of the evidence at hand. Carl, like the other students, was not willing to simply believe something because he read it.

"We didn't have enough evidence at that time"

Whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the author, issues of how one comes to know and the limitations of that process informed the students' ideas about why they changed their minds or why they continued to disagree with the author. For example, in reevaluating their positions, several students who now agreed with the author noted that the class did not have enough evidence in March for them to agree:

Ramon: I think probably [the class disagreed with the author] because we didn't have enough evidence or something like some people thought that everything was going fine in Michigan.

Shari: Why do you think the children would have thought that?

Ramon: Because I think they would disagree because, like I said a couple of minutes ago, because we didn't have enough evidence at that time because we only started interviewing people. (I., 5/12/98)

Ramon suggested that as he gathered more evidence he began to get the

impression that problems were more common than he (or the class) had anticipated when they began interviewing. From the initial interviews, he thought some students would have gotten the impression that "everything was going fine in Michigan."

Reflecting upon the change in her own position, Jessica concluded that the class's data from the first and second round of interviews supported different conclusions. She noted that the people who came later in the 1950s and 60s seemed to experience more problems than those who came earlier:

> Because the people who we had already interviewed, at that time, I think, none of them experienced segregation where they lived. Basically the only segregation was they couldn't go into like a restaurant and that was the only reason, so it didn't really seem like it was even close to as bad [as the South] because they could still do basically everything almost. (I., 5/11/98)

Jessica explained that the people who came later spoke of difficulty buying houses and that the schools became more segregated, while those who came earlier had not spoken of such problems.

Many of the children's comments reiterated issues from our March discussion. All of the children, regardless of their stance, imagined reasons that could cause them to revise their thinking in the future. All of the children mentioned that interviewing more people might lead them to change their position. As Carl noted:

> The more you interview people, you can see what other people think and stuff and put it all together and stuff, cause there is hundreds and thousands of people in Michigan. (I., 5/13/98)

Michael echoed Carl's point:

> If you interview more people you could get a lot more evidence and then you would be able to show a lot better if you wanted to show if something was true. Five or ten people, you don't get a lot of evidence. If you go to different people, you get a lot more evidence. (I., 5/12/98)

The children offered multiple reasons why interviewing more people would make a difference. Most emphasized that people who came from different areas in Michigan could have had very different experiences, hypothesizing why this might have been the case. Josh, for example, expected the people living in racially diverse cities to have fewer problems than their counterparts in cities with more homogeneous populations:

> I think if we interviewed more people some of them might say different things cause these people [we interviewed] only lived in Detroit and Hamtramck and Grand Rapids and Lansing. That's four cities and there are a lot more cities in Michigan so they could have had different experiences in different cities. . . . Because the people who live in the cities might be different. Like the people who live in Detroit, maybe they are mostly all blacks in Detroit, but almost all whites in Grand Rapids or Mackinac, so the people in Grand Rapids and Mackinac aren't used to having Blacks around so they pick on them and are mean to them. But, [the people in] Detroit [are] used to it, so the white people are okay with it. (I., 5/12/98)

According to Josh's theory, the whites living in cities with diverse populations would have been "used to" blacks. As a result, they would not have treated them badly. Whites living in areas with fewer blacks would be mean to them because they were "not used to having blacks around."

Jessica anticipated that the opposite would be the case:

> Some people might not have experienced that many problems because they could have lived somewhere in Michigan that wasn't really popular for blacks so the white people didn't have to be real strict cause there still wasn't a lot of black people where they lived. (I., 5/11/98)

Jessica concluded that if we interviewed people who came from areas with small

black populations, they would not have experienced many racial problems because the whites would not have felt threatened by their presence.

"Different people have different perspectives"

In addition to raising sampling issues, two students identified the interpretive nature of history (although we had never explicitly discussed this in class). Carl, for example, surmised that the class's reason for thinking Michigan was "way better" in March lie in their interpretation of the evidence. People weigh or interpret evidence differently based on perspective:

> Carl: Cause like different people have different perspectives
>
> Shari: What do you mean by perspective? Could you give me an example of what you mean?
>
> Carl: Like a little bit of segregation could be a lot of segregation to another person. Like different people take stuff different.
>
> Shari: Could you tell me a little bit about what you mean by that?
>
> Carl: Well, some people are really soft-hearted. Like when someone talks about them they feel really bad, but like some people don't even care if somebody talks about them. There's lot of different kinds of people. (I., 5/13/98)

Some children may have concluded from people's stories that there was "only a little bit of segregation," while others heard the same stories and concluded that there was "a lot of segregation." Carl knew from his own experience that "when someone talks about them [some people] feel really bad, but like some people don't even care if somebody talks about them." Some people are, in his words, soft-hearted, while others are not. Those who are soft-hearted would interpret the stories they heard or even their own experiences with discrimination differently than those who were not.

Similarly, Larry knew from his own experience that one's subjective understanding of an event shapes one's memories. As a result, he recognized that our interviewees' testimony might not represent what actually happened:

> Larry: Maybe some people we interviewed didn't have so much of a bad time because maybe they were just kids when they got here and then they grew up and were like 40 years old and when they grew up here they didn't face any segregation when they grew up.
>
> Shari: Why do you think it would make a difference if they were young when they came?
>
> Larry: Well, they wouldn't know what in the world was going on. What I mean is they just wouldn't get the idea of why people were treating them bad. (I., 5/13/98)

In contrast to our discussion in March when the children emphasized the role of memory in people's testimony, Larry identified the idea that a person's perception of an event as it occurs shapes his or her memories. People who experienced segregation as children might not have understood that they were being discriminated against; "they wouldn't know what in the world was going on." Hence, the stories they told of the past may have represented their lived experience, but not reality.

"Maybe he just took the bad parts about what happened"

Both Josh and Michael identified the active role that people play in constructing historical representations. The facts do not simply speak for themselves. Josh, for example, suggested that "maybe the class [in March] was only thinking of the good stuff that happened in Michigan" when they agreed with the author. Interestingly, this seems to reflect what Josh himself had done. Despite his awareness of the struggles people faced, Josh had initially told a

story completely devoid of problems, emphasizing only the way the migrants' hopes were fulfilled. In contrast, his second narrative focused solely on the problems people faced.

Unlike Josh, who seemed to indicate that the children unconsciously or unintentionally focused on the good stuff in March, Michael hypothesized that this author deliberately may have chosen to focus on the "bad stuff" rather than the "good stuff":

> Michael: Maybe he just took the bad parts about what happened. Some people we interviewed said good stuff and bad stuff about Michigan.
>
> Shari: What might explain why he/she might have only taken the bad stuff?
>
> Michael: Maybe to tell people that are reading about it how Michigan was bad. The people that we interviewed, they said some good things about Michigan and some bad things and maybe he took just the bad things that people said that showed how bad it was in Michigan.
>
> Shari: What do you think might explain that, why he would show the bad things?
>
> Michael: Because maybe it talked about the good things about Michigan in different books, cause those books want to talk about how good Michigan was, not how bad it was. (I., 5/12/98)

Michael speculated that the author might have "just took the bad parts about what happened," selectively using some parts of his evidence while disregarding others. Michael imputed a motive to the author's actions, implying that the author might be attempting to fill a void in the field. Other books already spoke about the good things, so perhaps the purpose of this author was to make people aware that there were also "bad things" going on in Michigan.

A Second, Equally Temporary, Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I claimed that my students became members of a new Discourse. Recall that Gee (1992) defines Discourse as being:

> composed of people, of objects (like books), and of characteristic ways of talking, acting, interacting, thinking, believing, and valuing, and sometimes characteristic ways of writing, reading, and/or interpreting. . . . (p. 20)

My purposes for describing our work together are many. First, I attempted to bring the reader inside of our classroom to see the practices in which the students engaged, the characteristic ways of knowing they acquired, and the objects and people which became a part of our Discourse. Second, I highlighted how the tools children acquired and the Discourses they brought with them (including knowledge, values and beliefs) interacted with and shaped both classroom Discourse and the meaning students constructed. In Chapter Five, I further explore how the sense children made was shaped by what they brought with them and our classroom Discourse. I now focus on the role evidence played in changing the nature of the Discourse and the children's participation in it.

Gee (1992) argues that becoming a member of a Discourse necessitates that:

> members, at least while they are playing roles within the Discourse, act as if they hold particular beliefs and values about what counts as the "right sort" of person and the "right" way to be in the world, and thus too, what counts as the "wrong" sort and the "wrong" way. And "right" here means "worthy of respect and status," both social goods. (p. 142)

In traditional classrooms, teachers pose questions, students respond and then teachers evaluate those answers, certifying whether they are "right or wrong"

(Cazden, 1988). In such classrooms, the role of the teacher and textbooks are to transmit knowledge. The role of students is to absorb it. Students read to find the "right answers." When they write, they often copy verbatim from the sources they are using. These social practices constitute what it means to "do school" or "do history" in many classrooms. "Good" students behave accordingly.

Keen observers of what their teachers expect of them, my students quickly came to see that I valued the use of evidence as the basis for making claims about the past. When I told them that I was becoming a Doctor of Education, an astute student quipped, "You should become a Doctor of Evidence, Mrs. Rose" (10/97). The value I placed on evidence was clear by the questions I asked: "What kind of evidence do you think the author might have used to support this statement?" "Do you think it is okay to include this statement if the author did not provide evidence?" "Do you have evidence to support that claim?"

These questions required the children to interact differently with texts, their classmates, and me. I expected students to provide reasons for their beliefs that went beyond "the textbook says so" or "my teacher told me." I expected them to support their ideas with evidence. This also meant listening to and commenting upon their classmates' claims. For some, this was relatively easy. They had engaged in such practices in science and mathematics or at home. Those without such prior experiences faced difficulties. Rather than directly addressing their classmates, many students looked only at me when they shared an idea, viewing me as the source of authority. Many, including Timmy and Vanessa, did not easily give up their belief that they could find a textbook that contained the

"Truth." We had to practice new ways of interacting with each other and with text.

Initially, the students' practice was constrained by the limited number and nature of available resources. They could ask questions of the textbook, but their shallow content knowledge kept them from entering into conversations with those textbooks, of meaningfully interacting with authoritative claims. Moreover, their sources provided them with little material to draw upon in interacting with their classmates. They debated what they thought was most important to include in our narratives, but for the most part, their early writing about Native Americans, the French, the English, immigrants, and runaway slaves lacked variation. On the whole, they repeated the reasons offered in textbooks to explain why people came and what it was like for them.

It was not until the children began to engage in the oral interview project that students' interactions with their classmates and with text substantially changed. Their involvement in that project allowed them to enter the world of historical discourse in a way they had been unable to when they lacked a rich evidentiary base to draw upon. This decentered authority in the classroom away from the teacher and the textbook to the children and their evidence, as they became creators of knowledge themselves. The students' immersion in evidence gave them a basis with which to negotiate meanings, to adjudicate conflicting claims, and to participate more fully in discussions about what was reasonable to believe.

By watching the same interviews and collecting the same data, the students gained fuller and more equal access to participating in class discussions. Regardless of their status with classmates, if they had evidence to support their ideas, their ideas were valued. If they did not, their claims were dismissed. Evidence allowed the children to evaluate their classmates' and textbook authors' ideas. No longer at the "mercy of appetite, sense, and circumstances" (Dewey, 1910/1991, p. 67), evidence provided students with power and control over the nature of their participation. As the students began to recognize this, evidence became increasingly important to them.

Over time, the children queried their peers and textbooks in the same way I had questioned them: "How do you know that?" "What evidence do you have?" They began to engage in "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends," what Dewey (1910/1991) refers to as reflective thought (p. 6). As the students began to recognize the value of evidence in allowing them to enter the classroom discourse, gathering and analyzing evidence became increasingly important to them. They realized that they could use the information they recorded on their data collection sheets to support their claims and to challenge those of others.

While many factors shaped the sense students made (e.g., the students' strong belief that the North was morally superior to the South), the valuing of evidence played a central role in what stories they told. As Cherryholmes (1988) notes, "rules of inclusion and exclusion, sometimes explicit and sometimes

implicit, determine what is in and what is out" (p. 66). What the children could and could not say about Michigan was bound by our collectively-established rules of evidence. In their written narratives, the students only made claims that they felt they could support. In sum, what counted as knowledge shifted simultaneously with our developing norms of participation. Moreover, their historical interpretations and the methods we used were inseparably linked.

Through our investigation and the rich body of sources they gained from oral interviews, the children formed more complex and textured images of life in Michigan for African Americans. They began to realize that because experiences varied, a single story could not be told. Rather, multiple stories existed which reflected the uniqueness of each person's experience but which also tied them to larger political, social, and economic trends. Stories of shattered dreams, of broken promises, of success and struggle, replaced the students' earlier, more simplistic representations. All of the children went from thinking of Michigan as a place free from racial problems to a place where racial problems existed in the recent past. This shift in their thinking required students to do more than simply memorize new information. It required many of them to abandon their idealized portraits.

In their interviews with me, in their journals, and in our class discussions, the children sought to make sense of their changing ideas about what Michigan was like. The changes in the children's understandings prompted them not only to develop new descriptions of what life was like (represented by their written narratives), but also to construct stories that explained why people in Michigan

behaved as they did and how things changed between the past and the present. In the next chapter, I will describe those stories, stories which embodied their theories about prejudice and discrimination, as well as how social relations in Michigan changed over time.

Chapter Four

The Need to Know Why: Children's Narrative Explanations

> Beyond the self -- outside the realm of the imagination -- lies a landscape cluttered with the detritus of past living, a melange of clues and codes informative of a moment as real as this present one. When curiosity is stirred about an aspect of this past, a relationship with an object has begun. (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994, p. 259)

Bruner (1996) argues that explanations emerge from our struggles to resolve something puzzling, something unexpected. Furthermore, he maintains that we often construct narratives in pursuit of this resolution:

> Narrative is justified or warranted by virtue of the sequence of events it recounts being in violation of canonicity: it tells about something unexpected. The "point" of the narrative is to resolve the unexpected. (p. 121)

Most of my students did not expect that Michigan would have racial problems. Those who did expected those problems to improve with time. As a result, the existence and persistence of racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation through the 1950s and 1960s represented breaches in the canonical for my students. These were matters in need of explanation.

The written narratives the students constructed about life in Michigan for our video production were primarily descriptive, highlighting why people came to Michigan and what it was like for them. Consistent with our norms of discourse, the students included statements that they could support with evidence. As a result, our collective class narratives did not account for the actions and attitudes of people in Michigan who treated African Americans well or badly, for we did not have evidence to support such assertions. Despite the

video's emphasis on description, the students were, nevertheless, equally concerned with finding explanations for why people behaved as they did. The collective narratives, therefore, represented only part of each student's effort to make sense of the past, for as the class worked on the video, individuals were (publicly and privately) creating narrative explanations aimed at "resolv[ing] the unexpected."

The narratives we construct to account for breaches in the canonical, Bruner explains, include reasons for people's actions, reasons which make the inexplicable comprehensible. In doing so, we use folk psychology, "a culture's account of what makes human beings tick. It includes a theory of mind, one's own and others', a theory of motivation, and the rest" (Bruner, 1990, p. 13). Those who have studied folk psychology contend that we view actions mentallistically in terms of the actor's wishes, hopes, beliefs, plans, and intentions. As my students sought to make sense of why people were often prejudiced against blacks in Michigan, they constructed stories in their journals, during our interviews, and in our class discussions which contained reasons for people's actions and attitudes, reasons which explicated people's beliefs and intentions.

