

EXPLORING GENDER EQUITY IN A MULTIMODAL NOVEL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study documents one teacher's attempts to address a gender gap in language arts. Concerned about the interest and achievement of grade seven boys in a northern Canadian resource town, the researcher developed a gender-equitable novel study based on research recommendations. Using professional inquiry that drew on action research cycles and traditions of critical reflection, she taught the unit to gender separated groups of boys and girls. Although student choice of mulitmodal activities appeared to support learning for both genders, the key finding was related to teacher learning. The researcher developed awareness of classroom power dynamics and resolved to shift from an emphasis on controlling students to facilitating their learning, which corresponds to a systemic shift from *sorting* to *learning* as the primary function of schools. The study contributes an example of the power of professional inquiry to shift paradigmatic assumptions to support substantial and sustainable changes in practice.

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GLOSSARY

I have defined the terms relevant to my thesis with the understanding developed through my teaching practices. Where I am aware of definitions in the literature, they have been cited.

Author's Chair: Once a student has drafted and revised a piece of writing to its publishing phase, the student is given the opportunity to present the writing to the entire group. Each student is given the opportunity to be the author, so her/his voice can be heard.

Emotional Activity: An activity within the Platform Booklet that encourages students to connect with how they *feel* about aspects of the novel. For example, *How do you know when you can trust someone?*

Feminized Education: Educators are women who teach from a female perspective, valuing what females are interested in. Boys will see that women are readers, teachers and thinkers and may not equate these attributes to males.

Gender Equitable

Instruction: A term I have chosen to describe planning, teaching and assessment that maximizes opportunities for engagement and achievement for students of either gender.

Gender Code: The socially constructed code that exists between boys and girls in school. Boys must adhere to the code by demonstrating that they are *not* female when they are participating in narrative writing activities. It is more acceptable for girls to fluctuate between demonstrating masculine and feminine qualities in their choice of writing topics (Peterson, 2002).

Gender "Rules": The expectation that boys are masculine and girls are feminine in school. The "rules" are more stringently followed by the boys in the intermediate classes (Park, 2005; Peterson, 2002).

Homophobic: "Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals" (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* p. 344).

Intermediate Grades: In British Columbia, Grades 4-7.

Language Arts: A subject taught in the K-7 school system. This subject contains reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing (English Language Arts, IRP, 2006).

Learners' Platform: Connecting students, parents and teachers so that students are better able to engage with their own learning. It is an “instructional approach [which] scaffolds student learning by presenting clear outcomes and a variety of ways to achieve them. Lessons are engaging, with an infusion of arts and technology (Brown, p. 1, 2009).

Misogyny: “A hatred of women” (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* p. 461).

Multimodal: Includes both arts and technology. Students are encouraged to use a variety of modes and media while demonstrating their learning. Modes are human meaning - making systems based on the senses and a variety of technological or artistic media facilitates expression in a wider range of modes (Kress, 2004).

Novel Study: Any work given by the teacher to students, before, during and after a novel is read. This can be individual or group work. The work can be written, discussions, acting, art displays, or any variety of work that allows students to show an understanding of various aspects of the novel. The aspects can include character development, setting, plot development, literary language and so on.

Platform Booklet: The multimodal novel study that each student received. It was put into a duo-tang for each student and included all assignments that students were required to complete, as well as assessment criteria and criteria.

Student Engagement: When a student fully participates and demonstrates their learning through discussions, written work and questioning.

Teacher Involvement: When the teacher fully establishes relationships with students, interacting with them frequently to check understanding.

Technical Activity: Any activity within the Platform Booklet that encourages students to think about *how* something works. For example, *Give step by step instructions explaining how a generator works.*

Writer's Circle: When a group of students discuss their writing at different stages of completion. This allows students to discuss with their peers different elements of their writing. This peer feedback is usually given in smaller groups so that everyone gets a chance to share his or her writing and receive feedback.

Writing Snippet: A short piece of writing consisting of 3-5 sentences on any given topic. Must include a topic sentence, and conclusion. All sentences are focussed on the topic. Snippets on a wide range of topics are assigned to reluctant writers to help them generate ideas and develop writing skills.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge my son, Matthew. He is the reason behind this thesis. He is the reason I do most things in my life. I hope I have inspired you, Matthew, as much as you have inspired me!

CHAPTER I

THE GENDER GAP PROBLEM

I am an intermediate teacher who was taught that reading novels was the only real form of reading. Nothing else is “real” reading, so in five years of teaching, I have expected that students write reading responses for novels only. In the past few months my reading of gender gap literature and the design and reflective delivery of a *gender equitable* and *multimodal* novel study have changed my understanding of what constitutes “real” reading and writing. I have learned that literacy is not limited to literature. I am also realizing that my limited view of valued literature may have been contributing to the *gender gap* in engagement and achievement between boys and girls in my classroom. This term commonly refers to the growing difference between boys’ and girls’ achievement and interest in literacy (Arnot, David, & Weiner, 1999; Newkirk, 2002; Taylor, 2005). Throughout a review of literature relating to reading and gender, I am discovering the variety of reading sources that appeal to girls and boys.

There are specific teaching practices that may contribute to gender gaps in language arts classrooms. Many teachers focus on novels based on fiction for novel studies, which the literature suggests may contribute to lack of interest from boys. Another specific instructional practice is assigning reading selections rather than encouraging students to choose their reading materials throughout the year. Limiting choice of activities can also contribute to a gender gap, especially when activities are centered around how a student *feels* about certain aspects of the novel (Sax, 2005).

As an educator, I need to be concerned about gender differences in literacy learning. I am convinced that the gender gap for literacy is growing, through the literature that I have read and through my own experiences in the classroom. I have taught grade seven in a northern Canadian resource town and during the past five years my understanding of literacy has evolved. I did not concern myself with a gender gap in literacy until last year when I attended a conference about a gender gap in education that I realized existed in my own classroom. I wanted to understand more about why many boys that I was teaching were not as interested in reading and writing as most of the girls. These boys would read comics and magazines during silent reading periods and they wanted to share comics, magazines, or books with other boys and discuss what they were reading together. Most girls had a novel and read quietly on their own. The purpose of this thesis, then is to explore reasons behind the gender gap in literacy and to explore ways that a classroom teacher might minimize that gap. Specifically, I designed and taught a gender equitable novel study to separate gender groups of grade six and seven students, and reflected on student responses.

I chose to use a novel instead of other forms of literature for two reasons. First of all, I had limited classroom access for fieldwork, so using a novel that I had taught before saved valuable time. Secondly, I wanted to allow the boys to experience reading a novel as a masculine activity. Taylor wrote (2005), "I am not suggesting that as teachers we shouldn't expose boys to literature that they might not seem interested in. On the contrary, literature is a wonderful way to develop new interests and build new understandings of ourselves and others" (p. 294). I did not want to adhere to gender stereotypes and not use a novel. Through

careful choice of an appealing novel, I wanted to test the claim that “boys do like fiction, if it’s the right kind of fiction” (Sax, 2005, p. 111).

I spent much time debating whether I should design a gender equitable unit of study around a novel or a book of non-fiction. I wanted all students to have success while working on the novel study and I was confident that boys would enjoy *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau (2003). When I taught the novel in a previous year, both boys and girls seemed to enjoy the book.

However, in this round of inquiry I planned to encourage interest in the novel for both boys and girls through a multimodal approach. Instruction with a multimodal emphasis offers “students... choices as to the modes and media through which they will express their learning” (Brown, 2009). Because the gender gap literature indicated that the way that a novel is taught can encourage better understanding (Millard, 1997; Sax, 2005), I determined to allow choice in learning strategies and examine the choices made as well as their impact.

I explored teaching and learning strategies for a more gender-equitable classroom by developing and field testing a novel using the *Learners’ Platform* approach (Brown & Lapadat, 2009). The novel I selected featured two lead characters: a girl and a boy. I developed the unit of study using content and pedagogy based on principles of gender equity derived from a review of the literature. The Learners’ Platform approach to unit planning allowed for a multimodal infusion of technology and the arts into literacy studies and offered established routines for students to choose supplementary or enrichment activities that appealed to them.

To support this professional inquiry, informed by the reflective cycles of action research, I focused my literature review on the way in which language arts is taught to intermediate students and the major impact instruction has on how students engage in reading and writing. I found ample evidence that the teacher's role is critical and the traditional way of teaching language arts needs to change (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Sax, 2005; Taylor, 2005) to correspond to changes in society that have occurred since the time in which teachers grew up.

Having a better understanding of all students' needs is crucial for me to be a better language arts teacher. It is not right for me to continually refer to the way I was taught as a student as being the most valid. I believe that as I become more aware of the needs of boys as well as girls in language arts I will more easily come to terms with my normative perceptions of language arts and the history of my own *feminized* education. I was taught by women throughout my elementary school years and the majority of my high school teachers were women as well. Elementary schools are female centered with a strong female perspective which boys encounter on a daily basis. Both boys and girls may then believe that reading and writing are female activities because it is women who are teaching them these skills (Millard, 1997).

An important concern that I encountered as I planned my study was whether I was concentrating more on the learning needs of boys rather than girls. I designed this literature and novel study unit and field test to try to understand and bridge a gender gap in literacy, which has been identified as a growing trend in education. However, I was confused by the notion that teachers could either be "pro-girl" or "pro-boy" but not both. I care about all my

students. Park (2005) wrote about “a pro-feminist stance as was meant to be inclusive rather than engage in a conflictual stance of male versus female” (p. 50). This inclusivity described the way I hoped to approach my novel study and subsequent reflection. I was fully aware of the issues that concern women in the public sphere, such as earning 72% of men, and more than 90% of part time teachers are women (Hallman, 2000). I was also aware that boys are under-achieving in language arts and have been for many years (Sokal, 2005). I believed that boys were under achieving not because they could not do the work but because they were not interested in what was being taught to them. As an educator, I chose to confront this issue of engagement for boys directly, by reviewing relevant literature, designing a gender-equitable unit, and field testing it reflectively through classroom action research. I believe that I do address the gender gap in the work place for girls in an indirect way but that is not the focus here. As a feminist I attempt to practice concern for all students in my classroom, no matter what their gender, culture, or economic background.

In this study, I was curious about how gender roles and peer group expectations for boys and girls would impact their choice of reading material and topics for writing. The social world of intermediate students, including same gender peer-pressure, is highly influential in these choices (Moffat, 2005; Peterson, 2002). What happens when a girl or boy wants to step away from the gender norms? I wondered if the answer may be different for boys and girls.

Gender construction, masculinity and femininity are ever changing in a social context. All of these terms are not easily defined and are not static. In this study, I explored the central question: “What can teachers do to increase equity of opportunity for students of

both genders in Language arts?” I intended to increase equity by allowing students of both genders the choices and freedom to be authentically themselves through the work they did in language arts. Some related questions that I hoped to find answers for were, “How does literacy research inform the design of a gender equitable multimodal language arts unit?”; “When such a unit is taught, how do girls and boys respond and what choices of activities do they make?”; “What are the implications for future plans for a gender equitable language arts program?”; and “Do gender separated classes show promise for improving achievement and interest in novel studies for both girls and boys?”.

In response to these research questions, findings for this study can be categorized as two levels of teacher learning: (a) single loop learning at the level of strategies and practice, and (b) double loop learning at the level of the assumptions and beliefs that support practice (Smith, 2001). Although I learned to choose more equitable reading material and structure gender groups, assignments, and opportunities for student choice differently, systematic and critical analysis of my data sources revealed an assumption that supported teaching practices more focused on controlling students than on supporting their learning. My image of a “good” teacher was one who was able to control a class; a “good” class was one where students worked alone quietly on their written assignments. In the course of this study, I have come to value student engagement in a new way. Although I recognize that an orderly environment is essential for learning, I now understand that such an environment should be organized to demonstrate the competence of the students more than that of the teacher.

Location: The Importance of the School Context

I am a 37 year old, white female who has been teaching grade seven for the past five years in a small northern community, the town of H. I grew up in H. and attended the private school, HCS, until I completed Grade 8, when I moved to the public high school for Grades 9-12. My son, who is 14, now attends that same high school and is taught by some of the same teachers who taught me.

I have an undergraduate degree in Sociology and one in Education. I have incorporated my love of gender studies into the way I teach. I have been aware of gender roles and the need to deconstruct those roles for the benefit of female students. I have not concerned myself too greatly with the needs of male students. I believed the world was set up for the boys to excel and girls needed to work much harder to get to the same level of achievement as boys. After teaching last year, noticing male student apathy in Language arts classes and attending a conference about the gender gap in education, I realized there may be a gender-related problem that I had not considered.

Through the many gender studies courses that I have taken over the years, I have learned that gender, class and race are intertwined and it can be difficult to talk about one without referring to the others. I believe the growing gender gap in language arts is one of the areas that benefit from an examination through the gender lens alone. The increasing gap is growing in school throughout Canada and the United States. According to the authors I have read, the gap is a “boy” issue, not one of class or race. Tyre (2008) wrote “the male literacy deficit does not solely affect poor boys either - it affects boys from every walk of life” (p.137) and “a consortium of administrators from the wealthiest school districts in the

country [United States] found that the male literacy deficit is alive and well in plush communities...” (p.137-138).

The article Mind the gender gap in the classroom written in The Vancouver Sun also indicates the gender gap is a provincial problem, not one that is due to the class or socioeconomic status of the students. Boys in North Vancouver schools showed a decline in graduation rates much higher than that of girls. When comparing graduation rates between boys and girls there are major differences province wide, not in one particular sector. “Boys had slipped from the honour roll to the suspension list, and not just in Burnaby. Figures from around the province confirmed that female students were much more likely than male students to be successful in school” (Steffenhagen, 2009, A22).

I do believe my results from my study may have been similar no matter where I taught my novel study unit. North American boys have been progressively becoming disengaged in their learning, no matter what jobs or education their parents may have, or where they grow up.

As an intermediate teacher and a feminist, I believed it was my duty to learn more about the learning needs of both girls and boys. My novel study was taught in H. because this is the town I care about. After living in urban centres for over ten years, I became curious about how gender influences social behaviour and learning in small northern towns such as H. My observations are that the gender rules of this community are followed more stringently than in urban centres where I had lived, and these restrictions may limit students’ learning opportunities and life choices. It is the students in H. that I want to see achieve greatness for themselves and then go into the world to encourage greatness in others. I want

students to begin their life journeys more equitably, by looking at their own views of gender roles and questioning their way of thinking, understanding that there may be other less-limiting ways that they had never thought of before.

My roots run deeply in H. My parents grew up here and I have siblings who live here and in close proximity to H. My family members have been involved in businesses and worked in the local lumber mills and my son attends high school here. This town has been influential in many of my life's decisions.