Not surprisingly, historians also construct narratives that seek to explain the thoughts of historical actors. As Collingwood (1946) notes:

> The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house

> at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar's defiance of Republican law, or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins. The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (where by a mere event I mean one which has an outside and no inside) but actions, and action is the unity of the outside and the inside of an event. (p. 213)

Collingwood and others have attempted to describe the process by which historians explicate the thoughts of historical actors, for as Holt (1990) notes, there are always "gap[s] between the story accessible through the document and the story to be reconstructed" (p. 12). There is always a lack of evidence to support inferences we make about things never seen. The thoughts of our predecessors no longer exist nor were they ever accessible through mere observation (Collingwood, 1946). We have traces of their existence, clues in the historical record, but that is not enough, for there are always gaps to bridge, inferences to be made, evidence to critique.

Like Bruner, philosophers of history such as Ricoeur (1965) also identify everyday theories of human behavior as an important source of historical "knowledge":

> History is dependent in varying degrees upon a popular conception of causality. . . . among the component causalities must be included psychological motivations, and these are always tainted by a common sense psychology. (p. 27)

But common sense or folk psychology is not all that historians rely upon. Hexter (1971), for example, argues that historians draw upon what he refers to as their second records. The second record, he explains,

> is everything [the historian] can bring to bear on the record of the past in order to elicit from that record the best account he can render of what he believes actually happened in the past. Potentially, therefore, it

> embraces his skills, the range of his knowledge, the set of his mind, the substance, the quality, and character of his experience -- his total consciousness. (p. 80)

Using a farming metaphor, Hexter distinguishes between two aspects of the second record: the sown and waste. The sown represents the "cultivated patches of systematically structured knowledge" drawn primarily from the historian's knowledge of information from the various social sciences and other written histories. In contrast, the waste represents what lies beyond the sown. This is "not desert, not mere ignorance and confusion," as Hexter explains, but rather, a source rich in knowledge of ourselves and others gained through everyday living.

As my students strove for unity between the inside and outside of events, they drew upon both the "sown" and the "waste" of their second records. They brought to bear theories of motivation and human behavior, as well as a capacity to theorize gained from their own experiences trying to make sense of the world in which they live (what Hexter would refer to as the waste). They also used their growing knowledge of the historical context and their understanding of the need to rely upon evidence (what Hexter would probably refer to as the sown).

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the narrative explanations Josh, Jessica, and Michael constructed about why people were prejudiced or discriminated against African Americans. In addition, Josh developed hypotheses about how people's attitudes eventually changed. Each of these students held different expectations regarding how people would behave in

different times and places. Rooted in the particulars of the historical context, their stories explain historical phenomena which conflicted with what they had expected.

First, I describe the circumstances which prompted the students to search for explanations, noting how particular events conflicted with their expectations. Next, I describe the hypotheses they offered to account for deviations from the canonical, highlighting the historical knowledge they drew upon as well as their beliefs and assumptions about human behavior. Finally, I compare the children's emergent narrative explanations with the theories of social scientists who have grappled with similar questions.

Josh

Like most of the children in the class, Josh was surprised and troubled to learn that some people were prejudiced against African Americans in Michigan. For Josh, the Civil War represented the turning point that changed the lives of blacks in Michigan. Prior to this time, he knew that blacks could be returned to the South if they were caught. Like most of the other children, Josh did not readily incorporate problems into the first narrative he wrote about Michigan in the 20th century. Yet, in his second written narrative, Josh told a story that emphasized how bad Michigan was. Recognizing that there were racial problems, he ended his narrative with an evaluative statement which revealed his view of the present. Recall his conclusion: "Good thing it gets better."

Josh believed that life in Michigan did get better, that "all of those problems" had been solved. As he learned about problems, he simultaneously worked to construct stories that explained how those problems got solved, how things got better. He worked to "resolve the unexpected," fitting the events he learned about into his overall story of progress.

Stories of Changing Attitudes

The story of busing in America can be told in many ways. It can be told as a story of efforts to rectify past inequalities. It can be told as failed attempts to do so. It can be told as a story of resistance to change. The children learned about busing as we prepared to interview people who came to Michigan in the 50s and 60s. However, they had trouble developing good questions for they had not yet figured out what busing was a story of. Josh, for example, initially asked, "Did the buses have seat belts?" (J., 4/10/98), a question from a worried rider, but not a good historical question.

When I asked the class to write about why they thought busing had started and what problem it was supposed to solve, Josh began our class discussion by sharing his journal entry:

> The reason they started busing was because they wanted to stop segregation so they told the government to solve the problem by busing and the buses would take the Blacks to the white schools and the whites to the Black schools. (J., 4/17/98)

In the conversation that ensued, it became clear that the students' confusion lay in their struggle to understand who would have supported busing and why. In earlier lessons, I had presented the students with the outside of the event, a simple description of the process by which schools became segregated and

the way in which busing was designed to solve that problem. I had not helped them understand the inside of the event, the beliefs and desires which motivated the people who supported busing. The students searched for unity between the two. Alicia began the conversation by asking Josh to clarify the ambiguous "they" in his journal entry:

Alicia: Who is they?

Josh: People.

Student: Black people.

Michael: It could be anyone.

Josh: The white people might want to stop it.

Ramon: I don't think they wanted to stop it.

Josh: Maybe they did.

Ramon: Maybe. But I don't think so, because the black people had less things like less sports and stuff than the white people did and maybe the black people wanted more stuff and why would the white people want to stop it, they already had the good stuff?

Michael: I disagree. I don't think that just blacks wanted it to stop. White people could have had a black friend that might have lived far away and they might have wanted to go to school with them, so it could have been both.

Ramon: Okay, I agree with that. Maybe the white people would have wanted it too because they might have been sad that the black people weren't going to school with them.

Ana: Why would the white people want to go to the black schools if it wasn't as good?

Josh: Why would they have been living in a separate neighborhood anyway?

Jessica: The white people didn't want to live around the black people and the black people didn't want to live near white people, so the black people went to live near where the black people lived and the white people went to live near where the white people were living.

Michael: If the white people didn't want to live with the black people and the black people didn't want to live with the white people, then why would they start busing?

Alicia: And I have another question. Why would their parents let them? Because if they didn't want to live by them, why would they let them bus them to the other school?

Jessica: In answer to Michael's question, the parents, some of them, or most of the white parents didn't, but not all. (C.D., 4/17/98)

The children's comments, concerns, and questions raised many of the controversies which, in fact, surrounded busing and caused many people to resist it. Imagining what people at the time would have thought, the children had begun to construct explanations about who would or would not have supported busing and for what reasons. Their explanations sounded very much like the theories social scientists developed during the same time period. Saenger (1953), for example, wrote of the tendency for whites to resist forced integration:

> Unless compelling motives force them to do so, most members of society prefer the familiar status quo to change in an unknown and perhaps dangerous direction. Particularly the more prejudiced individuals are unlikely to give up traditional patterns of discrimination and tend to resist social innovation in the field of race and ethnic relations. (p. 232)

My students seemed to understand that busing threatened the status quo, a status quo whites had an interest in defending. Noting the unlikelihood that whites would have supported busing, Ramon argued that they would not have

had a reason to do so because "they already had the good stuff." Ana questioned why whites would agree to be bused if black schools were not as good. It did not make sense to the students that a parent would choose to send their child to an inferior school, particularly if they did not want to live in the same neighborhood as blacks in the first place. Still, some remained convinced that there would be whites who wanted to stop segregation "because they might have been sad that the black people weren't going to school with them."

At the end of the discussion, Mrs. Smith, their regular classroom teacher who had experienced busing a few years after she moved to Michigan from Kentucky in 1963, clarified that her local school board had ordered busing and then selected students through a lottery to determine which school they would attend.[1] She explained that children were bused whether their parents supported it or not. This information provided the missing link for many of the students. They no longer had to make sense of why whites in general would have supported busing since the school board required it. Mrs. Smith's explanation, however, did not address what motivated the white school board members to institute busing.

Josh developed a story to explain the school board's actions. His story

[1] Mrs. Smith was bused as part of an experimental program that was instituted prior to a court order which mandated the integration of schools that were segregated due historic patterns of segregation in neighborhoods. However, several other factors were at play which influenced the school board's decision to order busing. For example, the government made the payment of vast amounts of federal money to poor school districts through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 contingent upon compliance with the

contained a theory about both the cause of prejudice and how it could be overcome. Like several other students, he viewed prejudiced attitudes as being learned; parents teach them to their children. This idea first came up when my students discussed Ruby Bridges, the made-for-television movie about one of the first black children to integrate a white Southern school. "All the kids didn't like her and stuff cause their mom told them not to. But one kid," Colin told the class, defied his mother's orders and told Ruby, "I am going to be your friend even though my mom told me not to" (C.D., 2/8/98).

Josh shared the same theory with me during an interview in which I asked him about the author's statement that racial discrimination in Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as in the South. Josh now agreed with the author, but was quick to tell me about the ways in which racial relations began to improve and why:

> Josh: They were making the schools integrated so white kids and black kids could go to school with each other so they could see each other in a different way.
>
> Shari: What do you mean by that?
>
> Josh: Like their parents keep on making them say that black kids or white kids are all mean or stuff and then when they start going to school together, they might start being friends with them and stuff and they would see them from their own point of view. (I., 4/30/98)

Josh reasoned that if prejudiced attitudes could be learned then they could be unlearned as well. If children come in contact with each other, they will begin to see each other "from their own point of view" rather than their parents'. They

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Civil Rights Act of 1966's provision that called for school districts to work for racial balance.

may become friends, just as the children in the movie Ruby Bridges did. Josh imputed these motives to the people who integrated the schools, arguing that "they" started busing so "white kids and black kids could see each other in a different way."

Although Josh did not have direct evidence of the school board's intentions and motivations, his assumption reflects the beliefs of many social psychologists and sociologists who supported integration of the schools, not simply as a remedy for educational inequality, but because of the role that they thought it might play in eliminating prejudiced attitudes. Known as the "contact hypothesis," sociologists promoted the idea that prejudice could be unlearned through increased contact between groups. They advocated integration for this reason (Duckitt, 1992; Saenger, 1953). Saenger (1953), a social psychologist, wrote:

> In abolishing discrimination and segregation we make it possible for majority and minority members to meet each other as equals. . . . Advances in the fight against discrimination and segregation may originate with relatively unprejudiced persons in positions of power, who can dictate the behavior of the more prejudiced whom they can influence. (pp. 232-233)

Josh saw the school board members as "unprejudiced persons in positions of power" playing the role of "dictating the behavior of the more prejudiced." As a result of their actions and the choice to integrate the schools, children of different backgrounds became friends, like they were today in Josh's class. For Josh, the story of busing connected the past to the present, highlighting the role that the school board played in helping people change prejudiced attitudes.

Josh interpreted busing as a story of efforts to overcome racial prejudice rather than educational inequality, selectively garnering evidence which supported this story. Although he knew that black schools were often inferior to white schools and even mentioned this in the same interview, he did not focus on the possibility that the school board started busing to eliminate inequalities in education. Instead he attended to stories he heard about the impact of busing and increased contact on racial attitudes and relationships.

Mrs. Smith, for example, spoke about the difficulties she and other white students had upon their arrival to the predominately black junior high school. But, she explained, over time she made friends with children from all different backgrounds. The students also read a newspaper article about an African American woman who was bused to a predominately white elementary school where she was greeted by having eggs thrown at her and being called the "'N' word." Mrs. Robinson told the reporter about how her experience with busing affected her attitude toward whites:

> It made me appreciate people for who they are. I think that if we wouldn't have been bused like that I could have had the same hatred in my heart that students showed me at Mt. Hope. (Myers, 1998)

These examples demonstrated the power of increased interracial contact, providing Josh with confirming evidence that if blacks and whites were brought together they "might start being friends." Based on these cases, Josh reasoned backwards, assuming that those who started busing did so to achieve the outcome of racial harmony, an outcome he believed was achieved.

Making Connections: "I Am A Man"

As Josh learned more about the 1950s and 1960s, he continued to connect the past to the present (as I described in Chapter Two), fitting information together to construct stories of change. Josh pulled together seemingly disparate information he had heard across time and in different contexts as he sought to understand how people began to reassess undemocratic attitudes. During one class discussion, Josh eagerly offered an explanation for how and why racial problems began to improve in Michigan:

Josh: MLK said speeches like, "I Have a Dream" and he led a lot of people to help him and even some whites started to help them. And I know the sign that helped the most.

Shari: What sign?

Josh: "I Am A Man."

Shari: Why do you think that sign helped the most?

Josh: They put up signs instead of violence.

Shari: Why do you think they put that sign up?

Josh: Because of the Declaration of Independence, because the Declaration of Independence said, "All men are created equally." And so the sign says, "I Am A Man" to get people thinking about how they should be treated equally. (C.D. 5/6/98)

Surprised that Josh made this connection between the sign and the Declaration of Independence (five months had passed since we had discussed the Declaration of Independence), I asked him about his comments in a follow-up interview to figure out how he had pieced this information together. In addition, this was the first time I had heard of Josh's knowledge of

this sign, a sign made famous in a photograph, but not a photo I had ever introduced to the class. During our interview, he explained that he had seen the sign when he and his family visited Martin Luther King, Jr.'s church in Atlanta over spring break. Again, he mentioned the Declaration of Independence and its connection to the "I Am A Man" sign. The "sign brought out stuff," he told me:

> Shari: Why do you think the sign brought out stuff?
>
> Josh: I don't know why, but I kind of do -- because of the Declaration of Independence. If they knew about that they could have put up that sign because the Declaration of Independence said, "All men, and that includes women too, are created equally" so, they, blacks, are men, too.
>
> Shari: So what do you think the sign meant?
>
> Josh: They are men, so they are created equally, too. They have the same qualities. They are just a different color. They're everything the same except the color. They can do all the stuff they can do. Maybe the sign started making people think they are equal to whites. (I., 6/6/98)

While Josh knew that Martin Luther King, Jr. -- along with many others -- had fought to bring about social change, he also understood that the speeches and protests, the outside of the events, did not explain why or how attitudes or beliefs would have changed or why people chose to put up particular signs. Josh looked to the "inside of the event" to understand how this sign would have influenced people's attitudes, and why people would have put the sign up in the first place. He imagined that if they (the people who put up signs) knew about the Declaration of Independence, then they could have put up the sign, "I Am A

Man" to convey the message that "all men are created equally" including blacks and, thus, should be treated equally.

Josh told a story about contradiction between the American creed and discrimination and the power of ideas to resolve that contradiction, to change people, "to get people thinking." His story mirrors what Gunnar Myrdal (1944) referred to as the American dilemma and its resolution. In his landmark book about race relations between blacks and whites, Myrdal defined the American dilemma as:

> the ever-raging conflict between, on the one hand, the valuations preserved on the general plane which we shall call the "American creed," where the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts, and on the other hand, the valuations on specific planes of individual and group living, where personal and local interests; economic, social, and sexual jealousies; consideration of community prestige and conformity; group prejudice against particular types of people; and all sorts of miscellaneous wants, impulses, and habits dominate his outlook. (p. xliii)

In the 1950s, social psychologists attempted to explain how people dealt with the dilemma Myrdal identified, "the moral uneasiness" endemic to a society which ostensibly valued equality but treated some people as second class citizens. Josh's speculation that the sign might have appealed to people's conscience by reminding them that the ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence applied to blacks as well as whites reflects reasoning similar to Allport's (1954). Allport argued that when the incongruity between people's ideals and attitudes becomes too obvious to ignore, they sometimes respond by reconciling this split in their basic value system. Resolution of the American dilemma occurs when a person rejects his

prejudiced attitudes and begins to live in accord with the ideal of equality. Josh seemed to understand that the sign highlighted the inconsistency between the Declaration of Independence and people's prejudiced attitudes. Furthermore, he hypothesized that the surfaced inconsistency might act as a catalyst for change.

After the follow-up interview with Josh, I still could not imagine that he had made such a profound connection on his own. I decided to ask him directly about whether anyone had spoken to him about the sign. He insisted that nobody had. Unconvinced, I asked his parents about it when they came to see the students' video production. Equally surprised by his insight, they both had no recollection of speaking with him about the sign or the Declaration of Independence. Josh had made the connection on his own, it seemed, telling a coherent story which synthesized his understanding of the American creed, his knowledge of the "I Am A Man" sign and the civil rights movement, and his beliefs about people's capacity for moral reflection and change.

Jessica

A Story of Power, Privilege, and Political Activism

Unlike most of the children in the class, Jessica expected there to be racial discrimination in Michigan up through the 50s and 60s. She had heard her grandfather tell story after story of his efforts to solve those problems through his work with the NAACP. Still, she was surprised that the examples of segregation and discrimination she heard from her grandfather, Mr. Wright, seemed worse than those that the people who came earlier had described.

Mr. Wright told the children about his inability to buy a house in a white neighborhood. He told them about people putting signs in front of his home imploring his family to "Go back to Africa." He told the students about the deplorable conditions of segregated schools in Benton Harbor and the lack of black teachers across the state. In contrast, all of the interviewees who came earlier went to integrated schools and all but one lived in integrated neighborhoods.

Jessica pointed this out to her grandfather during his interview. Ramon also told Mr. Wright that it seemed like the people who came earlier did not have that many problems. Jessica's grandfather challenged the idea that those who came earlier did not have significant problems; but he conceded that schools did become more segregated over time:

> They didn't have enough blacks to make any of them [schools] segregated. It doesn't become a problem until you get large numbers. Oh sure, all the schools were integrated in the 20s and 30s because you didn't have many blacks around. (S.I., 3/25/98)

Jessica expected things to get better rather than worse, even if there were still problems. Her perception that segregation had worsened conflicted with this expectation. In response, she developed a coherent explanation of why racial problems got worse as the number of African Americans increased which went beyond what her grandfather had provided. Mr. Wright had attributed the increase in problems to the growing number of blacks living in Michigan, but he did not explain why an increase in the African American population would cause more problems. Jessica's explanation aimed at helping her understand the reasons behind people's behaviors. In constructing her story, she drew

upon evidence from other interviews, her prior knowledge of the civil rights movement, and her own insights into human behavior.

I learned of Jessica's explanation when I asked her about the textbook author's statement comparing Michigan to the South. During our interview she immediately agreed that Michigan was sometimes almost as bad as the South even though she had been the first to disagree with that position in March. When I pointed out that she had changed her position since our class discussion, Jessica shook her head in acknowledgement. She immediately asked me who we had interviewed at that time. After I showed her a chart of the people (who had all come around the 20s and 30s), Jessica attributed the change in her position to the fact that those interviewees had come to Michigan during an earlier period when there were fewer blacks living in the state, echoing her grandfather.

Jessica continued by explaining why she thought there would have been fewer problems during the 20s and 30s. Looking to the beliefs of whites, she theorized that they must not have perceived blacks as a threat to the status quo when there were "only a few black people here":

> They came earlier and there weren't a lot of black people around here, there were only a few black people here. When I say a few, I mean pretty lower population than in the 50s and 60s. So, they [whites] didn't feel like they really had anything to worry about because they felt like a couple of people in each city isn't going to hurt anything. It's not going to be a real problem. (I., 5/5/98)

Jessica inferred that whites would have thought that "a couple of people in each city isn't going to hurt anything." As a result, they would not have had to worry.

Jessica went on to speculate about why whites would not have felt threatened when there were only a couple of blacks in a given city.

Jessica: They didn't have to worry about the black people there wanting to get in power or wanting a lot of rights or stuff because [blacks] wouldn't have much of a case because there was only a few of them. And so there wasn't much to worry about because they couldn't start anything really because there were hardly any black people there, so they couldn't really start anything, like any movements or anything like that, so [the whites] didn't have much to worry about.

Shari: Could you tell me a little bit more about what you meant by "wanting to get in power"?

Jessica: So they could vote and be part of the say, instead of having to do whatever, and so they could get the jobs that would help them make decisions and stuff.

Shari: Could you tell me a little bit about what you meant by they wouldn't be able to "start anything, like any kind of movements"?

Jessica: Like they couldn't, like they call the 50s and 60s the civil rights movement, and they were trying to get more rights and stuff. Well, if there are only a few people up there, it would be kinda hard for them to get gatherings and stuff. (I., 5/5/98)

The whites in the early 1900s did not have anything to worry about because the blacks "couldn't really start anything." Their numbers were too small to "get gatherings and stuff." In other words, they lacked political power and the means to acquire it.

In contrast, Jessica explained that the blacks were able to exert their will in the 50s and 60s due to the dramatic increase in the number of blacks living in Michigan between 1940 and 1960. She pointed to the census chart which hung in our class -- the African American population went from 208,234 to

717,581 in only 20 years. As a result, she imagined that whites began to feel threatened:

> But then when more people started to come it was like, "Oh my gosh, they are going to try to take over!" and it was like, "Well since we're in power right now, we really have to be real strict." (I., 5/5/98)

Jessica imagined what the whites would have been thinking, revealing their fear and their resolve to maintain power, to "be real strict."

Next, Jessica hypothesized about why whites began to feel threatened, drawing upon her knowledge of social movements:

Shari: Earlier you mentioned that some whites might have been thinking "Oh my gosh they are trying to take over." Could you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by that?

Jessica: Like there are more people there and so the black people have a better chance of being able to affect things like they did in the South with the bus and stuff. If there were only a few people, it wouldn't have been that big of a loss anyway, but when more people weren't riding the bus, then it was a bigger deal for them to lose all those people.

Shari: What bus are you talking about?

Jessica: When they didn't ride the buses in the South.

Shari: Where did you learn about that?

Jessica: I don't know. First grade or something.

Shari: So, what did you mean by "they are trying to take over?"

Jessica: Well not really take over, but be able to have a say-so in everything that happens. (I., 5/5/98)

Jessica inferred that when more blacks came to Michigan, they would be able to "get gatherings" and effect the kind of change illustrated by the people involved with the bus boycott. As a result, blacks would become a threat to the

historic privilege whites had enjoyed -- they would "be able to have a say-so in everything that happens."

Jessica proceeded to give examples that illustrated specific efforts at "being real strict." These examples represented the outside of the events, the actual actions people took to maintain power. Along the way, she wove in explanations of the inside of events:

Shari: What do you mean by they had to be "real strict"?

Jessica: They felt like they had to make sure a lot of the places were segregated and they tried to make sure that the neighborhoods were segregated by not selling, the white people not selling their houses to blacks to keep the neighborhoods segregated so that the schools would stay segregated.[2]

Shari: Tell me a little bit more about the neighborhoods being segregated.

Jessica: That probably happened because a lot of the white people wanted to stay in control. So, they wouldn't sell their houses to black people in neighborhoods and they kind of made the lower more beat up neighborhoods for blacks. Like the banks wouldn't give loans to buy a house in a white neighborhood but they would give them enough money probably to buy a house in a more rundown neighborhood.

Shari: Do you have any evidence for this?

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[2] Jessica understood the relationship between segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools. We had discussed this in class. In her journal she explained this relationship:

Why did they desegregate the schools through busing? What problem was it supposed to stop?

> They started busing because most of the kids went to their neighborhood schools and most of the time one neighborhood is black people and the other neighborhood is white people, so they bused white students to an almost all black school and black students to an almost white school because it was against the law to have segregated schools so this was a way to integrate the schools without having people move to a new house or having to drive their children (child) to school. (J., 4/17/98)

Jessica: My grandpa, he couldn't buy a lot because of his color. He might have said this in the interview. And he couldn't get a loan from the bank either. He couldn't get the property and he couldn't get money from the bank either to buy it. So, he didn't have enough money. I think his friend got the loan and he got the lot for him. And Mrs. Lewis, she bought a lot because she had enough money, and then people were marching against her because they didn't want any blacks in that neighborhood. They wanted to keep the neighborhood segregated. Mrs. Williams, she couldn't get a loan from the bank to buy a home either because of her race.

Shari: And tell me what you said about they tried to make sure the neighborhoods were segregated so that the schools would be segregated. Tell me a little bit more about that.

Jessica: Well, I think a lot of the white people didn't want their children going to black schools. Like when my grandpa was talking about all the people got notes from their doctors that it would be better for them to go to the other school and so basically, they didn't want their kids to be in a school with mostly blacks. And probably they were living in the neighborhood that my grandpa was living in and probably they weren't supposed to go to the other school and then they got notes so they went to the other school so they got permission, that's why they had to get permission from the Board and then my grandpa did the same thing. They were probably were just moving because they didn't want to be in that school. (I., 5/5/98)

Jessica's examples focus on her assumptions about the ways in which whites sought to maintain the status quo and their motives for doing so: Whites marched against the blacks <u>because</u> they did not want any blacks in the neighborhood. Whites did not give blacks loans <u>because</u> they wanted to prevent them from buying houses in their neighborhoods. Whites got notes from doctors to send their children to different schools <u>because</u> they did not want their children going to school with black children.

Jessica wove together several things she learned and believed into a coherent story which accounted for why segregation increasingly became a problem as the number of blacks living in Michigan grew: As blacks came to Michigan, whites began to feel threatened, fearing that they would lose power and control as blacks were able to effect political change. In response to this threat, whites became "real strict," engaging in more discriminatory actions in the hopes of preventing blacks from "having a say so."

Jessica's theory about the relationship between the increase in the number of blacks and an increase in discrimination resonated with a hypothesis set forth by Allport (1954). He argued that in small numbers minorities could be tolerated, but in large numbers they became a threat:

> A single Japanese or Mexican child in a classroom is likely to be a pet. But let a score move in, and they will certainly be set off from the remainder of the children, and in all probability be regarded as a threat. (p. 227)

Jessica, too, imagined how threatened whites must have felt.

Similarly, Jessica's explanation also sounded remarkably like a passage in Thomas Sugrue's (1996) award winning book, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit where he wrote about the response of white Detroiters to the influx of blacks into their neighborhoods. Sugrue also told a story of fear and desperation as whites sought to maintain social and economic control over their neighborhoods and jobs as blacks became an increasingly visible presence in Detroit:

> A potent mixture of fear, anger and desperation animated whites who violently defended their neighborhoods. All but the most liberal whites who lived along the city's racial frontier believed that they had only two

> options. They could flee, as vast numbers of white urbanites did, or they could hold their ground and fight.
>
> The violence that whites unleashed against blacks was not simply a manifestation of lawlessness and disorder. It was not random, nor was it irrational . . . . The violent clashes between whites and blacks that marred the city were political acts, the consequence of the perceptions of homeownership, community, gender, and race deeply help by white Detroiters. The result of profound economic insecurity among working and middle-class whites, they were above all, desperate acts of neighborhood self-determination, by well-organized community groups, in response to an array of social and economic changes over which they had little control. (pp. 233-234)

Michael

Making the Irrational Rational

Like both Jessica and Josh, Michael told stories about why people discriminated against blacks in Michigan. But his was a different story. Like economists who argue that individuals are, at their core, rational self-maximizers who behave in their economic self-interest (Becker, 1957), Michael (as I described in Chapter Two) expected people to behave rationally. His assumptions about rational behavior resonated with free market ideology. People are motivated by the desire for money. This belief framed the sense Michael made of the failure of restaurant and hotel owners to serve blacks and the refusal of schools to hire black teachers. By theorizing about the reasons behind people's actions, Michael told stories which helped him make sense of behavior which at first seemed irrational.

Based on Michael's assumptions about the profit motive, he anticipated that store owners would serve all customers, regardless of race. Surprised to

hear stories of people in Michigan who could not get served at certain restaurants and hotels, he blurted out:

> Everyone knows everyone loves money. Why wouldn't they sell them the food so they could make money? Why won't they serve you when you can make a lot of money with blacks coming in to eat? (J., 3/12/98)

Michael established the canonical: Everyone knows everyone loves money. To him, the restaurant and hotel owners' failure to serve blacks was irrational or what Bruner (1990) calls "folk-psychologically insane" (p. 40). Over the next two months, Michael constructed and reconstructed stories which reflect his attempts to make sense of what he viewed as deviations from the canonical. Like Jessica and Josh, he drew upon his knowledge of the times as well as his beliefs about the motivations behind people's actions.

Several days after Michael's initial comment, he raised the same question again:

> Why would the owners of the stores and hotels, why wouldn't they want the blacks to come in if they could make a lot more money?

This time the children offered several explanations:

Nathan: Cause they were racist, they didn't like blacks.

Alicia: Maybe they heard that blacks couldn't get that good of a job, they didn't pay them that much and then they knew that they couldn't pay for what they would have gave them.

Michael: They still would want money though.

Ramon: They're probably prejudiced and they probably only wanted whites going to their restaurants.

Vanessa: You said that people could have gotten more for having blacks go to their restaurant, why do you think it's about money?

Marcus: Cause they're greedy.

Michael: Do you know anybody that doesn't like money?

Vanessa: I don't. (C.D., 3/11/98)

Michael remained dissatisfied with his classmates' explanations. The stories they told did not make sense to him. He believed that the desire to "make a lot of money" was stronger and more fundamental than personal dislike. Economists highlight a similar disincentive to discriminate when there is a simultaneous exchange of money for goods and services:

> One person's money is as good as the next's. As long as there is no residual ongoing relationship between the two sides, the bigot is well advised to take money from strangers he does not like and spend it in the company of friends. (Epstein, 1992, p. 60)

Michael expected the "bigot" to sell blacks the food "so they could make money." When he learned that some did not, Michael searched for an explanation which would make the store owners' behavior seem consistent with their economic self-interest.

Alicia's idea that store owners might not have served blacks because they "knew that they couldn't pay for what they would have gave them" made sense to Michael. If the whites knew that the blacks could not pay for the goods or services, then he could understand their decision not to serve them. Anticipating that his audience would be as confused as he was about the seemingly irrational behavior of restaurant and hotel owners, Michael incorporated Alicia's explanation into the narrative he wrote about why African Americans came to Michigan between 1920 and 1940:

> What I learned about why African Americans came to Michigan in the 1920s to 40s and what it was like for them
>
> Back then Michigan was a promised land. You could get a better opportunity to get a job and an education at school. The jobs were very good in Michigan and also the amount of money you were paid to do the job. Back then you could get paid $5.00 at Henry Ford's factory. You traveled on trains a lot because there was not that many cars.
>
> Some white people in Michigan were prejudice of Blacks. If you go into a restaurant if you were Black back then you might not get served in a restaurant. If you went to a hotel or a restaurant, they would not let you come in if you were Black. Why? Because they know that you don't have enough money to go into a restaurant or hotel. (J., 3/12/98)

Michael posited a direct correspondence between what the store owners thought and reality, accepting the idea that blacks must not have had enough money to pay, as Alicia had suggested. Michael did not, however, mention anything about the second half of Alicia's explanation (i.e., that some blacks did not have enough to pay because they "couldn't get that good of a job"). Doing so would have contradicted his story of the Promised Land along with all of the economic opportunities which he believed Michigan offered.