My teaching needs to be better for all my students. I have reflected on this idea for the past several months. I owe my students the best of myself and that is why I chose to pursue a graduate degree. To become a better teacher, I have focused on teaching language arts in a way that provides equity of learning opportunities for all students. My concerns about teaching to increase gender equity in my classroom are not unique. The issues of gender have been written about extensively for the past twenty years (Millard, 2002; Park, 2005; Tyre, 2008).

I chose three themes to explore as background literature for the study. The first section investigates how teachers influence the lives of their students. This section helped me expand my understanding of my role as a teacher so that I was better able to plan the novel study unit and the variety of teaching methods that were included in the unit. The way teachers treat students and their expectations of what boys and girls can do can have an impact on their students learning as well. Teachers need to be aware of their own values about gender while teaching the girls and boys in their classroom. Secondly, I reviewed literature about how established gender rules affect both boys' and girls' choices of literature

and how they react to that literature. In the third strand, I drew on literature advocating gender separate classes, to allow for more open discussions about literature.

To investigate my research questions, I used professional inquiry informed by an action research cycle of planning, taking action, reflecting, and revising (Kervin, no date). My approach to reflecting drew on Brookfield's (1995) understanding of critical reflection as "hunting assumptions", particularly those that "mask the ways in which the variable of power affects and often distorts educational interactions" as well as "those that seem congenial but that actually work against our own best interests" (p. xiii). My research method corresponded with my desire to learn more about my teaching practices and to reflect critically on how my developing practices relate to equity of opportunity in education. Throughout the last two years of teaching I have set a professional goal to improve the learning of all my students in language arts, and professional inquiry informed by action research cycles of experimentation and reflection has allowed me to work toward this personal goal and also generate a case study of teacher learning that may be useful to the broader field of education.

The class that participated in my study consisted of 17 boys and 10 girls. It is important to note that my fieldwork was completed in a brief amount of time near the end of a school year – a single unit of instruction in a single subject over three weeks, for a total of 16 class periods. The classroom teacher discussed with me previously that she was dissatisfied with work habits for this class. I spent only an hour a day with these students, which may have influenced my relationship with them and their attitudes toward what I was teaching them. The information that I garnered from this fieldwork is only a small sample

that will not reflect all grade six and seven classrooms in small northern towns. However, observations from this classroom provide fuel for reflection on gender equitable teaching that I will continue to consider in subsequent classes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The strands of literature I have selected informed the design and reflective delivery of the multimodal novel study unit. Teachers have a significant influence on students' learning. I hoped that my interactions with the girls and boys in the classroom of my fieldwork would result in more effort from each student. The second theme is how gender is constructed in the classroom. The code of gender rules is followed stringently by many boys and girls, especially during adolescence. I used this knowledge to inform the design of the multimodal novel study that I taught during my fieldwork. A brief discussion about what makes a multimodal novel study is included. Lastly, the literature shows there are many reasons to have gender separate classes. During my fieldwork, the boys and girls were separated so that I could compare what I learned in the literature to what I saw in this particular classroom.

Teachers' Influence on Students' Literacy Learning

The classroom teacher has a major influence on how students learn (Biddulph, 1997; Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Sax, 2005). Teachers bring their history and experiences into the classroom, which will have an impact on their teaching styles and interactions with students (Davies, 1997; Park, 2005). Teachers need to analyze how they construct gender roles in their classrooms and gain awareness of their influence on the gendered identities of both boys and girls. A teachers' influence is exercised in a variety of ways, such as through instructional methods, types of assessment, choice of books and activities. Explicit teaching can also change the behaviour and attitudes toward learning for both girls and boys. Critical awareness of teachers' influence may create more gender equity in students' literacy learning.

The way in which teachers structure their language arts teaching will greatly impact students' successes. If language arts is taught the same way throughout the entire school year, many students will become bored and unresponsive. If a teacher incorporates a variety of teaching styles, many students, especially boys, will be more apt to remain interested and engaged in language arts (Taylor, 2005).

Jones and Myhill (2007) have concluded that there is little difference in the actual quality of boys' and girls' writing, although their preferred genres may be different. The issue of concern is how teachers assess students differently. The way girls write is what teachers expect in an educational setting and the writing that boys produce is not typically considered "good" writing. "The perception of boys as less successful in literacy may itself contribute, through teacher expectations, to their under-performance" (Jones & Myhill, 2007, p. 460). During a study conducted by these authors, teachers were given pieces of writing with the gender of the writer reversed. The teachers criticized and made more corrections on work that they thought belonged to a boy. This study showed the impact of how teachers can grade boys' and girls' writing differently because of perceived expectations.

McEwan (2002) discussed teachers' "increased awareness and attentiveness to boys' slightest departures from behavioural and academic norms" (p. 8) and their tendency to identify boys as the students with problems. When boys feel their teachers are "out to get them" or do not support them in the classroom, there may be a negative impact on boys' attitudes towards their literacy learning.

Sax (2005) showed that there are differences in the way in which boys and girls relate to their teachers which may have an impact in the way a teacher assesses students' work.

Girls are generally teacher pleasers and will follow the teacher's example. "Girls want the teacher to think well of them. Boys, on the other hand, may be less motivated to study unless they find the material intrinsically interesting" (p. 81). Teachers need to be aware that girls may handle criticism as more of a personal attack than boys. Current assessment practices require teachers to provide constructive, criteria-based comments that encourage all students to take ownership of their work and to understand what steps they can take to improve it (Stiggins, Arter, & Chappuis, 2007). Different types of comments may be more effective depending on the gender of the student. Sax (2005) discussed the role of the teacher in choosing books for students to read and determined that eighty percent of books for early readers fall into the "girl fiction" category. Another issue in the intermediate grades is the kinds of activities teachers assign in a novel study. Sax provided the example of a teacher who used role-playing as a way for students to understand how the characters felt and behaved in a book. The boys thought the dialogue was "stupid" and there was no way they were "gonna pretend to be a grandmother" (p. 108). Another teacher (in an all boy's school) taught *Lord of the Flies* by having the boys create 3-D maps of the island discussed in the novel. Sax goes into detail about how the teacher taught this lesson and showed how intricate the boys' knowledge needed to be to construct an outstanding map.

If teachers are not aware of boys' interests, they may be contributing to boys' disinterest in literacy. Although Sax (2005) discussed the importance of activities that surround a novel study, if the novel is considered "lame" or "boring" students will not even get through reading the novel so that they can work on the assigned activities. Millard (1997) wrote about a group of boys who "repeatedly expressed impatience with the books

chosen for them by teachers, complaining that nothing of consequence ever happened” (p. 43). When teachers do not include a variety of literature that can appeal to all students, not just females, they are reinforcing the idea that reading and writing is for girls only.

Studies have shown that the sex of the teacher may have an influence on reading achievement in boys and girls (Sokal, 2005). The influence of female teachers may be determined by the types of books they choose to read aloud to students. Boys enjoy listening to action books, no matter if a male or female teacher is reading to them (Tyre, 2008). Remembering to choose a variety of books that can appeal to both girls and boys to increase enjoyment of language arts is an important instructional strategy.

Developing student awareness of gender differences through explicit teaching can change their attitudes and work habits (Guzzeti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe & Hardenbrook, 2002). In a study about mixed-sex partner groups using technology for an assignment, boys were shown to dismiss girls’ ideas and girls spent much time trying to keep the boys on task. In the intermediate grades, the teacher talked to the class about what it meant to work in a group and that all members can make valuable contributions. As the year progressed the boys did become more “partner-focused” (p. 100). This study illustrated the potential of explicit teaching about behaviours and attitudes for addressing gender issues in the classroom. Teacher-initiated discussions helped students so they could better understand their role in perpetuating expected gender roles.