Two months later when I asked him about some comments and questions he had written in his journal, Michael revised his thinking. Now, Michael speculated that whites might have thought that blacks did not have enough money, even if that was not, in fact, the case.

> Shari: Do you have any explanation of why they might not have served blacks at some restaurants? Why do you think they did that?
>
> Michael: I don't know. Maybe they wanted just whites to get served. Maybe cause they . . . somebody said that maybe [whites] thought that [blacks] wouldn't have enough money. Somebody said in the class that they wouldn't let the blacks

go into the hotel or restaurant cause [the whites] didn't think [the blacks] had enough money.

Shari: Do you think that was true?

Michael: No. But people might have thought that. I don't know why other people would have thought that, but I can tell you why I don't. Why would they go there if they didn't have enough money? (I., 5/14/98)

Michael reasoned that it would not make sense for people to go to a restaurant if they did not have the money to pay. Instead, he attributed the restaurant owners' behavior to a false belief, a belief which probably did not correspond to the actual state of affairs. (Why would blacks go to the restaurant in the first place if they didn't have enough money?) Although Michael continued to wonder why whites would have thought that blacks did not have enough money to pay, he tentatively adopted an explanation which allowed him to once again view the restaurant owners' behavior as being economically rational.

Michael heard other stories of discrimination which also did not conform to his expectations of how people would behave in Michigan. When he learned that Mrs. Cleaves, Josh's grandmother, could not get a job as an English teacher in Grand Rapids in 1954, he asked:

> How come some people wouldn't let people work in teaching even though they went to school to try to get a job? The people wouldn't even give it to them. Why? (J., 4/17/98)

Similarly, when he learned from Mr. Williams, Doris's grandfather, that there were no black supervisors when he first started working at a local automobile factory in the early 1950s, he shouted out:

> Probably because they didn't want blacks as their leaders telling them what to do. But how could they know they didn't want them as their supervisors if they hadn't had them as their supervisors like the teachers? How could they know if black teachers wouldn't be just as good as white teachers if they didn't give them the jobs? (C.D., 4/23/98)

While economists typically define rational behavior in terms of the profit motive, several social psychologists have argued that prejudice is an irrational attitude -- not because it ignores the profit motive -- but because it violates the "norm of rationality by being overgeneralized, rigid, and based on inadequate evidence" (Duckitt, 1992, p. 15). For Michael, discrimination in employment violated this "norm of rationality." Prejudging blacks without adequate evidence did not make sense. These violations of the "norm of rationality" perturbed Michael and once again sent him searching for explanations.

Michael constructed a story which helped him understand the school employers' behavior. As he tried to make sense of the apparent incongruence, he looked to the inside of the event, imagining what the school employers were thinking when they made the decision not to hire blacks. In so doing, he returned to the profit motive and his knowledge of the reaction of white parents to the integration of schools in the South.

Michael theorized that the school might lose "customers" if they hired black teachers:

> Maybe [the school employers] think [the white parents] will move their kids, the parents will move their kids to a different school if they had a black teacher. Cause maybe their parents don't like black people. Cause there was this one movie where the parents wanted their children to leave school cause there was this black girl coming to the school. I think the movie was called Ruby. (I., 5/14/98).

Like many of his classmates, Michael had seen Ruby Bridges (which he knew was based on a true story). This movie depicted a similar scenario: When a black child went to a white school, white parents pulled their children out. In class, he had also heard a classmate's grandparent speak of white families who began to leave the school his children attended as the percentage of black children grew. Given this prior knowledge -- as well as his understanding of the profit motive -- Michael inferred that school employers might have worried that hiring black teachers would cause white parents to remove their children from the school as well.

In contrast to the restaurant scenario in which Michael perceived the costs of discrimination as being high (not getting money for food), and hence, the incentive to discriminate low, hiring black teachers had the potential to incur a substantial "cost" to schools. Similarly, Epstein (1992) explains that the decision to discriminate may be economically rational when doing so promotes profits. While many economists assume that hiring a heterogeneous work force allows firms to "establish bonds" with diverse groups of potential customers, Epstein argues that in certain situations, diversity may result in a loss of customers, particularly when the firm caters to a homogeneous customer base:

> The problem for the firm is to find a way to maximize its profits, taking into account its total costs, including organizational costs. In some cases the gains from diversity may be rejected as too costly. (p. 69)

The white schools in Grand Rapids catered to a single class of customers. Michael hypothesized that the potential loss of "clients" as a cost for hiring a

black teacher might be more than a school was willing to incur. Michael's explanation allowed him to see the school employers' decision in a rational light -- they, like the restaurant and hotel owners, were acting in accordance with the profit motive.

A Third Temporary Conclusion

My students' sense-making, the process by which they constructed narrative explanations about prejudice and change, shared several features. First, the children were prompted to tell stories when they perceived a breach in the canonical. What constituted a breach depended upon the child's preconceptions and expectations of what life in Michigan would be like. Josh did not expect Northerners to be prejudiced. He told stories which helped him understand those attitudes. Based on his assumption that most people in Michigan are no longer prejudiced, he developed hypotheses about how change occurred. He connected the past to the present, noting the impact of events such as busing and civil rights protests on people's attitudes.

Jessica's perception that racial problems in Michigan increased between the early 1900s and the 50s and 60s conflicted with her belief that things gradually got better over time through the tireless efforts of people like her grandfather. Her explanation allowed her to account for why racial problems worsened as the African American population in Michigan increased and how things eventually got better (i.e., there were finally enough blacks in Michigan to fight for and achieve equality). Michael expected people to behave rationally. For him, both the restaurant and hotel owners' failure to serve blacks

and the schools refusal to hire blacks seemed to be irrational. He struggled to understand what motivated discriminatory actions given his assumptions about the rational nature of human behavior.

All of these students made connections between information they had acquired over time and in various settings (in and out of school) and their assumptions about human behavior to piece together coherent narrative explanations. Josh drew upon what he had learned about busing from the interviewees and a newspaper article as well as his belief that people can unlearn prejudice. He connected his knowledge of the Declaration of Independence and a sign he saw on his family vacation with his belief in people's capacity for moral reflection. Jessica combined her knowledge of social movements (some of which she claimed to have acquired in the first grade) and all of the examples of discrimination in neighborhoods she learned about in class with her belief that people would feel threatened by challenges to their power. Michael remembered an incident he saw in a scene from the movie Ruby Bridges which helped him explain the school board's refusal to hire black teachers in light of his belief that people behave rationally. While as the teacher, I would like to take credit for facilitating these connections, more often than not the children made these connections spontaneously and for their own reasons, not as a result of my prodding.

Finally, my students developed explanations which looked to the inside of events, the thoughts in the minds of historical actors. They drew upon the tools of folk psychology, explicating the beliefs, desires, wishes, and intentions

which motivated people's attitudes and behaviors. Josh thought the school board members started busing because they thought it would help children see each other from "their own point of view." Protesters carried the "I Am A Man" sign "to get people thinking about how [blacks] should be treated equally." Jessica hypothesized that whites felt threatened when the number of African Americans in Michigan grew because they were worried that blacks were "going to try to take over." Michael speculated that whites refused to serve blacks because they "thought they wouldn't have enough money to pay" and that school board members would not hire black teachers because they thought "[white] parents would move their kids to a different school."

I could have simply described the stories my students constructed, highlighting the process by which they did so. But, I did not, choosing instead to juxtapose my students' narrative explanations with those of social scientists and historians. After I noticed that many of my students had explanations for why people were prejudiced, I began to read social scientists' theories of prejudice. I was immediately struck by the uncanny similarities. Wondering what might account for these parallels, I turned to Dewey. Dewey (1902/1964) hypothesized that there is:

> no gap in kind (as distinct from degree) between the child's experience and the various forms of subject matter that make up the course of study. From the side of the child, it is a question of seeing how his experience already contains within itself elements -- facts and truths -- of just the same sort as those entering into the formulated study; and what is of more importance, of how it contains within itself the attitudes, the motives, and the interests which have operated in developing and organizing the subject matter to the plane it now occupies. From the side of the studies, it is a question of interpreting them as outgrowths of forces operating in the child's life, and of discovering the steps that

> intervene between the child's present experience and their richer maturity. (p. 344)

My students' theorizing provides a vivid illustration of the relationship between child and subject matter of which Dewey (1902/1964) spoke -- highlighting the similarities between children's interests and the "facts and truths" contained within their experiences and social scientists' and historians'. Dewey's claim only goes so far, though, offering little in the way of concrete examples which help illuminate "the facts and truths" contained within the child's experience.

Moreover, we know little about how scientists or social scientists form the hypotheses which lead to the development of "facts and truths." As Bruner (1986) notes, "[h]ypothesis creation (in contrast to hypothesis testing) remains a tantalizing mystery" (p. 12):

> Journals of science do not give space to rambles through metaphor, to the process by which we get ideas worth testing -- that is worth falsifying. Yet a great deal of the time of scientists is spent on just such rambling. Let me say now what Niels Bohr told me. The idea of complementarity in quantum theory, he said, came to him as he thought of the impossibility of considering his son simultaneously in the light of love and in the light of justice, the son just having voluntarily confessed that he had stolen a pipe from a local shop. His brooding set him to thinking about the vases and the faces in the figure-ground pictures; you can see only one at a time. And then the impossibility of thinking simultaneously about the position and the velocity of a particle occurred to him. (pp. 50-51)

While the process by which scholars often get their ideas remains elusive, Nisbett and Ross (1980) contend that the way lay people and social scientists generate hypotheses may have much in common:

> [W]e learned that when the social scientist is most serious and creative he thinks and talks like a layperson, using familiar intuitive strategies

> and focusing always on the phenomena of daily social existence. . . . [W]hile the formal tools of the scientist are essential, they generally serve the goal of verifying insights, not of producing them. (p. xv)

The students' narrative explanations represent hypotheses -- initial hunches and speculations which provided them with a way of making sense of the past. Their hypothesizing may be mysterious, but we can see the influence of culture.

Firmly rooted in Western culture, the children's and the social scientists' hypotheses reflect the values, beliefs, assumptions, and tools for sense-making which they inherited. Readers may conclude that the children's theorizing simply provides evidence of their ability to think in complex ways. The juxtapositioning of their theories with those of social scientists implicitly conveys that message. However, the similarities in their theories, I believe, are more than interesting parallels or proof of my students' capacity for abstract thought (although they are that as well). They point to the important role that culture played in shaping the explanations offered by social scientists as well as the stories my students constructed. The theories of social scientists do not represent "facts and truths," fixed in space and time. Rather, they are social constructions, developed by real people who bring their own interests, values and assumptions to the task of understanding their social worlds.

Most of the theories I have mentioned throughout this chapter have, for the most part, fallen out of favor within academic communities. For example, as the pervasiveness of segregation in the North and South became more visible during the 1950s, sociologists began to question the earlier assumption that prejudice was simply a psychological response or a

personality "problem," for at the time, it seemed to be a social phenomenon. Similarly, as race relations continued to fester and the aim of equality went unrealized – despite the Civil Rights Movement – sociologists questioned the "contact hypothesis." Studies began to show that increased contact did not necessarily and inevitably lead to changes in attitudes (Duckitt, 1992). Sociologists then began to construct theories to explain the persistence of prejudice which focused on the role of intergroup contact conditions, intergroup conflict, and structural and cultural conditions (Duckitt, 1992).

Regardless of the theories they construct, the social scientists and the children share cultural assumptions that are embedded within their explanations. Michael's perception, for example, that the restaurant and hotel owners were irrational reflects the cultural assumption that individuals are, at their core, rational self-maximizers who behave in their economic self-interest (Becker, 1957). Children from a communist society probably would have offered very different explanations to account for people's behavior. Similarly, Michael's perception that the school employers' behavior was irrational reflects the cultural assumption that people make decisions based on reason, including adequate evidence and that we live in a meritocratic society. Josh's belief that increased contact will lead to racial harmony can only be understood in light of the fact that he lives in a society which has a deep and abiding faith in our ability to live together, e pluribus unum.

C. Wright Mills (1940) argues that we learn "vocabularies of motives" early on as parents speak to us about our own actions as well as those of others:

> [M]otives are imputed to others before they are avowed by self. The mother controls the child: "Do not do that, it is greedy." Not only does the child learn what to do, what not to do, but he is given standardized motives which promote prescribed actions and dissuade those proscribed. Along with rules and norms of action for various situations, we learn vocabularies of motives appropriate to them. These are the motives we shall use, since they are part of our language and components of our behavior. (p. 909)

Gee (1992) notes that scientists often "'steal from' and variously 'clean up' various folk theories" (p. 91). Similarly, the views of social scientists often become absorbed into our culture, providing students with a store of explanations which illuminate people's motives (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Gee, 1992).

The children brought "a store of explanations" with them, pervasive folk theories about why people were prejudiced which they would hear in the course of everyday living. They knew from personal experience that people sometimes treated others badly because of difference. They had witnessed children make fun of or exclude those who were heavy, who wore glasses, who had "slanted" eyes or who spoke a different language. Sometimes -- although they would not readily admit it -- they were guilty of these behaviors or had been the object of ridicule themselves. They were quick to theorize about why people tease, taunt, mock, and exclude those with such differences:

Colin: It happens to them so they feel bad so they do it to you.

Tommy: They think they are better than other people.

Jessica: Some people are scared of differences. When they're mean they feel less scared.

Carmen: They're jealous of your culture. (C.D., 10/21/98)

One can imagine a parent or teacher consoling a child with whom the other children will not play, "Don't feel bad, they're just jealous" or "They just think they're better than everyone else."

In addition to the explanations Jessica, Michael, and Josh articulated about the past, their classmates also brought theories to bear in making sense of prejudice in the past which resonate with those of social scientists. Larry, for example, identified jealousy as a possible cause of prejudiced attitudes toward immigrants who came to Michigan at the turn of the century. He thought people would have been prejudiced against the immigrants because:

> they like what the other people have and they're just acting all prejudiced to make themselves feel better. Then, the other person would be all sad and the person that made the other person sad would be feeling all better. But, they would still be feeling a little bit jealous and mad at the other person. (I., 2/11/98)

Larry assumed that the immigrants possessed "a whole bunch of stuff" which elicited envy from the native-born "have nots." In support of this theory, Larry described an incident he had witnessed at his old school in which one group of children "were sitting there hitting all these other people just because they were jealous that they had all these other things that they didn't have." One group, he said, had more toys and more attention than the other so they "picked on the other children for no reason" (I., 2/11/98). As a result, they do not like those who had more than them.

Larry, like psychologists, reasoned that people are susceptible to the effects of jealousy. "Envy," Allport (1954) asserted, "leads one to think ill of someone else -- more ill than the situation warrants" (p. 383). In Larry's example, "they picked on those people for no reason." Moreover, Larry identified a psychic benefit of such behavior -- people act "all prejudiced to make themselves feel better." Similarly, some psychologists have maintained that people with low self-concept exhibit prejudiced attitudes and behavior because doing so increases their own self-esteem (Saenger, 1953).

In contrast to Larry, Carmen identified snobbery, a sort of supercilious scorn born of disdain for the lowly condition of the poor, as the source of prejudiced attitudes toward the immigrants. In an interview she explained:

> Well, the rich people probably don't like the immigrants because they're poor, they have ripped clothing and not a lot of jewelry and not a lot of things. So, the rich people think they are better. The people who are prejudiced are probably rich. (Carmen, I., 2/10/98)

For Carmen, the impoverished conditions of the immigrants, their ripped clothing and lack of jewelry and other worldly possessions defined the way in which people, particularly rich people, perceived them.