The Code of Gender “Rules”

Although teachers come into the classroom with their own ideas and beliefs of gender stereotypes, so do the students. Boys follow gender rules more closely than girls (Bailey, 1993; Millard, 1997). Most boys work to develop their masculinity to show that they are *not* girls (Millard, Moffat, 2005; Peterson, 2004; Sax, 2005). If boys continue to view language arts as a “girly” activity, they will not engage readily. If boys are to see the value of literature in all its forms, then teachers, students, and parents need to understand the gender “rules” that girls and boys follow on a daily basis.

The challenge for teachers is to convince boys that reading can be an acceptable male activity. Moffat (2005) conducted a year long study with a grade 5/6 class, which showed that the gender gap in reading is socially constructed through community and teacher expectations of what is acceptable for boys and girls. Reading is regarded as a “girl activity” and if a boy is viewed as a reader he must be “gay.” Moffat recommended classroom discussions about “gender normativity and homophobia” (p. 46). She believes that once boys and girls regard reading as acceptable for both genders the gender gap will close. Millard (1997) conducted interviews with 10-12 year olds about reading in schools. She found that boys equated reading as a “girl” thing to do. They saw their mothers and teachers (predominately female) as readers, but not their fathers. Under the gender “rules” boys are opposed to appearing “girly” or “gay” so their perceptions of gender appropriate activities will impact how much they read. If a boy enjoyed reading in his primary years, the strong code of gender “rules” may then dissuade him from reading and showing enjoyment of reading in the intermediate grades.

Students' perceptions of gender roles and the importance to adhering to those roles was discussed by Peterson (2002), who analyzed the way grade eight students talked about writing. These discussions showed how important it is for these boys to write about "natural" or accepted "hegemonic masculinity." It was not acceptable for boys to write romance stories but same gender friendships and sports were widely accepted as masculine topics, although girls could write about sports as well. Romance stories were thought to be for girls only, even though only two out of the 26 girls actually wrote a romance story (p. 357). One boy, Matt, wrote about homosexuality in the army and one of the characters in his story was a gay farmer. Matt said that he was only trying to be funny but one of his male classmates stated that he did not understand Matt's writing choices. Peterson wrote that male students do not understand when another male student would want to "do something that positioned him as incompetent within the social order" (p. 362). This article showed that expectations for boys to follow gender rules appeared stronger than they were for girls. If the boys stepped outside their expected social masculinity, they could expect social ridicule.

Being teased and laughed at can be difficult for any adolescent. Many students will do anything to be sure that they do not experience social ostracism at school. Moffat (2005) showed that "one student linked the fact that another boy was often teased for 'acting like a girl' to the fact that the boy in question spent a great amount of time reading" (p. 45). In order for boys to fit into their social group they are pressured to dislike reading novels. However, certain genres of literature seemed to be more acceptable.

Asselin (2003) wrote about the types of books that boys like to read, which is different than for girls. Boys preferred to read from the internet, magazines, non-fiction and

newspapers, which are not commonly credited as literature within schools. Taylor (2005) wrote that researchers “point out that boys are making meaning with texts, but are doing so in ways that schools aren’t recognizing, such as reading information books, magazines, and Internet sites” (pg. 292).

Discussion groups about novels have become a focus in intermediate language arts classes. Girls more easily form groups to discuss literature. Boys do not engage in literature discussions as easily, which puts them at a disadvantage. However, gender rules apply to girls as well. In Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe and Hardenbrook (2002), girls who wrote stories that they considered to be outside the “gender norms” did not want to share their writing with the class in the author’s chair. These girls were afraid of the boys’ “negative responses” (p. 86).

As evidence that gender rules are more stringent for boys, Barrs and Pidgeon (1994) demonstrated that teenage boys and girls respond differently to novels. Through this study, girls showed that they did not “reject texts [action books] because they were ‘boys’ books” (p. 7). The girls would pick out different topics to discuss than the boys would but reading these books was acceptable to the girls. The boys, on the other hand, were resistant to reading a book that “dealt with the female experience” (p. 7) because of the fear of what this would look like to their peers. Again, the words misogyny and homophobia are used to address the issue of why boys reject books that they see as feminine (p. 85). The rejection of many books limits the boys’ reading experiences. Girls have less difficulty reading a variety of genres, which opens many reading opportunities for girls.

It is important for teachers to understand the impact of gender rules. Boys put themselves at a disadvantage in language arts because of the social pressure *not* to appear feminine or girly. The issue of gender rules may be more easily dealt with in gender separate classrooms where boys and girls may feel free to explore reading and writing differently than when they are in a mixed gender classroom.

Gender Separate Versus Gender Mixed Classes

Studies have shown that both girls and boys achieve higher grades and have less disruptive behaviours in gender separate classes during the middle school years (Biddulph, 1997; Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Sax, 2005). Pollack (1998) wrote that coeducational schools have teachers and administrators who are not empathic to boys' learning styles.

Sax (2005) has written authoritatively on gender separate classrooms. He advocated the need for gender separate classes so that both girls and boys will achieve more. Sax used classroom examples to illustrate the effectiveness of gender separate classes. For instance, in a French class in an all-boys school, boys competed to see who had the best accent, although boys in coed were teased or ridiculed when they tried to use the French accent perfectly (p. 242). In coed schools, many girls will not take perceived masculine classes, although in girls only schools they feel comfortable in doing well in all subjects (p. 243). Sax stated,

coed schools tend to *reinforce* gender stereotypes, whereas single-sex schools can *break down* [his italics] gender stereotypes. There is now very strong evidence that girls are more likely to take courses such as computer science and physics in girls-only schools than in coed schools. Boys in single-sex schools are more than twice as likely to study art, music, foreign languages, and literature as boys of equal ability attending comparable coed schools. (p. 243)

There is evidence that there may be more learning and less discipline problems in single sex classes (Gurian & Ballew, 2003). Girls appear able to concentrate more and boys

begin working together to solve problems. Gurian & Ballew went on to say, “at least half of middle school learning and discipline problems would be removed if schools were single-sex institutions” (p. 171). They provided examples to support their statement. There were many ancestral cultures that separated boys and girls during the years before and during puberty. This allowed members of each gender to relate to one another and to be mentored by same sex adults (p. 172). During adolescence it is especially effective to separate boys and girls. “Competition between the sexes is avoided and many psychosocial stresses - especially culturally imposed ones - are removed. Test scores and grades are rising in single-sex classrooms and groupings” (p. 172).

A study conducted by Cherland (as cited in Guzzetti, et al., 2002) showed how grade six students interacted in literature response groups. She found that in cross-gender groups, “teasing was used in the groups to mark and maintain gender boundaries” (p. 20). Teasing happened 13 times in five cross-gender groups but it happened only once in each of the single gender groups. Three more studies were cited to indicate that boys in mixed-gender groups tend to take over discussions or tease the girls for making “stupid” observations. The girls’ said that the boys’ “attitudes were the problem” (p. 24). When given the opportunity, boys and girls would segregate themselves according to gender. Some would simply start discussing the books with same gender classmates, no longer including the other gender in their discussions.

Buddulph (1997) discussed an experiment that a teacher of English developed in her school. She wanted to separate boys and girls for English classes only. The results suggested that separating genders may increase achievement. Before splitting the boys and

girls into gender separate groups, only 9% of boys achieved grades between A and C. After two years in a boys only English class, 34% scored between A to C. That is a 400% increase in achievement. Girls also showed improvement. They went from 46% scoring between A to C to 75% scoring these grades (p. 144). The teacher of this program said that “behaviour, concentration and reading levels all improved significantly” (p. 144).