Allport (1954) also identified haughty attitudes as a source of prejudice toward the poor. He attributed those attitudes to advertising and the standards set by Madison Avenue:

> For one thing, as mass-men, we follow the conventions of the times. The snob appeals of advertising affect us deeply. We want more goods, more luxury, more status. The standards -- forced upon us by advertisers call contempt of people who are poor, who do not reach the level of material existence that is prescribed. Hence, we look down upon groups economically below us -- upon Negroes, immigrants and rustics. (pp. 211-212)

Like Allport, Carmen inferred that rich people thought they were better than the immigrants because they did not have "a lot of things."

In developing her theory, Carmen drew upon what we had learned in class, her own family's experience, and popular culture. She knew that immigrants who came at the turn of the century often had to work in low status jobs, were typically poor and frequently worked as servants, especially women. Her own family had come to America to escape the poverty they faced in Mexico. Carmen used her knowledge of a television show on the Spanish Channel as an example to demonstrate that rich people look down upon those who have less. In the show, she explained, a rich child refused to be friends with her servant's child (who Carmen thought might have been Indian). She maintained that the rich child thought she was better than the servant's child because "she did not have a lot of things, like jewelry."

While the similarities between my students' theories and those of social scientists may seem uncanny, it should not be surprising for as Bruner (1990) explains:

> It is man's participation in culture and the realization of his mental powers through culture that makes it impossible to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone. Human beings do not terminate at their own skins; they are expressions of a culture. To treat the world as an indifferent flow of information to be processed by individuals is to lose sight of how individuals are formed and how they function. (p. 12)

The way in which my students made sense of the past -- the flow of information they encountered -- cannot be separated from the culture of which they are a part. Their understandings are an expression of that culture as are

the understandings of historians -- a point which I will explore in more depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

The Historical Nature of Children's Historical Sense-making

> [T]here is lodged in Mr. Everyman's mind a mass of unrelated and related information and misinformation, and of impressions and images, out of which he somehow manages, undeliberately for the most part, to fashion a history, a patterned picture of remembered things said and done in past times and distant places. It is not possible, it is not essential, that this picture should be complete or completely true; it is essential that it should be useful to Mr. Everyman; and that it may be useful to him he will hold in memory, of all the things he might hold in memory, those things only which can be related to some reasonable degree of relevance and harmony to his idea of himself and of what he is doing in the world and what he hopes to do. (Becker, 1968, p. 15)

Fashioning a history, as Carl Becker pointed out over fifty years ago, reflects the human search for meaning. The demand for meaning, as Stanford (1986) notes, is "fundamental to our being" (p. 188). Children are no different. My students needed to understand their world, to make sense of both its past and present. As they encountered their first systematic study of the past, they too searched for meaning, fashioning histories. They did so by constructing stories. In the previous three chapters, I provided a detailed account of those stories, the process by which students constructed them, and the community we created that enabled them.

In this chapter, I background my individual students' sense-making while foregrounding factors that have shaped history writing across time. I do so in order to demonstrate how the sense my students made transcends the particulars of our class, resonating with central ideas and trends in both the discipline of history and Western culture and thought. Because my argument concerns historical sense-making, I begin with Jenkins' (1991) tripartite

characterization of history. He argues that history is composed of epistemology, methodology, and ideology, all of which shape the making of historical meaning. While the three parts of history are interdependent, my analysis begins by examining each separately.

Methodology

There is no single historical method. Historians use a range of methods that are often determined by their questions and concerns. Contemporary economic historians, for example, use methods quite different from those of modern feminist historians (Pernoud & Clin, 1998; Ulrich, 1990). Historians interested in questions concerning the illiterate masses invented methods different than their colleagues who study elite politicians who left behind a substantial paper trail. As the field evolves, research methods change and multiply. Further, new methods are often contested. Some scholars argue that there is "no epistemologically defensible historical method" (Seixas, 1993, p. 309, cf. Harlan (1989)). Other historians disagree, as witnessed in the discourse played out on the pages of professional journals and book reviews in The New York Review of Books, American Scholar, Harpers, The New York Times, The Atlantic, and others.

Depending upon one's view about what is worth knowing and the methods of inquiry one uses, Michigan's history can be told in many ways. Military and political history capture battles fought, bringing to the fore events such as the French and Indian War, Pontiac's War, the Treaty of Paris, and the Northwest Ordinance. In learning such history, third and fourth graders would probably

have to rely primarily upon simplified textbook accounts, for much of this information is inaccessible to them.

Social history

While our investigation inevitability led us to examine economic, political, and military issues, my framing of our central inquiry question emphasized social history. My views of what and how my students should learn were also shaped by the times. Had I taught fifty years ago, I probably would have made different pedagogical decisions. The movement to focus on social history gained momentum in the 1960s. As Grele (1996) explains:

> The personal politics of the 1960s and the new social history combined to demand a new history, a history from the bottom up, a history not of movers and shakers but of members of the working class, of ethnic and racial minorities, of women. (pp. 66-67)

While school history has typically emphasized political and economic history, current reform documents reflect the trend toward studying the lives of ordinary people. The authors of the National History Standards (1994), for example, state that:

> Through social history, students come to deeper understandings of society: of what it means to be human, of different and changing views of family structures, of men's and women's roles, of childhood and of children's roles, of various groups and classes in society, and of relationships among all these individuals and groups. This sphere considers how economic, religious, cultural, and political changes have affected social life, and it incorporates developments shaping the destiny of millions: the history of slavery; of class conflict; of mass migration and immigration; the human consequences of plague, war, and famine; and the longer life expectancy and rising living standards following upon medical, technological, and economic advances. (p. 5)

What my students came to understand about the past can only be understood in light of our focus on social history. They told stories of ordinary

people, of the way economic, cultural, and political changes affected social life. They told stories of mass migration and immigration. If I had crafted a different inquiry question to guide our investigation, the children would have likely told different stories.

They would have also engaged in different ways of knowing. Our inquiry question played a central role in determining the appropriate methods, including the sources that provided evidence upon which we could rely. For the first half of the year, we primarily used textbooks, although the children also examined material artifacts, read literature describing the lives of early settlers, some journals and letters, and spoke to people about what they knew about their ancestors' experiences coming to Michigan during the 19th century.

In keeping with my commitment to social history, oral interviews became our primary method of inquiry as we began our study of the 20th century. Similarly, those historians who strive to tell "history-from-bottom-up" have increasingly relied upon oral interviews to give a voice to those who have traditionally been left out of mainstream history. Oral history, its proponents argued,

> offered historians the opportunity to create documents where none existed and therefore rescue a hidden history, and to more sympathetically understand the viewpoint of the people they studied. (Grele, 1996, p. 67)

Oral history, therefore, represents not only "a tool or a method for recovering history," it also represents "a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written" (Okihiro, 1996, p. 209). I too believed that using oral interviews would legitimize

the students' family histories, histories that are often marginalized in the traditional school curriculum.

Using oral interviews, my students constructed narratives about the lives of "common folks," their family and community members. Moreover, the children heard particular voices out of which they constructed particular histories. The majority of interviewees were African American. Most had gone to college and had white collar jobs. No one described economic hardships. Not surprisingly, neither did my students.

While the sense my students made cannot be separated from our sample of informants (something the children themselves recognized), the students also played an active and integral role in bringing their "data" into existence, deciding for themselves what to ask. Like some professional oral historians, they crafted questions aimed at testing their own hypotheses. Exploring preconceptions they brought with them, they sought to find out if Michigan was free from racial problems or if the North was better than the South. The students then used their collected data to construct representations of Michigan that answered their own particular questions. The sense children made, therefore, also cannot be separated from the evidence they created.

The children's involvement in the process of creating their data raises a host of methodological issues which historians themselves have explored. In contrast to traditional history which relies upon traces of the past left behind in documents, diaries, letters and everyday artifacts, oral historians, like my students, deliberately create "data" which previously did not exist, making it a

unique form of primary source material (Starr, 1996). Some have argued that this intervention compromises the historian's ability to write objective accounts. They suggest that the historians who generate the data of oral history should not be the historians who analyze them (Hoffman, 1996). At the heart of these issues lies questions concerning the nature of historical knowledge. I turn to some of these issues in the following section on epistemology, exploring how the relationship between the children and their data shaped and was shaped by their views of knowledge.

Epistemology

From the very beginning of the year, it was clear that my students had beliefs about knowledge and authority. Recall the students' reaction to the conflicting textbook accounts. When they refused to return to the textbooks and directed me to find a better book, Timmy and Vanessa revealed their assumptions about authority, knowledge, and text. Although I did not fully document and explore my students' epistemological assumptions, their beliefs about knowledge were an important part of the subterranean world of our classroom and their sense-making. These beliefs about knowledge rose to the surface frequently, most obviously in the doing of oral history and in their explanations. I discuss each briefly.

Oral history

When historians began to use oral interviews in the 60s, most did so in the tradition of finding out what life was "actually like." Several historians have argued that using oral interviews for this purpose is problematic for a number of

reasons. Based on self report, recollection, and memory, oral interviews suffer all the weaknesses of those phenomena, frailties that have been explored by scholars of all sorts; from psychologists (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) to historians (Finnegan, 1996; Friedlander, 1996; Vansina, 1996) to novelists (Lively, 1975).

Given these criticisms as well as others, some historians have begun to treat oral interviews as "texts" which reveal the historical consciousness of the interviewees, rather than as evidence of what life was like (Finnegan, 1996; Friedlander, 1996; Grele, 1996). This treatment of oral interviews reflects an interest in "the ways in which desires, ideologies, visions, and above all memory formulate our histories as we construct them in the interview" (Grele, 1996, p. 79). For these historians, oral interviews represent cultural constructs rather than evidence which might help them understand what "actually happened."

While the use of oral interviews is contested (reflecting different views about the nature of historical knowledge), both my purposes as the teacher and the beliefs my students brought with them influenced our use of interviewees' testimony. Like any teacher, I had multiple agendas. Contemporary scholarship notes the frequent and large chasm between schools, family, and community (e.g., Seixas 1993a). Teachers are often encouraged to bridge the gap and bring families into the world of their children's learning. The inclusion of the students' relatives in this work was important in that way. Nearly 20 family members attended the first viewing of our class videotape, celebrating their children's achievement. This increased communication and collaboration meant much to me as a teacher. Moreover, the children cared about finding out what had

happened to their own and their friends' relatives. Their interest and enthusiasm can be attributed, in part, to this connection. Finally, using oral interviews provided students with accessible data and evidence that allowed me to break the teacher's traditional reliance on textbooks and watered down curricular material.

But, like many pedagogical discussions (as Lampert (1985) has made clear), our use of oral interviews brought with it several dilemmas related to other goals I had for my students. Influenced by thinking related to the socially constructed nature of historical knowledge, I wanted to help my students better understand the role that historians play in making history. I did not want to promote an objective view of history, representing the past as something to be discovered. Yet our central inquiry questions that I chose for all the reasons I discussed earlier -- "Why have people moved to Michigan? What was it like for them?" -- promoted using the interviewees as sources of evidence about what life was like. Therefore, the structure of our inquiry supported the development of a more objective view of the nature of history.

As the teacher, I recognized that the interviewees represented their view of life, a view that had been shaped and reshaped with the passing of time. I was also aware that what the informants told the children was the product of their interaction with the children. Adults have an interest in promoting a particular view of the past as well as a particular view of the present which might have nothing to do with "reality." Sometimes, for example, we tell children stories of the past that make our hopes for their futures seem attainable.

I felt that my ability to discuss these issues with the students was limited. First, they were children -- eight, nine, or ten years old. I am not sure to what extent it is possible to engage them in meta-analysis of the "texts" of their interviews. Second, our interviewees were familiar and beloved. To critique and analyze the testimony of relatives was uncharted territory I was not ready to explore, particularly given the class's reaction to Josh's proposal that someone might be lying. In past years, my students had interviewed people who they did not know. Identifying their motives and biases, they freely challenged these informants' testimony.

As the teacher, therefore, the intimate relationship between the interviewees and my student interviewers had a cost in terms of my goals. Because my students implicitly trusted their relatives and community members, they treated them as authorities. The interviewees' testimony, therefore, replaced the authority of the textbook and the teacher. As a result, they engaged in what Collingwood (1946) refers to as the "scissor and paste" method of history (Collingwood asserts that this was the only method known to the later Greco-Roman world or the Middle Ages). In scissor and paste history, Collingwood explains:

> The method by which [scissor and paste history] proceeds is first to decide what we want to know about, and then to go in search of statements about it or written, purporting to be made by actors in the events concerned, or by eyewitnesses to them, or by persons repeating what actors or eyewitnesses have told them, or have told their informants, or those who informed their informants, and so on. Having found in such a statement something relevant to his purpose, the historian excerpts it and incorporates it, translated if necessary and recast into what he considers a suitable style. (p. 257)

My students dealt with conflicting accounts like "scissor and paste" historians. Collingwood explains the procedure such an "historian" uses when confronted with "authorities" which contradict one another:

> Sometimes he will find that one of them contradicts another; then unless he can find a way of reconciling them, he must decide to leave one out; and this, if he is conscientious, will involve him in a critical consideration of the contradictory authorities' relative degree of trustworthiness. (p. 257)

My students found a way of reconciling accounts: They attributed conflicting testimony to faulty memories or sampling issues related to where or when the interviewee lived.

Having identified sampling issues as the primary basis for varying accounts, they used this as a framework for assimilating new information into their overall representation of life in Michigan. They decided that all of the testimony they heard must be true, unless someone simply forgot what had happened when he or she was a child. Carl's comments about the interpretive nature of people's testimony and Larry's suggestion that our memories are shaped by our understandings when we experience a particular event stand as exceptions to this norm. Because the children trusted all of the interviewees, they came to believe that multiple (albeit equally true) stories could be told about Michigan's past, rather than a single authoritative account.

Still, the task of writing a script for our video required the students to write a single narrative (although the interviewees' multiple stories were embedded within the script as evidence). All but one student wrote their public narratives from the third person point of view, conveying a sense of omniscience and certainty. In so doing, the students created the same "referential illusion" of

objectivity as historians (and textbook authors) who suppress any references to themselves (Barthes, in Vann, 1995, p. 57). Without explicitly pointing this out to students, I encouraged them to qualify their claims by using language such as "Many people we interviewed said. . ." In my mind, I had them do this so that they would implicitly distinguish between what might have actually happened and what their informants said happened. Most students did this, particularly in their second set of interview-based narratives. Overall, though, they adopted an omniscient stance. Only Josh inserted himself into his narrative, stating, "We think Lansing was the main city because most people came here." He also expressed tentativeness, observing that "it seems like the 1950s and 60s was a bad time for most blacks."

It could be that the students might have simply adopted the textbooks' form of presenting historical information when constructing their own narratives, without thinking much about the message this conveyed about the nature of their knowledge. However, I believe they wrote about the past in an "objective" manner because they believed that their narratives represented reality as it actually happened. I base my hunch on the different ways students spoke depending upon whether or not they had evidence to support their claims. Specifically, when students had direct testimony for a particular statement, they spoke with certainty. In contrast, the children spoke more tentatively, using words such as "might" or "may have" when they lacked direct evidence. Initially, the students included several speculative statements in our class narrative (e.g., the ex-slaves <u>might</u> have left the South to get away from the memories of

slavery). However, eventually, they insisted that we take out claims for which they believed we lacked evidence. Thus, my students had become little empiricists, committed to making claims for which they felt they had concrete proof. The interviewees, their "authorities," provided them with that proof. In contrast to the fanciful stories many children tell about the past (VanSledright & Brophy, 1992), my students' storytelling became increasingly disciplined, bound by our collectively established rules of evidence.

At the same time, through the process of actually "seeing" that different people provided varying testimonies, the children developed a tentative stance toward historical knowledge. They remained open to revising their general claims because of their understanding that new evidence might cause them to reevaluate prior conclusions. Viewing their knowledge as incomplete, they believed that additional evidence might tip the scale in favor of a different conclusion as they weighed all their available evidence. All of their informants' accounts could be true, but what the evidence collectively meant could vary depending upon the amount of evidence they had to support a particular assertion. The relationship between the children and their data, therefore, was bi-directional. The children's views of knowledge and sources of authority shaped how they made sense of oral interviews. At the same time, the way we used oral interviews also shaped the children's ideas about the nature of historical knowledge.

Historical explanations

The other place where students' epistemological assumptions surfaced was in their explanations. The nature of historical explanations has, as I briefly mentioned in Chapter One, been the focus of ongoing epistemological debates. Although explanation is at the heart of historical narratives, historians and philosophers of history disagree about the kinds of explanations historians should offer. I will not discuss the range of those controversies and the epistemological assumptions that underlie them. Instead, I focus on debates regarding the sorts of explanations my students offered -- explanations that looked to the "inside of events."

Debates about our ability to "know" the minds of others pervade the field of history, anthropology, and psychology (Bruner, 1996; Geertz, 1983; Jenkins, 1991). Philosophers of history disagree about whether or not it is possible to reenact the thoughts of historical actors. Yet, idealist historians regularly include such explanations in their narratives. [1] With the exception of a few personal revelations (Hexter, 1971) we do not know, however, how they go about doing so -- the strategies and heuristic devices they draw upon. Philosophers of history promote normative views of how historians should go about developing such explanations. Hume, for example, believed that we could understand the actions of people far removed in time and space by applying laws of human nature:

[1] Philosophers of history often distinguish positivist historians from idealist historians. In contrast to positivist historians who argue that explanations must have the same logical structure in all areas of human knowledge, idealists historians maintain that explanation in the human sciences are qualitatively different from the natural sciences. Idealist historians attempt to explain actions from "the inside" through a process of intellectual empathy (verstehen). (See Collingwood (1946) for an argument in favor of such explanations and how to achieve them.)

> It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions; the same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit – these passions, mixed in various degrees and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises which have been observed among mankind. (Hume, in Martin, 1977, p. 25)

According to Hume, the way to know the past is by generating laws of human behavior through observation of contemporary society and then applying those laws to the past:

> Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, and course of life of the Greeks and Romans? Study well the temper and actions of the French and English; you cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former most of the observations which you have made with regard to the latter. Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. (Hume, in Martin, 1977, p. 26)

Some interpret Collingwood's call to reenact past thought as an indicator that he believed that historians can know the past through intuition, by "'penetrat[ing] into the minds of the subjects of their study and tak[ing] as it were, psychological x-ray photographs" (Gardiner, 1952, p. 128). Others argue that Collingwood believed that historians could reenact past thought through the combined use of evidence and empathy, or what some refer to as the historical imagination. Some contemporary scholars are more skeptical. As Jenkins (1991) argues:

> Given that there is no presuppositionless interpretations of the past, and given that interpretations of the past are constructed in the present, the possibility of the historian being able to slough off his present to reach somebody else's past on their terms looks remote. (p. 40)

Regardless of whether we can, in fact, know the thoughts of historical actors, in our daily interactions we believe and behave as though we can. Part and parcel of our "folk psychology" is a "theory of mind," our belief that we have the capacity to know the minds of others, or what Bruner (1996) refers to as "our folk epistemology" (p. 165). We speak readily and knowingly of people's mental states.

My students, however, did not speak as though they "knew" the minds of those who lived in distant times and places. Instead, they conveyed a sense of uncertainty regarding their explanations, an uncertainty that was absent from their public, collectively composed narratives. Offering tentative explanations, they "marked their stance" by using words such as "probably," "might," and "maybe": "Maybe whites thought that blacks wouldn't have enough money" so they did not serve them; "Maybe the school employees think the white parents will move their kids to a different school if they had black teachers;" "Maybe the sign started making people think they are equal to whites." Neighborhoods were segregated "probably because a lot of the white people wanted to stay in control." The students did not treat their explanations as facts.

The children's speculative way of speaking about such explanations might, in part, be a product of our norms of discourse. As I have mentioned, the children only spoke with certainty when they had evidence to support their claims. When they believed they lacked evidence to make bold claims about the reasons behind people's actions, they spoke more tentatively.

We know little about "intersubjectivity," -- how people come to know (or believe they know) what others have in mind. Bruner (1996), in fact, refers to the quest to understand this process "psychology's next chapter" (p. 160). In one sense, how my students came to know the past resonates with Hume's description of how historians should go about developing explanations. In some instances, they used theories they had developed through the course of everyday living. But, more often than not, the students did not simply apply their theories to particular circumstances. Bruner speculates that people look to situational contexts for clues regarding what might constitute an appropriate explanation. My students seem to engage in a similar process, drawing upon their knowledge of the historical context to construct theories that made sense to them, given their general beliefs about human behavior. Their explanations, speculative as they were, provided them with a way of making sense of the past -- at least for the moment.

Ideology

Jenkins nominates ideology as the third component of history. The concept of ideology is itself contested terrain. Some writers, often in the field of political science, use the term to refer to "a tightly knit body of beliefs organized around a few central values. Examples are communism, fascism, and some varieties of nationalism" (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1988, p. 118). For others, typically from the Marxist tradition, the term ideology implies distorted beliefs -- the product of false consciousness. For still others the term encompasses any set of beliefs (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1988). For the purpose of this

analysis, I adopt this use of the concept, focusing on three beliefs that framed the stories my students told: equality, progress, and human agency.

Equality

> The people who wrote "All men are created equal" were not including blacks. They just meant white men. Blacks were slaves when they wrote the Declaration of Independence. (Jessica, C.D., 12/15/97)

Competing ideas of equality (and inequality) have, from the founding of this nation, shaped political discourse. The doctrine of equality inspired the Declaration of Independence and other democratic documents. While such a belief is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it has not necessarily translated into a belief in social, political, or economic equality. However, a corollary central principle of Western liberal society has been the belief in equal opportunity. This remains the dominant ideology in the United States, while equality of outcome is associated with socialist ideology (Bell, 1979; Nielsen, 1985).

Notions of equality have also influenced the writing of history and social science. Prejudiced attitudes, for example, did not become a legitimate and compelling object of inquiry until such attitudes began to represent a breach in the canonical, a violation of the belief that "all men are created equal." Prior to the 1920s, prejudice was widely viewed as natural, a normal response to the innate inferiority of particular racial and ethnic groups (Duckitt, 1992; Milner, 1983). Prejudiced attitudes, therefore, needed no explaining. Dominant scientific paradigms of the day both mirrored and promoted the prevailing view of racial inferiority. Research aimed to identify and understand the deficiencies of

"backward peoples." When historians in the nineteenth century wrote about Columbus's interaction with the indigenous Americans, for example, they did not question his portrayal of them as simple-minded and ignorant. They accepted it as fact, not as the result of ethnocentric bias.

As lay people and scientists began to question the doctrine of innate inferiority, prejudiced attitudes came under scrutiny, as Milner (1983) notes, "The notion of potential equality carried with it the implication that white attitudes towards blacks were unjust and needed explaining" (p. 24). Thus, as views of equality changed, so did social science. Social scientists began to search for the root causes of prejudice with the hope of both understanding and eliminating it. Historians reinterpreted past histories in light of new beliefs.

Moved by the same curiosities and interests that have motivated both historians and social scientists, the issues of prejudice and discrimination captured my students' imaginations and prompted them to search for explanations. In light of their own deeply-held belief in the equal worth of all people, they wanted to make sense of the history of hatred, exploitation, and disregard for democratic principles. They wanted to understand why people behaved in ways they viewed as inconsistent with the valuing of equality. Children of a different age, who grew up in a different time and place with different absolute presuppositions about equality, would probably not have been asking such questions.

Like historians and social scientists, my students' questions arose when their canonical beliefs about equality were breached. They treated the idea that

all men (and women, as Josh was quick to point out) are created equal as a non-negotiable fact, a "self-evident" truth which raised no question or controversy. They emphasized the idea that "we are all the same." The children recognized that they had differences, speaking about them freely, comparing shades of skin, eye color, height, and weight. They were not "color blind." The "sameness" of which they spoke reflected their belief in the equal worth of human beings, something which went beyond what was on the outside to, as Brian wrote, "what was on the inside."

My students' belief in equality of persons, translated into the ancillary belief in equality of opportunity: Everybody should be able to do the same things, go to the same places, get the same education, and get the jobs they wanted -- if they were qualified (the "if they were qualified" became a constant refrain children would add when someone did not qualify their statement that people should be able to get <u>any</u> job they wanted). The children already had a keen sense of how they thought our meritocratic system worked. Larry, for example, articulated his idea of equality of opportunity, describing how nowadays there was no longer discrimination in employment because his dad had to take a test to get his job at the telephone company and "he had the best score on the test so he got the job." Michael expected Mrs. Johnson to be able to obtain a job as a teacher since she had a teaching certificate. Not only was it irrational not to hire people who were qualified, it was also unfair. It did not fit with the students' notion of equality of opportunity, the meritocratic ideal.

In contrast to their strong reaction to inequalities in opportunities, only one student across the entire year drew attention to discrepancies in economic outcomes (and this was not in the context of our social studies class). Having attributed prejudice to the haughtiness of the wealthy, Carmen reasoned that eliminating poverty would alleviate this sense of superiority. She wrote:

> I am dreaming of helping the world by giving the poor people a home and money and so people don't think bad of them just because they have more money than them. (Carmen, essay, 6/8/98)

A budding socialist perhaps, Carmen tied her call for a redistribution of wealth to the outcome of people viewing others as equals. Other than Carmen's comments, however, no other student raised issues related to economic equality. This could be due, in part, to the fact that the children did not hear stories that would have elicited a reaction to economic inequalities.

My students' belief in equality as a non-negotiable social good influenced how they defined "mistakes," "problems," or "injustices" in the past. This belief also contributed to the way they viewed the relationship between the past and the present as they equated progress with erasing inequality.

Progress

> It seems like the 1950s and 1960s was a bad time for most blacks. Good thing it gets better. (Josh, J., 5/8/98)

A belief in progress has long shaped the writing of history (Nisbet, 1980). As Seixas (1995) explains:

> One of the most fundamental ways we organize the past in relation to the present is in terms of the concepts of progress and decline. Though it is often unarticulated by historians, textbook writers, or lay people, a sense of progress or decline underlies most accounts of the past. (p. 772)

"Descriptions of progress," as Collingwood (1946) asserts, "tell us much about the historians who study the facts, but nothing of the facts they study. An improvement from one point of view may be the reverse from another" (p. 327). Notions of progress reflect normative evaluations of the relationship between past and present. As such, the idea of progress has meant different things at different times and for different people (Almond, G., Chodorow, M., & Pearce, R.; Appleby et al., 1994; Nisbet, 1980). Enlightenment thinkers, for example, valued science and reason. Based on these values, they viewed the past as less developed, primitive.

American social studies textbooks have traditionally promoted a story of progress -- defining progress in terms of the extension of constitutional rights and growing equality (Gitlin, 1995). This is the story our interviewees told as well. Explicitly framing their stories in terms of progress, parents and grandparents noted the way things had improved over time. For example, Mr. Williams, Doris's grandfather, explained the way job opportunities opened up for him in the automobile industry and how workers began to accept him as their supervisor:

> I felt that when I got to Michigan and I wanted to work in the factory, there were limited opportunities in some areas where we worked. They didn't have any black supervisors when I started working at [a local automobile factory] and that was a challenge for me. I decided I would take on some extra classes and started to inquire about what I could do to become a supervisor. I wanted to be a supervisor. So, I worked toward that end and in 1968 I was one of the first among three to become a supervisor at [a local automobile factory]. . . . Some people didn't want to work for me. They anticipated I would be a mean supervisor because I was black, but after they worked with me for a while and I worked with them there were no problems at all. (S.I., 3/26/98)

Mr. Wright's story of becoming one of the first successful African American lawyers in the city also represented a story of progress. Like Mr. Williams, Mr. Wright expressed similar changes in the kinds of opportunities available to blacks:

> When I first came here, things were not as nice as they are today. The Afro Americans, the only jobs they could get downtown in the department stores were to run elevators. I remember a high school basketball team came to play basketball from Detroit and it was an all black team and they went to a hotel to get a room and they wouldn't give them a room because they were Afro American. We had no black schoolteachers when I first came here. We fought to get a black schoolteacher in Lansing and finally we did. (S.I., 3/25/98)

Mr. Jones, Carl's grandfather, offered explanations to account for advancements in racial equality and waxed philosophical about how to maintain those past achievements:

> In the South you had to sit in the back of the bus, until what lady came along and refused to get up? [Children respond – "ROSA PARKS"]. That's right, but that's the way it was. And why did the restaurants open up in the South? Because the Freedom Riders went down and refused to get up out of their seats in the restaurants. We're very proud of the way things have gone forward, but it's up to you to make sure it continues, that you still look at each other as people and not as having a certain color. We need to just look at one another as persons. . . . The opportunities were limited, very very limited in the past. This is a new day, a brand new day! (S.I., 2/25/98)

These interviewees conveyed a clear message: Life today for African Americans is much different and better than in the past.

The interviewees' emphasis on progress resonates with Rosenweig and Thelen's (1998) survey of how Americans make sense of the past:

> To a startling degree, black Americans constructed a story of progress when they looked at the past -- a rather traditional story that was hard to find among white Americans. When they named public events that had affected them, about one third of the African American respondents talked

> about change for the better or worse, and of that third, almost three quarters described change for the better. (By contrast, more than four fifths of white respondents described change for the worse.) (p. 160)

Like our informants and those in Rosenweig & Thelen's study, my children "saw" progress in the relationship between the past and the present, using equality as the measure. The children brought images of a "less equal" past with them to class. They knew of slavery, Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad, the KKK, lynching, segregation, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and the civil rights movement. The 1950s and 60s were a "bad time for most blacks," as Josh pointed out, because of the existence of social and political inequalities. The present was better than the past because "all those problems had been solved." The majority of the students had not "seen, heard, or read about" more recent incidents of racial discrimination or segregation.

Only two children (one white and one black) articulated the belief that racial problems still existed. Carl said that his mother had told him about the unequal treatment of African American children at her preschool. In contrast to his classmates, he stressed the continuity between the past and present as well as the changes. Larry claimed that he had seen children discriminate against some new kids because of their race at his other school. When these two children raised the possibility that there were more problems in the present than their classmates assumed, the other students worked hard to maintain their worldview, appropriating our norm of justifying claims with evidence to this end. They asked Carl how his mother could have known that some parents were telling their children not to be friends with particular children because of their

color. They wanted to know what evidence he had that it was because of their color and not something else. Similarly, Larry's classmates challenged his assertions as well, arguing that the children could have been being mean to the new child because he was new, not because of his color. "What evidence do you have?" they asked. Larry maintained that he had "lots of evidence," but none that was specific enough to convince his classmates.