Separating boys and girls in schools has been criticized as being sexist and as a way of ignoring the bigger issues of how students are educated (*USA Today*, 2007). Boys and girls then get different educations that may result in gender stereotypical instruction that limits knowledge and understanding for both girls and boys. Just separating boys and girls is not enough, according to Tyre (2008). She wrote, “single-sex education is not a pedagogy unto itself. To be successful, public schools for boys - like all schools - have to attract good students and good teachers. Those teachers must be given the right kinds of training, materials, and ongoing support” (p. 224). If separating boys and girls is not the answer for increased achievement and interest for both gender groups, what can be done to improve all students’ learning? Some authors have done research to show that there are a variety of ways to improve school literacy learning for both girls and boys.

Steps Toward Equity in the Language Arts Classroom

Many authors have written specifically about what can be done to encourage boys to read and write more within the school setting (Asselin, 2003; Booth, 2002; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Taylor, 2005). This does not mean the focus on boys excludes girls. Parsons (2004) wrote about the importance of changing the way in which language arts is taught in schools not just to benefit boys but to benefit girls as well.

Reading books aloud to students may be a strategy that encourages more students to participate in language arts classes.

According to Lee (2002), intermediate students enjoy having literature read aloud to them. He conducted a study with intermediate students about their attitudes about reading. First of all, out of 36 boys' responses about what they liked about reading at school, 14% enjoyed the quiet that is associated with reading, and 17% talked about how much they liked it when their teacher read aloud to them. Out of the 22 girls that responded to the same question, 41% enjoyed the quiet. Only one girl liked being read to by the teacher. The next question was about what they disliked about reading at school. An interesting point to note is that out of the 33 boys who answered, 36% said they hated all the noise that was going on during reading time in class. Out of the 20 girls that answered, 55% hated the noise (p. 48-51). I can make the inference that the teacher had a difficult time maintaining quiet during reading time. I think there is a misconception that many boys want a noisy environment but this research shows that a quiet place to read is important for both boys and girls.

An innovative strategy to address the reading gender gap was initiated by Welldon (2005). She started a group in her school called the "Cool Guys Reading Club" (p. 44). This club was for boys only. She wanted the boys to learn literacy-related skills so she developed the program to start very simply and grow more challenging as the boys developed more skills. Some of the skills the boys developed included research skills and discussing books in depth. The boys would "share the title, author, and a little about the plot of another book by email" (p. 44). Welldon used Karate belt colours as a way for the boys to keep track of their

successes. They were able to identify with this strategy as something they understood and valued. On the first day to sign up, 37 boys joined (p. 44). There is no evidence yet that this club is making a difference in reading achievement scores but there are certainly many boys reading and discussing a variety of books. One important strategy that Welldon used to encourage boys to read was to offer a large variety of reading materials that included graphic novels and the *Captain Underpants* (Pilke, 1997) series.

Peterson (2004) has asserted that boys do read, they just read different information than what is identified as “good” literature in schools. Boys want to read comics, crime novels, graphic novels, the internet, and comedy. When boys were asked if they do read, they answer “no” because they know that what they read is not considered “good literature” according to their teachers. Boys could read complex nonfiction books but would continue to count themselves as nonreaders because of their perception of what kind of reading is valued in schools. In order for boys to feel like they are good readers, teachers need to broaden their definition of literature to include a large variety of reading materials that both boys and girls like to read.

Last year, in my grade seven class, the boys continued to have difficulties relating to the characters in the novels they were reading. I did not understand why they had problems writing about how they felt about certain aspects of the story. After reading Sax’s (2005) research, I had a better understanding of why they were not easily able to journal their feelings and why the girls generally did not have an issue with that aspect of their assignments. Sax wrote about the differences in brain organization between boys and girls, related to asking boys to write about how they would *feel* in a given situation described in a

novel. “That question [how would you feel if....] requires boys to link emotional information in the amygdala with language information in the cerebral cortex. It’s like trying to recite poetry and juggle bowling pins at the same time” (p. 106). This reading influenced me to change my approach to novel studies, as shown in the novel study I created for my field work (see Appendix A).

Sax (2005) wrote about the differences between girls and boys learning in language arts. He proposed that girls like to discuss character development through the emotions characters feel as a result of the events of the novel (p. 107). Boys, on the other hand, enjoyed stories about “illustrated accounts of how things work, like spaceships, bombs or volcanoes” (p. 107). Sax observed that boys enjoy strong male characters “who take dramatic action to change their world” (p. 107).

Murray (2004) wrote about the responsibility that schools need to take in educating boys and girls more effectively. Boys are not the problem; the education system is the issue. If schools do not change with the times, education will no longer be relevant for many of its students. Just as schools needed to change in the early 1900s to better suit students in transition from a rural to an industrial economy, a similar shift is required today. Bodkin (as cited in Murray, 2004) wrote, “we want to make sure we maximize all students’ potential. We don’t want boys to become more like girls. We want human beings to be multi-faceted” (p. 4).

According to Parsons (2004) the teaching of literacy in schools does not induce life long learning for boys or girls. Teachers need to become more creative in their teaching and not just maintain the way language arts has been taught over the years. Parsons is surprised

that more students are not failing language arts. He maintains that the way a subject is taught is no longer relevant to students in this technological society. He would like to see language arts taught in a way that “has students learning that reading is an open-ended opportunity to find out more about themselves and the world around them” (p. 9). Parsons believed that reading a novel and answering questions will no longer entice students but will actually turn them away from reading all together (p. 9).

Gear (2006) discussed two types of questions that can be included when discussing literature. She called them *quick questions* and *deep-thinking questions*. Quick questions are those that have a one word answer or a quick reply, such as who the main characters are in the novel, or what kinds of jobs do these characters have. Students need to have read the novel for the information and there is a right or wrong answer. Deep-thinking questions take more time to discuss and to reflect upon. The answers to these kinds of questions should encourage more discussion from the students and may lead to more questions than answers. Students would use inference skills and would not be able to look into the novel for a specific answer. If teachers use deep-thinking questioning techniques, students may become more interested in what they are reading and become better thinkers overall.

Multimodal Literacy

Multimodal literacy is defined as “lessons [that] are engaging, with an infusion of arts and technology” (Brown, 2009, p. 1). Modes are human meaning - making systems based on the senses and a variety of technological or artistic media facilitates expression in a wider range of modes (Kress, 2004). Many students are connected to technology outside of school and access to technology within school may bring increased engagement with their learning.

Multimodal literacy or learning strategies in the classroom encourages students to choose activities that interest them. Students can demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways that are not always prescribed by the teacher. Students may engage in group discussions while working together on an activity that interests all of them. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Position Statement (2005) stated “When students produce brochures, literacy magazines, books, videos, or greeting cards, collaboration improves the product and helps all students involved learn more.”

The Learners’ Platform Approach

Based on a theoretical framework drawn from multimodal literacy, the Learners’ Platform approach to lesson design and unit planning was created by two teachers to better meet the needs of all students in their classrooms (Brown, Hartwick & Lapadat, 2005). The platform metaphor suggests that student success is based on clear expectations and effective communication among teachers, students, and parents. Teachers, as well as students, reach for new learning from a stable platform of existing knowledge, peer support, and familiar routines. One of the ten foundational beliefs of this approach focuses on cultivating student responsibility for learning. Ownership is accomplished “through ongoing self-assessment according to criteria for success...presented clearly in the form of unit and lesson goals, and descriptive rubrics” (Brown, Hartwick & Lapadat, 2005, p. 2). Another of the beliefs underlying this approach is that “learning is personally meaningful and integrated” (Brown & Lapadat, 2009). When students are able to connect to what they are learning their education becomes more meaningful to them. Within Learners’ Platform units, students follow basic work common to all with choices of activities and projects. Because of these choices,

assignments are more meaningful for students and students show more creativity and engagement with what they are learning.

Another platform belief is that learning is multimodal. Students are encouraged to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways that will showcase their talents. Students may use music, videos, drama, movement, words, images or any medium that can best demonstrate their learning. When students are given the opportunity to choose the types of activities to participate in, they should stay motivated to “build upon their strengths, interests, and previous experiences” (Brown, Hartwick & Lapadat, 2005, p. 2).

While students are given choices of activities within the Learners’ Platform approach, they are also given “clear outcomes and a variety of ways to achieve them” (Brown, 2009, p. 1). My classroom experience tells me that students need to have clear expectations in order to achieve what is asked of them. In Learners’ Platform Units, outcomes are clearly stated and reviewed with students to increase their opportunities for success.

Critical Reflection

As I worked through the novel study with the students I became more aware of what my role could have been as the teacher. A critically reflective teacher can stand outside her practice and see what she does from a wider perspective. As a critically reflective teacher, I stood outside my practice and saw it from a wider perspective. I became more critically reflective through my understanding that this class of students is part of a larger social structure, as am I. Brookfield (1995) wrote about the relationship between teaching practices and awareness of power relationships in society. The larger society can define expectations

of students and as a critically reflective teacher I need to be aware of those relationships and my role in perpetuating them:

An awareness of how the dynamics of power permeate all educational processes helps us realize that forces present in the wider society always intrude into the classroom....When we become aware of the pervasiveness of power, we start to notice the oppressive dimensions to practices we had thought were neutral or even benevolent. We start to explore how power *over* learners can become power *with* learners...Becoming alert to the oppressive dimensions of our practice (many of which reflect an unquestioned acceptance of values, norms, and practices defined for us by others) is often the first step in working more democratically and cooperatively with students and colleagues (Brookfield, 1995, p. 9)

Systemic Shift from Sorting to Learning Functions

Kaser and Halbert (2009) described the characteristics of school leaders, including administrators and teacher leaders, who raise the educational bar and close achievement gaps, and are part of a systemic shift in the function of schools from *sorting* to *learning*. “The sorting system inherent in the industrial paradigm of schooling reflects the fixed mindset with its emphasis on grading and judging. Learning systems, however, require teachers...with a mindset in which learning and helping others learn is a lifelong pursuit” (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p.14). Encouraging students learning is paramount to my philosophy of teaching but will require a paradigm shift for me, which occurred during reflection on my teaching of the multimodal, gender equitable novel study unit that was the focus of this research.

Chapter Summary

As the literature reviewed here suggests, intermediate teachers need to become aware of gender issues in their classrooms. Students are influenced by their teachers’ gender as it is expressed in teaching practices and choices of learning materials and activities. Boys and

girls may connect differently with their teachers, depending on gender. Teachers also need to understand that boys and girls adhere to guidelines of gender construction, referred to as the *gender code*. The adherence to the strict gender code will have an impact on students' learning and behaviour in the classroom. Adolescence is the age when students become more entrenched in these gender codes and there is strong evidence to suggest that learning is less inhibited by gender codes in gender separate classes.

Studies illustrating the success of gender separated classes have been reported by many authors, including Biddulph (1997), Gurian and Ballew (2003), and Sax (2005). Boys and girls in same gender groups may feel more confident in expressing themselves and participating fully in all subjects. When boys and girls are separated, there may be fewer discipline problems and more time spent learning.

There are many opportunities for teachers to create an engaging language arts classroom. Inviting students to choose reading materials, reading aloud, and expanding the definition of literature may support student interest and success. Providing multimodal and gender equitable units may be one way to capture students' attention and encourage the engagement of all learners.

The Learners' Platform approach (Brown & Lapadat, 2009) to novel studies provides choices of multimodal enrichment activities for all students to select or design. This approach encourages student responsibility by including clear outcomes, criteria, and descriptive rubrics that students are taught to use to monitor the quality of their learning and of their assignments. Students may choose the way in which they demonstrate their learning, which encourages creativity and personal connections.

Teacher learning, the deep learning described by Kaser and Halbert (2009), occurs through a process of critical reflection on practices and their underlying beliefs, or assumptions. Brookfield (1995) contributed an understanding of critical reflection that is relevant to teachers' professional learning and compatible with a feminist stance. As a body of literature, the studies cited here guided the technical aspects of my teaching practice, the design and delivery of my gender equitable unit in gender separate groups. However, critical reflection and systemic thinking helped me step away from my practice to see it as part of a larger system and to see my own learning as part of an emerging trend in education.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

There are a variety ways to investigate any given topic. I have chosen professional inquiry, inspired by action research inquiry cycles, because it fits well with my learning goals as a grade seven teacher and is likely to produce reflections of interest to other teachers. This chapter will begin with justification for using action research inspired professional inquiry for this study and describe my specific approach in more detail. Then I will review the data collection tools and my research process. I will explain how I designed the novel study unit and describe the pre-planning that the classroom teacher and I did before I entered the classroom. Lastly, I will explain my data analysis process and how I organized my data to answer my research questions.

Rationale: Why Action Research?

My professional inquiry was inspired by an action research method because I was interested in learning more about what I could do to ensure my teaching methods were gender equitable. “Action research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future” (Ferrance, 2000). After my last year of teaching I knew that I was not able to connect with some of the boys in my classroom. I wanted to learn more about what I could do to help these boys engage with their school work. An action research-informed method of inquiry would allow me to gather insights from relevant literature, create a novel study for grade six and seven students, teach that novel study, and then reflect on my experiences in the classroom. My main intention was to inform my own future teaching practices.

However, Greenwood and Levin (2007) emphasized that action research must contribute “actively and directly to processes of democratic social change” as well as generate valid social or technical knowledge (p. 3). With my concern that all students, particularly underachieving boys, have access to quality learning, I believe this study also fulfills that criteria. However, these authors also emphasize the participatory nature of action research, in which a problem is generated not by the researcher alone but in collaboration with participants. By this criteria, my study more closely resembles professional inquiry informed by the action research cycle and some of its goals. I identified a gender problem or opportunity in my own teaching and set out to experiment, reflect, and revise to address it. This process has empowered me as a professional but empowerment of participants, particularly the students, was not its central goal. However, given the effectiveness of class discussions for bringing awareness of gender roles and enabling students to adjust their attitudes and behaviour, a more participative action research approach may be useful for a subsequent study.

According to Ferrance (2000) there are four types of action research in education, including individual teacher research, collaborative, school-wide, and district-wide action research (p. 6). Although I worked with the classroom teacher of the grade six and seven classroom, my method more closely resembles the individual teacher research method because when I go back into the classroom, I am the only grade seven teacher at my school and I do all of my planning alone. I am interested in analyzing my teaching methods so that I can make changes to benefit my students and in sharing my learning with other teachers

concerned with decreasing the gender gap in achievement and interest in their own classrooms.

Teacher inquiry through action research appeared to be a good fit with the expectations I held for myself as a learner. A traditional cycle of inquiry in action research includes planning, doing, reflecting, and revising (Brown, 2004). I first planned my unit, then taught the unit to a group of students. As I taught the unit I continually reflected about the effectiveness of my teaching as indicated by student responses. At the end of the unit, I recognized the need for revisions, which then required me to do more planning. This inquiry cycle continued as I learned more about the effects of my teaching practices.

“Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change” (Ferrance, 2000, Introduction). I have always had concerns about gender differences in education but was more concerned that girls did not get short changed by their teachers or the education system. With the gender gap in achievement in language arts increasing between girls and boys, I became concerned that my instructional practices could be a contributing factor. Because of how influential my practices are to the success of my students, I chose action research as professional inquiry to address my need to develop and change as a practicing teacher. However, I have made my learning transparent and accessible to the teaching community so that it fulfills the criteria for research as well as for professional learning.

Teaching is a collaborative process and action research promotes collaboration among colleagues. I wanted to use my time in the classroom during my field work to collaborate with the classroom teacher. Elliot (2008) described action research in this way:

Action research is the process through which teachers collaborate in evaluating their practice jointly; raise awareness of their personal theory; articulate a shared conception of values; try out new strategies to render the values expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse; record their work in a form which is readily available to and understandable by other teachers; and thus develop a shared theory by researching practice (home page, Classroom Action Research).

Action research and gender studies fit well together. Gender studies focuses on challenging the status quo and allows the researcher to be a participant as well as an observer in the research process. Within gender studies researchers are encouraged to learn about themselves and develop a better understanding of how they need to change within the existing system. Action research allows the researcher to do just that. I need to take responsibility for my part in contributing to the gender gap in literacy achievement and interest. I used the reflective process as a major part of my research so that I can become a more effective teacher for both boys and girls in my classroom.

Action research is dependent on reflections made by the researcher. When I first came into the classroom, I would write in my journal the next day about the past day's experiences. I was not as accurate as I wanted to be and was concerned that I would forget the nuances of behaviours and attitudes from each group. After about a week, I decided to observe what was going on around me and write about it immediately. I began to write more meaningful notes and observations that helped me reflect about my practices in the classroom.

My identity as a teacher has given me a strong practical orientation; I did not want to spend a year away from the classroom to study only what other authors have written about the gender gap. I wanted to get involved and participate by creating a multimodal novel study and field testing it with some of my future students. I wanted to learn from these students and an action research approach to professional inquiry allowed me to fulfill my goals. Ferrance (2000) explained that a teacher engaged in action research “is not blindly following what the latest study seems to suggest, but is transforming the knowledge into something meaningful” (p. 13). By designing and field testing my novel study and reflecting on my practices, my understanding of what it means to be a successful language arts teacher has been transformed.

My Fieldwork Site

The school that I chose as the site for my field research is the oldest elementary school in H. It has been the bedrock for this community for over 60 years. Over the past decade enrollment in this school has decreased, as it has in many schools in the district. The school serves families whose socioeconomic realities are diverse. There is a higher than school district average of Aboriginal students and foster care children. The principal is a man in his mid-thirties and this is his first administrative position. The teachers, whose average age is approximately 45, are all female and so are the education assistants, the paraprofessionals who work with special needs students. Some education assistants work closely with students who need extra support in the classroom and others work one on one with students who require a fully modified program. Most staff members are of Western

European descent. The staff demographics of this school are considered typical for elementary schools in this region.

I chose the class that I did for three reasons. First of all, this was a combined class of grade six and seven students and I expected to be teaching the grade six group next year. I thought this would be an opportunity to get to know them. Secondly, the classroom teacher was a first year teacher and I wanted an opportunity to develop teacher leadership skills through a collaborative, mentoring role with her. The classroom teacher was able to observe my classroom management skills and to see my developed novel study. Third, I knew what a diverse group of students this was. There were 27 students in the class that participated in the novel study. Fifteen of the students were in grade six and twelve of the students were in grade seven. Of the 27 students, 17 were boys and ten were girls. Throughout my sessions in the classroom, two educational assistants were also in the classroom to assist designated special needs students.

I gave all adults in the classroom a novel study and novel so that they were able to help their respective students. Work habits, such as homework completion and handing work in on time, were a particular concern for the classroom teacher with this group of students. The classroom teacher commented to me that disruptive behaviour such as yelling, throwing objects in the class, and disrespect to the teacher was an ongoing issue. She had tried many different strategies throughout the year to encourage appropriate behaviour that included listening during instruction and keeping an organized work space. I was interested to see if separating the students into gender specific groups would alleviate some of those inappropriate classroom behaviours.

Data Collection Tools

I used a variety of data collections tools to aid in my research. First of all I analyzed data from classroom documents, the platform booklets that each student worked on. These booklets contained assignment instructions and space for students to complete assignments, record their learning activities, and self-assess learning outcomes. The booklets showed what activities the students chose to work on and how many challenges they completed. I used the platform booklets to compare the differences and similarities between choices made by boys and girls. I also used the platform booklets to make inferences about students' interest in the novel and in specific assignments. I also compared the engagement evident in the work completed in the platform booklet with the quality of the work completed for a final project. I wanted to see if boys and girls would choose different modes or media to display their learning and if there was a different level of engagement between the platform booklets and a multimodal final project.

I recorded conversations between myself and the classroom teacher as part of my data collection tools. The classroom teacher described differences she observed in the behaviour of students when boys and girls were separated and student responses to the Learners' Platform approach. She commented on the students' work habits and her insights as to whether the Learners' Platform approach was effective in increasing the quality of student work.

I wrote journal notes every day that I spent in the classroom. I focused on my reactions to the students and how I felt when I was working with each of the same gender groups. I recorded observations about what students were doing during the lessons. At the

end of the novel study unit, I gave students a questionnaire about their experiences during the 16 sessions with me. The data that was produced by these questionnaires was important because it focused specifically on the students' perspectives. These questionnaires remained anonymous so that students could feel confident about sharing their thoughts. The students identified themselves as to gender so that I could determine if there was a gendered difference in their responses. Giving the students a voice allowed me to understand more about their needs and preferences for consideration when planning and teaching future units of study within language arts and across the curriculum.

Learners' Platform Pedagogy and Unit Design

I drew on my literature review to develop a novel study for *The City of Ember* (DuPrau, 2003). I chose one novel for both boys and girls because I did not want to perpetuate gender stereotypes by using "boy" books and "girl" books. Research shows that boys and girls will find different elements to relate to in books they read (Moffat, 2005; Park, 2005). However, this particular book had a boy and girl as lead characters who shared the role of hero. The setting was a futuristic city where electrical systems were failing, which provided opportunity for students to make technical and non-fiction connections. The main characters developed a friendship over the course of the novel, which provided opportunities for students to make emotional connections as well.

Literacy Research and Gender Equitable Novel Study Design

I decided to use a novel, even though research indicates that boys generally are less interested in fiction books (Peterson, 2004; Sax, 2005; Sokal, 2005). Because of my experience teaching grade seven for the past five years, I was confident that I chose a novel

that would appeal to girls and boys equally. It is important in teaching language arts, to expand students' interests and if the novel could be taught in a way that was appealing to boys, I hoped they would begin to see the value of reading novels.

The way in which I constructed this novel study was intended to be inclusive for both girls and boys and was intended to answer my research question, "How does literacy research inform the design of a gender equitable multimodal novel study?" Before I began reading the novel *The City of Ember*, my literature review helped me better understand the literacy learning needs of girls and boys. I was continually aware of gender-based preferences. In the past, when planning novel studies, I focused on having students journal their feelings while reading their novels.