The children's belief that time had brought progress framed how they made sense of the past. Every time we began a study of a new time period, they expected that society would have become more equal. After slavery ended, African Americans (at least in the North) would have equal rights. African Americans who came to Michigan in the 50s and 60s would have had fewer problems than those who came earlier. They predicted that "there wasn't as much discrimination" and that "it probably got easier [for blacks] to get a job." When they found out that problems still existed in the 1950s and 60s, Lisa attributed this to the fact that "it hadn't been that long [since the 20s and 30s]." Time brings progress.

The students' belief in progress also influenced the way some children resolved the interviewees' varying accounts. Some people, they explained, might have experienced segregation because they came to Michigan earlier in the century. Similarly, they used the notion of progress to account for the textbook author's claim that racial discrimination in the North was comparable to the South. The author, they reasoned, might have interviewed people who came to Michigan before our interviewees.

In sum, while the "evidence" children gathered about the 50s and 60s threatened the idea of steady progress from one decade to the next, all of the children (except perhaps Carl and Larry) believed that there was an expansion of social and political equality between the 1960s and the present. This belief prompted the children to search for explanations of change. Filling in the gap between the past and the present, they offered a range of theories that presumed progress: "People got tired of segregation;" "how people thought about other people changed;" the African American populations grew large enough for them "to get a movement going;" people got together and began "to see each other in a different way."

Agency and historical explanations

Some historians have viewed progress as inevitable, an inherent feature of societal evolution. These writers have searched to explain the normative changes they identify with laws of human development. These laws point to a progressive unfolding of more rights, more equality, more and better technological advancements (Nisbet, 1970). Other historians, who view change as a central feature of historical study, look for explanations in the actions of human agents (Collingwood, 1946).

The kinds of explanations historians have developed across time reflect their belief in free will or human agency, their belief in deterministic causes or a combination of the two. As Appleby et al. (1994) note, "From ancient times, observers of the human scene have been divided in their weighing of free will and determinism" (p. 306). Those who have a deterministic view of human

history emphasize the laws of historical development or the structures which confine and direct what is thought and done.

Those who believe in free will or human agency reject deterministic historical explanations. Rather, explanations must account for the "inside of the event," the thought in the minds of historical actors. These writers equate the "cause" of an event with "the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about" (Collingwood, 1946, pp. 214-215). They view historical phenomena as being the result of "the actions of free men who order their actions in accordance with reason" (i.e., thought) (Nash, 1969, p. 7).

For such writers the belief in free will is a fundamental principle underlying historical thinking. As Lukas (1985) asserts:

> That men are free and responsible moral agents is the fundamental principle of historical thinking; no free will, no history – no history in our sense of history. There exists on this point a salutary harmony between the Western historical and Western Christian concept of human nature: for even historians who may not accept religious doctrine of free will proceed still from the recognition of its functions, whence the circumstance that the good historians is often an anima naturaliter christiana, and surely an anima naturaliter occidentalis. (pp. 252-253)

The types of historical explanations my students offered reflect the language of free will and human agency. Rooted in Western folk psychology, they spoke a language of intention. This language, as Berlin (1969) points out, pervades how historians write, even those historians who profess their belief in determinism. The very act of congratulating some one for their courage, bravery, or sacrifice, he explains, betrays deterministic thought. He asserts that the belief in determinism:

> is not compatible with beliefs deeply embedded in the normal speech and thought either of ordinary men or historians, at any rate in the Western world... (p. xxviii)

In contrast to their clearly articulated belief in equality, the children's belief in human agency was embedded in the language they used to explain human action, language they inherited from their culture. It was not an explicit or examined belief. It was a belief with which they thought and spoke.

Like Collingwood, the students looked to the inside of events, describing the thoughts which they believed motivated people's actions and attitudes. They spoke as though thoughts "caused" action. The children brought this way of making sense of the past to their study of history. It was not something I explicitly made part of the curriculum. From the outset, they "saw" intentions in people's actions. Early French explorers married Indian women because "they probably thought they could get their land that way." Slave masters chose blacks to be slaves because they thought they were inferior, they thought it "would be right to take them to work for us." Abolitionists took risks in freeing slaves because they thought the blacks were "as good as they were." They did not want them to have to "lose their lives." Whites became stricter with blacks, engaging in discriminatory behaviors because they thought they could stay in control. Protestor specifically chose to use the "I AM A MAN" sign because they thought it would have an impact on people's attitudes. Restaurant and hotel owners refused to serve blacks because they thought they did not have enough money to pay for the services. School employers refused to hire African Americans because they thought they would lose clients. Whether the historical actors

actions were admirable or deplorable, they imagined they were rational (i.e. the result of thought). People were willful, thoughts determined or "caused" their actions.

Although my students spoke as though thoughts determined actions, some of their explanations explained actions in terms of what Collingwood would consider to be the irrational. Collingwood distinguishes between the irrational and rational:

> In realizing its own rationality, mind also realizes the presence in itself of elements that are not rational. They are not body; they are mind, but not rational mind or thought. To use an old distinction, they are psyche or soul as distinct from spirit. These irrational elements are the subject matter of psychology. They are the blind forces and activities in use which are a part of human life as it consciously experiences itself, but are not part of the historical process: sensation as distinct from thought, feelings as distinct from conceptions, appetite as distinct from will. Their importance to us consists in the fact that they form the proximate environment in which our reason lives, as our physiological organism is the proximate environment in which they live. They are the basis of our rational life, though not part of it. (Collingwood, 1969, p. 56)

Collingwood argues that the irrational should not be a part of historical study. Rather, it should be studied by psychologists. Sometimes, my students explained behavior in terms of feelings or appetite rather than will, as Larry did when he maintained that people treated immigrants badly because they were jealous.

When the children spoke of change, however, they highlighted human agency. The children saw people as actors who shaped their futures rather being shaped by it. Josh imagined ex-slaves and white abolitionist as being faced with moral choices. The ex-slaves who escaped on the Underground Railroad could have fled to Canada, but Josh inferred that they chose to stay and

fight. The interviewees also emphasized human agency in the stories they told. Mr. Williams "worked toward [the] end" of becoming a supervisor and he eventually, after taking some extra classes, became one. Mr. Wright "fought to get a black school teacher in Lansing and we finally did." Mr. Jones attributed the end of segregation in the South to the Freedom Riders who "went down and refused to get up out of their seats in the restaurants." Explicitly connecting progress to human agency, Mr. Jones reminded the children that although "things have gone forward," it was up to them "to make sure it continues." Progress will continue, but only through the efforts of people like themselves.

Conclusion

My students sense-making can best be understood as being situated in multiple contexts. Each of the four data-based chapters foregrounds one context while backgrounding others. While doing so necessarily simplifies the complexity of my students' sense-making, it allows the reader to see more clearly how their understandings were situated in multiple contexts. Chapter Two begins with the most local unit of analysis, exploring the role of the students' positions -- their personal and family backgrounds -- on how they interpreted the past. Moving outward, I turned to the classroom context in Chapter Three, highlighting the way our Discourse shaped the stories children told. Next, I situated the students' individual explanations about prejudice and change in the cultural context, arguing that the parallels between the children's theories and those of social scientists demonstrate the common values, beliefs, and assumptions that underlie their explanations.

Finally, in this chapter, I consider features of the students' sense-making through the lens of history. Depending upon one's methodology, epistemology, and ideology, one will make sense of the past differently, for our theories of the world are embodied in the histories we construct. My emphasis on social history and use of oral interviews, the children's views of equality, their use of the language of human agency, and their tendency to frame their narratives in terms of progress have a history in Western culture and reflect the times in which we live. All of these factors shaped the stories the children constructed across all three prior chapters.

Taken together, the data-based chapters provide a fuller picture of what my students came to know and how they came to know it. The chapters are not to be viewed sequentially and linearly, although Chapter Three is organized chronologically. The children's interpretive frameworks that I described in Chapter Two shaped and were shaped by our classroom Discourse over the course of the year. In Chapter Four, Jessica, Michael, and Josh's explanations about prejudice and change can best be understood in light of the interpretive frameworks I described in Chapter Two. Similarly, the explanations students developed in Chapter Four took place concurrently with their construction of narratives in Chapter Three. Understanding the children's sense-making, therefore, requires imagining the four chapters being nested within each other.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of this research on my own thinking as a researcher and a teacher.

Chapter Six

The Child and the Curriculum Revisited: Interpreting and Guiding Children's Experiences

> Objects are concealed from our view not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray as because there is no intention of the mind and eye toward them. We do not realize how far and widely, or how near and narrowly, we are to look. The greater part of the phenomena of nature are for this reason concealed to us all of our lives. Here, too, as in political economy, the supply answers to the demand. Nature does not cast pearls before swine. There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate, -- not a grain more. The actual objects which one person will see as from a particular hilltop are just as different from those which another will see as the persons are different. The scarlet oak must, in a sense, be in your eye when you go forth. We can not see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, and then we can hardly see anything else. (Thoreau, 1858/1982, pp. 214-216)

A year outside of the classroom thinking deeply about children's thinking is a luxury few teachers ever experience. Feeling guilty about this indulgence, I often wondered what the benefits for me as a teacher would be. I was, after all, spending my time analyzing the sense-making of children who I was no longer teaching. However, for me this study has come to represent more than simply interesting stories about particular children in a particular context. It is also a story of how I came to see -- as both a researcher and a teacher. It is about my developing understanding about the relationship among research, subject matter knowledge, and practice. In the remainder of this chapter I explain these relationships by telling the story behind my data analysis.

Motivated to conduct this study by my concerns as a teacher, I sought to better understand the way various factors shaped my students' understandings.

For the most part, I think I accomplished this goal. By providing a detailed portrait of how my students came to know the past, my work provides an empirical example of what Wineburg (1996) refers to as applied epistemology. Researchers who engage in applied epistemology:

> conduct empirical studies into how students, teachers, and historians come to understand history. [They] ask questions about what people know and how they come to know it. In doing so, this approach wrests questions of epistemology from the clouds and turns them into objects of psychological and historical inquiry. (cf., Strike & Posner, 1976) (p. 166)

The data-based chapters demonstrate the sense children made and the factors that contributed to their construction of meaning. Moving back and forth between my focus students and the class as a collective, I have attempted to understand "in practice" the dynamic interaction between what children brought with them (i.e., knowledge, values, beliefs, and ways of knowing), our classroom Discourse, and the narratives they created.

In looking back on the previous four chapters, I have imposed a sense of order on the messy process by which my students constructed meaning. However, when I initially turned my attention to analyzing my students' sense-making I brought limited lenses for seeing. Influenced by constructivist theories of learning, I believed that children drew upon knowledge, values, and beliefs in actively making sense of new information. Generic learning theories, however, did not help illuminate, for example, the specific values, knowledge, beliefs, and cultural tools people draw upon in making sense of the past or how historical sense-making is situated in multiple contexts. These theories were not enough,

for as Dewey (1902/1964) noted over 75 years ago in the Child and the Curriculum,

> As long as we confine our gaze to what the child here and now puts forth, we are confused and misled. We cannot read its meaning. . . . What we need is something which will enable us to interpret, to appraise, the elements in the child's present puttings forth and fallings away, his exhibitions of power and weakness, in the light of some larger growth-process in which they have their place. Only in this way can we discriminate. (p. 346)

At the outset, I lacked tools for discriminating. I was only able to construct my interpretation of the students' sense-making through a process of becoming steeped in multiple disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. The analyses I offer emerged out of the dialectic between my examination of the records of a year of teaching and reading from various fields including the works of historians, philosophers of history, socio-linguists, social scientists, and cultural psychologists. Moving back and forth between the children and our classroom discourse and these writings, I developed my capacity to look with intention, to see what previously had been invisible to me, to interpret my students' "putting forths."

Learning to Interpret Children's Experiences

Dewey himself pointed in the direction of the disciplines when he set forth a method for interpreting children's experiences. He explained:

> The subject-matter of science and history and art serves to reveal the real child to us. We do not know the meaning of either of his tendencies or of his performances excepting as we take them as germinating seed, or opening bud, of some fruit to be borne. (p. 347)

More recently, Shulman (1986) has also called attention to the role of subject-matter knowledge in teaching. Neither Dewey nor Shulman, however, offer

particular cases of how a specific subject matter might help us make sense of children's experience -- either as teachers or researchers.

How one might use one's knowledge of history to interpret what children bring with them depends, in part, on one's view of the discipline, including one's views of the nature of historical knowledge and knowing. Historical subject matter, therefore, can be used as lenses for interpreting children's experiences in many ways. For example, based on my knowledge of leading interpretations of a particular historical time period, I could have simply tried to understand how the "facts and truths" the children brought with them were similar to current authoritative interpretations. In such a case, the interpretation would represent "the systematized and defined experience of the adult mind," (Dewey, 1964, p. 351) the product of an historian having organized and contextualized facts about the past into a meaningful narrative. Brophy and VanSledright (1997) use authoritative historical knowledge to assess students' accurate and inaccurate conceptions of the past in a similar manner, as do McKeown and Beck (1990, 1994) in their work. In contrast, Wineburg uses his knowledge of the discipline to better understand how children come to understand history (See for example, Wineburg, 1999, in press).

My analyses represent one example of how the subject matter might reveal the child to us. I did not, however, draw solely upon the discipline of history. Instead, I used several disciplines and interdisciplinary fields to interpret the children's sense-making. The way I did so is nonobvious. Standing at the intersection of multiple streams of overlapping intellectual work, my analyses

were informed by recent calls to attend to both the subject-specific nature of history teaching and learning and to the constructed nature of meaning (both for individuals and within the disciplines), and to consider the situated nature of knowledge and cognition. Each chapter explores these theoretical realms empirically, demonstrating how children's historical sense-making is subject-specific, constructed, and situated in multiple contexts. In order to understand my own learning as both a teacher and researcher, I start at the beginning.

Prior to conducting this research, I was unfamiliar with the ideas of Collingwood (1946), Hexter (1971), Jenkins (1991), Mink (1987), Stanford (1986), White (1978), and others who I have cited throughout this work. A political science major in college, I avoided taking history courses in college like the plague, never feeling like I could remember the names, dates, or events required. Like most of the preservice teachers I taught, I had viewed history as largely irrelevant, a parade of facts that had little -- if anything -- to do with my own life.

For the most part, as a doctoral student and social studies methods instructor, I kept my less-than-adequate subject matter knowledge to myself. For example, when I wrote my pedagogical autobiography in a course entitled "Learning to Teach" with Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Helen Featherstone, I chose to focus my account on my experience teaching elementary school math, not social studies or history. Like the other graduate students, I readily confessed that I had no idea why you had to invert the second fraction in a division problem and then multiply. Such confessions were part of the MSU

culture, a cathartic experience designed as a first step in helping us consider what it might mean to "teach for understanding" (See for example, Feiman-Nemser & Featherstone, 1992).

These admissions make writing this chapter difficult, for it requires revealing all that I did not know. For some researchers this might not be such a problem, but the issue is complicated by the fact that I was both the teacher and the researcher. At the outset, I made the claim that my classroom would provide students with reform-oriented history instruction. Most current reforms are based on the idea that teachers need "deep" subject matter knowledge (Shulman, 1986; Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987). Having been socialized in a culture which took this idea seriously (Wineburg, 1998), my own lack of knowledge seemed a serious shortcoming.

Admittedly, I returned to teaching with more knowledge of history than most elementary teachers as I spent time learning about the subject matter in doctoral courses, as a social studies methods instructor, and as I was teaching elementary students. (I conducted this study in my third year teaching as a professional development school release time instructor.) However, the unfolding story of my data analysis demonstrates the deficiencies in my own knowledge. The last year, therefore, has been as much about learning about the discipline of history as it has been about understanding my students' sense-making. The two cannot be separated.

For most of the year while I was teaching, I worried that I did not have anything interesting to say. I had, as my advisor called it, "an amorphous pile of

evidence from a full year's work with students," but few strategies for making sense of that data. Like a parent who repeats the funny, profound, and often insightful things children say, I shared my children's stories with colleagues. Certain that their comments were memorable, but uncertain about what made them noteworthy, I read my husband excerpts from interview transcripts. A lawyer and social studies major himself, he noticed things which I had not.

As I read him Josh's comments about the role he thought busing might have played in changing people's attitudes toward each other, my husband immediately made a connection between Josh's comments and those of social scientists in the 50s and 60s who supported busing for this reason. He sent me to read Gordon Allport. Struck by the way Josh's words resonated with proponents of the contact hypothesis, I returned to my data to look for other examples of when the children had theorized about prejudice. I knew there were more instances. At the same time, I immersed myself in the literature on theories of prejudice. The more I read, the more I saw. And I continued to identify parallels between the children's explanations and those of social scientists.

My initial analysis consisted of juxtaposing the children's theories and social scientists. Next, I turned my attention to reading about explanations in history. Unaware of debates over the nature of historical explanations, when I stumbled upon Collingwood's description of the "inside of the event" I was surprised that a book written in 1946 would so perfectly describe what my students seemed to be doing (i.e., looking to people's intentional states to explain

human behavior). Again, my analysis focused on simply describing how the children's explanations were similar to the kind Collingwood described.

Only after reading across theories of prejudice and then subsequent reviews of the broader literature did I begin to delve below the surface of these theories to the values and beliefs underlying them. Similarly, reading philosophy of history and cultural psychology helped me understand the cultural and historical roots of the kinds of explanations historians have offered across time. For example, historians only began to develop "scientific" historical explanations during the Enlightenment. I began to see my students' explanations as a reflection of our Western culture's folk psychology and assumptions embedded in the language they inherited.

It is not surprising that I was well into my analyses before I started examining the beliefs and values underlying my students' explanations. After all, I too am part of the same culture and share many of the same presuppositions as my students. This made it difficult to "see" the values and beliefs my students brought with them. Stanford (1986) argues that an historians has "a better chance than most of recognizing (through comparisons with other ages) at least some of the suppositions of his world" (p. 93). Similarly, comparing the writings of historians and social scientists across time helped me recognize their suppositions (as well as my own) as being both culturally -- and historically -- situated. Drawing upon Bruner's claim that breaches in the canonical prompt people to tell stories, I read my students' narratives looking for the kinds of events which prompted them to develop explanations. These events helped me

identify what constituted canonical beliefs for my students. These readings, therefore, also enabled me to get a subject-specific handle on the rather vague constructivist claim that our beliefs shape the sense we make.

This initial foray into reading the social sciences and philosophy of history convinced me of its value. As such, scholars' insights into how historians construct narratives became increasingly important to me as I continued to analyze my data. Philosophers of history, for example, have argued that historians' positions affect the questions they ask, their selection and interpretation of data, and the plots they created (Ankersmit & Kellner, 1995; Partner, 1995; White, 1978). With this in mind, I examined my data with an eye toward figuring out how my students' backgrounds might have influenced the stories they told, including what they found worth knowing. I analyzed the questions they asked, making inferences about what those questions revealed about their values, interests, and assumptions.

In asking such questions, I was able to get a sense of the way students' interpretive frameworks contributed to how they combined and connected events to tell particular stories. Recall, for example, my description of the relationship among Jessica's knowledge of social movements (gained from both her family and school), her view about the purpose of history (i.e., learning about mistakes and the special things people did to change things), and her interpretation of the abolitionists' actions. Based on her understanding of the way contemporary activists such as her grandfather use their bully pulpits to "make statements," she speculated that abolitionists took the risk of getting arrested because doing so

would enable them to "make a statement;" they could "make it more public." For her, the Underground Railroad represented a story of civil disobedience, a strategic means of effecting change.

Similarly, such questions led me to look closely at how the children's preconceptions influenced their characterization and use of evidence. As a teacher when I had read the children's narratives about the Great Migration I primarily paid attention to the whether or not they used evidence to support particular claims. My purpose for having the students read each other's narratives was, in large part, simply to have them challenge those claims for which their classmates lacked evidence. It was not until I began to examine the relationship between the students' hypotheses and their narratives that I even noticed that the majority of the class told stories about Michigan that were completely devoid of racial problems.

Guiding Students

In the prior four data-based chapters I tried to describe and explain the children's historical sense-making. However, as a teacher I am also concerned with my students' learning. Identifying various factors which contributed to students' sense-making does not provide me with clear guidelines for what to do with their ideas -- how to use them as I plan instructional tasks. For Dewey (1902/1964), knowledge of subject matter should help teachers both interpret and guide students' experiences:

> As a teacher he is not concerned with adding new facts to the science he teaches; in propounding new hypotheses or in verifying them. He is concerned with the subject-matter of the science as representing a given stage and phase of the development of experience. His problem is that of

> inducing a vital and person experiencing. Hence, what concerns him, as teacher, is the way in which that subject may become part of experience; what there is in the child's present that is usable with reference to it; how such elements are to be used; how his own knowledge of the subject-matter may assist in interpreting the child's needs and doings, and determine the medium in which the child should be placed in order that this growth may be properly directed. He is concerned not with the subject-matter as such, but with the subject-matter as a related factor in a total and growing experience. Thus to see it is to psychologize it. (p. 352)

Subject matter provides teachers with a view of desirable outcomes. "To see the outcome," Dewey explains "is to know in what direction the present experience is moving provided it move normally and soundly" (p. 345).

Being able to more skillfully interpret children's sense-making is meaningless outside of the role it plays in helping me "properly direct" children's learning. When I recognized the kinds of explanations my students were developing, I wondered what I might have done differently had I noticed this while I was teaching.[1] But, simply making these observations did not provide me with a map of what to do with children's explanations. I lacked a view of the outcome.

If I had limited my reading to Collingwood (1946), I might have decided that his normative description of the reenactment of past thought should serve as the endpoint to which I might direct students' learning. However, my encounter

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[1] Other researchers have identified the tendency of children to develop historical explanations that look to the "inside of events." At the time, however, I was unaware of this research. Most research on historical empathy and explanations has been conducted by British researchers (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby, 1997; Portal, C., 1987; Shemilt, D., 1984). Only recently have researchers in the United States begun to investigate how children explain human behavior in the past (Barton, 1996; Downey, 1995; Wineburg, 1999).

While I was teaching I did notice that students seemed to be offering explanations that answered their own "why" questions. I did not, however, make this aspect of their sense-making a central part of the curriculum. Since I found their comments interesting, I did, however, explore their thinking further in interviews with them. In these interviews, I asked them questions about what they had written in their journals or comments they had made in class. In addition, since several children had made references to why they thought abolitionists had helped on the Underground Railroad and why people were prejudiced against immigrants, I interviewed the six focus students about their thinking related to these two issues.

with Collingwood sent me off to explore what other writers had to say. I did so initially, not because I wanted to develop a stance regarding the "proper" sort of explanation, but because I recognized that history is a contested field. I wanted to better understand how both Collingwood's and my students' explanations were historically situated. It was Collingwood (1946) himself who pointed me in this direction. In his book, The Idea of History, he situates the way Western historians since the Greco-Roman period have written about the past in the historical context, historicizing their epistemological assumptions and absolute presuppositions. Based on the insights I gained from reading Collingwood, I decided to read the work of contemporary authors to see how postmodern discourses have influenced philosophers of history. It was not until several months after reading Collingwood that I actually read Jenkin's (1991) critique of historical empathy and its connection to historical explanations.

Given the epistemological debates regarding historical explanations, the more I learned, the more problematic determining the "proper" outcome seemed. It was only after I had written all of the data-based chapters that I began to more seriously contemplate what the current "epistemological confusion" (Seixas, 1994) might mean for me as a teacher. I turned my attention to finding out what contemporary history reformers and researchers had to say about this issue. Not surprisingly, their views regarding our ability to know the minds of others reflect the wider debates in the discipline.

The Standards' authors (1994), for example, adopt a position similar to Collingwood's, arguing that:

> To read historical stories, biographies, autobiographies, and narratives with comprehension, students must develop the ability to read imaginatively, to take into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals involved -- their motives and intentions, their hopes, doubts, fears, strengths, weaknesses. Comprehending historical narratives requires, also that students develop historical perspectives, the ability to describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there. By studying the literature, diaries, letter, debates, arts, and artifacts of past peoples, students should learn to avoid "present-mindedness" by not judging the past solely in terms of the norms and values of today, but taking into account the historical context in which the events unfolded. (p. 23)

The Standards' authors contend that students should develop their "ability to describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there." Likewise, the authors of the Michigan Framework for Social Studies Education (1995) state that elementary age students will "describe the past through the eyes and experiences of those who were there as revealed through their records" (p. 16). In Barton's (1996) study of fourth and fifth graders' development of perspective taking ability, he too maintains that that "the ability to take the perspective of people and actions and events as they would have appeared at the time -- is a key aspect of historical understanding" (p. 3).

Philosophers of history such as Collingwood have argued that an historian's ability to develop historical explanations rests on his or her skill in imaginatively reconstructing historical actors' intentions, motives, and beliefs. The British researchers, Lee, Dickinson, and Ashby (1997) make the connection between historical explanations and empathy explicit:

> knowing that an agent in the past had certain beliefs and values is insufficient: the knowledge must have a pay off in terms of being able to follow the agent's reasons and see their bearing on action. At this point empathy connects with explanation, either of action or of social practice. (p. 233)

Like Collingwood, these researchers view empathy as a prerequisite for the "rational understanding" of past human behavior. Based on Collingwood's ideas and authors who have interpreted his work, they set forth a method for achieving historical empathy:

> The only reliable way of finding out what someone believed or wanted in the past is by appeal to evidence. This does not rule out intuition, but equally it does not bar methodical ratiocination. The affective element of such understanding is not sharing other people's beliefs and values, but the disposition to entertain those beliefs and values in order to understand how those people made sense of the relevant action or practice. (p. 233)

By relying upon evidence, rather than our everyday understanding of human behavior, these authors claim that we can know what someone in the past wanted or believed.

In contrast to these writers, Wineburg (1999) argues that the "goal of historical study should be to teach us that we cannot see [through the eyes of people who were there], to acquaint us with the congenital blurriness of our vision" (p. 493). For Wineburg:

> Historical thinking requires us to reconcile two contradictory positions: first, that our established modes of thinking are an inheritance that cannot be sloughed off; second, that if we make no attempt to slough them off, we are doomed to a mind-numbing presentism that reads the present on the past. (p. 493)

Like the Standards' authors, Wineburg warns against presentism. However, unlike these other writers, Wineburg draws upon contemporary historians such as Ginzburg (1991), Darnton (1985), and White (1998) in challenging our ability to "slough off" our "established modes of thinking." Presentism is inevitable or as Jenkin's (1991) argues, "there is no presuppositionless interpretation of the past"

(p. 40). For Wineburg, historical thinking is an "unnatural act" which runs counter to our "psychological condition at rest." As such, we must consciously confront our tendency to use present day assumptions as lenses for interpreting the past. At the same time, according to Wineburg, we must recognize this inclination as an inherent constrain on our ability to "describe the past through the eyes and experiences of those who were there" as the Standards' authors and others suggest we should.

In contrast to those who connect historical empathy to historical explanations, Wineburg argues that helping students understand the "congenital blurriness of our vision" might teach them "those virtues of humility in the face of limits to our knowledge and the virtue of awe in the face of the expanse of human history" (p. 498). For Wineburg, therefore, the epistemological difficulties we face in knowing the minds of others, lead to a different purpose for studying history than writers such as Lee, Dickinson, Ashby (1997), who see the development of explanations of human action based on evidence or "rational understanding" as a central goal. Clearly, views of the nature of historical knowledge are inextricably linked to our varied purposes for teaching history.

None of these contemporary history education reformers or researchers go so far as Jenkins (1991) in completely rejecting the goal of trying to understand the perspectives of people in the past. In fact, although Wineburg's view is closest to Jenkins, he clearly distinguishes his position from those who argue that attempting to know the minds of others is futile:

> To replace naive historicism with a rigid sense of disconnection is to play mental musical chairs, to give up one reductionism only to adopt another. (p. 493)

From my own point of view, Wineburg's position makes the most sense -- not because I disagree with Jenkin's epistemological arguments, but because I now understand that looking to the inside of the event is central to the way my students -- without my guidance or instruction -- tried to understand past human behavior. This represents a starting place to begin to consider whether we can, in fact, know the minds of others and what the limitations in doing so might be. It seems making such discussions a part of classroom discourse would engage students in the same sorts of contested issues historians confront as they try to make sense of the past, enabling students to begin to critically examine their own sense-making.

Having considered the positions of various contemporary education reformers and researchers in light of my own reading of historians, I am better able to make informed decisions regarding what I might consider "desirable" outcomes. However, it is still difficult to imagine what I might have done or will do differently outside the context of actual classroom practice. Teaching is, after all, local and contextual, situated in a particular time and place. Moreover, factors other than my view of history will, as they have in the past, inevitably contribute to my instructional choices.

Rather than speculating about what I might have done or will do, I end with a quote by Paul Sartre:

> The moment comes when you just can't take the work any further. . . . At this point, my friend Giacometti explains, you can throw your piece of

> sculpture in the rubbish bin or exhibit it in a gallery. So there it is. You never quite grasp what you set out to achieve. And then suddenly it's a statute or a book. The opposite of what you wanted. If its faults are inscribed methodically in the negative which you present to the public, they at least point to what it might have been. And the spectator becomes the real sculptor, fashioning his model in thin air, or reading the book between the lines. (Sartre, in Novick, 1988, p. 629)

For now, I have learned all I can from the children in my study. Now that I am back in the classroom with fifth graders, I return to teaching a different person -- knowing more about children and more about history. The lenses I developed as a researcher I bring with me into the classroom as a teacher. The next step in my own journey requires dedicating myself to my new students, to continue to listen, to practice hearing in new ways, and to design opportunities for them to make sense of their worlds. As Ball (1997) notes, "particular students -- not the faceless students of general theory, or even the real and remembered students of previous classes -- are the actual terrain of practice. It is these students, now, whom [I] must teach" (p. 776).

It is in this context, the context of practice, that I will best begin to understand how the knowledge I have gained will help me both interpret and guide students' experiences. My current encounter with different students, engaging in a different historical inquiry will undoubtedly raise new questions -- questions which will prompt me to read more and to interpret my students' sense-making differently. As both a teacher and a researcher I will continue to "live in multiple worlds, moving back and forth between the wider disciplinary culture with its conventions, norms, and theories, and the idea-filled worlds of [my] students" (Ball, 1997, p. 775).

Returning to the classroom and reading more, however, are only part of my continuing journey. Having resisted the frequent temptation to throw this work in Sartre's rubbish bin, I now make my interpretation of my students' stories public, presenting it to you as a "book" -- at which point, you become the "real sculptors," reading the study in your own way with your own lenses. This ending, I hope, marks the beginning of new conversations, for there are an indefinite number of ways to read research (Cherryholmes, 1999). The sense people make of the stories I've told -- what it all means to them -- will depend upon their views about the purposes of history teaching and learning, the kinds of outcomes they envision as being beautiful, satisfying, and fulfilling for students. Like my own, those visions will be informed, consciously or not, by the multiple discourses of our time.

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