Pre - Planning Informed by Literature

Tyre (2008) wrote about the correlation between students' writing success and their interest in the writing topic. I included a large variety of topics within the novel study Platform Booklets so that boys and girls, whose interests may differ, would have a wide array of topic choices. The grade six and seven students were not limited to the topics I proposed but were also encouraged to suggest their own topics that related to the novel. As I generated a list of writing topics for the novel study I was continually aware of the needs for both girls and boys, as described in the literature.

In pre-planning, I considered the gender roles presented in the novel. Recalling Sax's (2005) notion of boys' preference for strong male characters who take action, I noted that Doon, the male hero in *The City of Ember*, tried to come up with a way to save Ember from running out of electricity. However, the female hero, Lina, was determined to solve the

mysterious code left by past Ember city dwellers. She was confident that this code was the way out of Ember.

Millard (1997) and Taylor (2004) both stressed the importance of providing a variety of activities to increase students' enjoyment of a novel. Throughout my novel study, the Platform Booklet presented a variety of choices of activities that focused on *technical information* or *emotional connections*. I chose and labelled these two categories because of what Sax (2005) wrote about the differing responses of boys and girls during a novel study. I provided the opportunity for both girls and boys to choose activities that interested them and these categories ensured that I would have a wide range of activities available. In this study, student choice of activities while working in gender separated groups was important because some boys did not always want to choose typically boy-centered activities and girls did not always want to choose girl-centered activities. Sax (2005) wrote about the importance of allowing both genders to experience atypical activities in their classrooms, to allow for a well rounded individual who can "grow up to be an adult who is comfortable expressing both feminine and masculine attributes" (p. 249). Other research indicated that gender codes would be relaxed and less likely to inhibit learning in gender separate groups (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Tyre, 2008). By providing an array of choices within the platform booklets and in gender separate groups, I hoped that girls and boys would have opportunities to develop their skills in both emotional and technical activities.

As I planned the novel study unit, I included a section for discussion questions. I wanted students to dig deeper into their minds as they read the novel and discuss these thoughts during group discussion time. From my reading about Gear's (2006) ideas about

questioning, I knew I wanted to encourage students to go from *quick questions* to *deep thinking questions*. The last group discussion section referred to deep-thinking questions so that students understood the importance of thinking beyond the words written on the page, which then would enhance their group discussions.

The Novel and Unit Focus

To create a gender equitable and multimodal Learners' Platform novel study, I started by reading the book. While reading the novel, I jotted down vocabulary that might be difficult for students, questions that I wanted the students to discuss in groups, and ideas for "challenge" choices that I thought would be interesting for the students. As I read, I summarized each chapter. I wanted to include chapter summaries for students who found it difficult to keep up with the reading, to assist them to continue working in their Platform Booklets and keep up with group discussions.

When I finished reading the novel, I reviewed the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for grade seven from the British Columbia Ministry of Education website. I highlighted all PLOs that corresponded with activities that I had chosen for students to complete in their novel study booklets. While creating the actual novel study I reproduced the PLOs on the first page of each section of activities. With the outcomes made explicit, I hoped that students, parents, and teacher(s) would clearly understand the intention of the learning activities for each section.

In planning the novel study, I identified four main learning sections that would be repeated four times. There were twenty chapters in the book, so each section addressed four chapters. Each section included a focus on vocabulary, discussion questions, short, focused

writing assignments called *snippets*, and *challenges* that students could choose to explore topics further. For the early chapters, I provided all the vocabulary, discussion questions and writing snippet ideas. As students progressed through the novel study, students were expected to find more of their own vocabulary, questions for discussion, and writing snippet ideas. I wanted there to be a progression from teacher chosen activities toward student independence for their own learning. I chose this format because I wanted the students to become familiar with the structure of the novel study. I guided the students in the beginning but as the students worked through the platform booklets I hoped they would increase their independent learning and depend less on the teacher. The overall learning goal that I wanted the students to achieve was to build connections to a novel through a variety of activities. The goal was for the students to learn that novels could open the doors to learning about the world and encourage them to think about topics in a new and interesting way.

My City of Ember novel study was created to support students to take more ownership and responsibility for their learning. Student responsibility is a large part of the Learners' Platform philosophy. Students are required to consider their performance in light of specific criteria while working through their Platform Booklets. In this study, students reflected on how well they were participating in discussions and how much they were working on their writing snippets. (Refer to Appendix A; p. 11, 18, 24, 30 for writing snippets criteria). As students emerge from grade seven they should be able to understand criteria and the expectations of their teachers and begin to develop standards and expectations of their own. The Learners' Platform approach encourages students to take

ownership of their learning, to identify their strengths, and the steps they will take and the support they will need to move their learning forward.

Assessment

Peterson (2004) objected to assessment rubrics that are not “boy friendly”: “features of writing that are often found in boys’ writing often cannot be found in rubrics used to assess school writing assignments. As a result, boys’ favourite types of writing may not qualify as ‘real writing’ in classrooms” (p. 35). Because of Peterson’s observations, I was open to a variety of writing topics that had an emotional or technical emphasis and I included specific criteria with each writing snippet section (see Appendix A). I hoped that both boys and girls would write about what they were most interested but would also choose topics that challenged their thinking.

Field Testing the Novel Study: Research Process

Before entering the class room I met with the classroom teacher, Ms. S, to discuss scheduling. I described the premise of the novel study and gave her a copy of *The City of Ember* to read. We discussed separating the boys and girls and agreed that there would be written work and a final project to conclude the novel study. The classroom teacher was willing to teach the novel study as I had planned it. We determined the schedule and discussed whether she would provide class time to work on the novel study, in addition to scheduled lessons. I suggested that we wait to see if the students were able to complete the work within the scheduled lesson periods and then we could consider if extra time would be needed.

I wanted to meet with the students before I started teaching in their classroom. I visited the classroom and introduced myself to those who did not know me from when I taught in the school previously. I told the students that I was taking educational leave, attending university, and earning my master's degree. I distributed an information letter for the students to bring home to their parents, emphasizing to students that it was important for their parents to know what was happening in their school lives.

I informed students that they would have three weeks to complete a novel study taught by their classroom teacher and me and that boys and girls would work in separate groups. Students had no questions: they all sat there very quietly, staring up at me. I was not concerned that students did not have questions during my brief introduction. At this point, students may not have thought about what they would ask, so I was not surprised by their silence. They had not seen the Platform Booklets yet, so would not know what to ask. My introduction lasted about ten minutes. I left feeling excited about getting my novel study started.

To prepare to teach the novel study, I received a class list from the classroom teacher so that I was able to number each book before giving the books to the students. I photocopied 32 sets of the novel study Platform Booklet. I knew there were 27 students, and I wanted to be sure that the education assistants and the classroom teacher would have their own copies as well. I put each novel study into a three ring folder, or duotang, and included some lined paper after the photocopied pages, to provide space for writing snippets, write questions, and complete challenges. I wanted the Platform Booklet to be portable so that students could easily take it home.

Before the students began reading the novel, I distributed the entire novel study booklet and provided a brief, whole - class overview. I described my expectations for their behaviour, and they seemed to be listening. My expectations were that no one was allowed to interrupt anyone talking during lessons and book discussions. The students were quiet while I talked to them. I asked if they had any questions and no one did. The girls went to another classroom with the classroom teacher to begin their novel study booklets and I began the first lesson with the boys.

The novel study was delivered in 16 classes. The sessions were an hour long on Monday through Wednesday, on Thursday the session was 45 minutes and Friday it was 40 minutes. The classroom teacher shared teaching time with the principal so she was limited with the times that I would be able to work with her students. The original plan was to teach the novel study over a three week time period. However, there was a four day weekend in the middle of the lesson schedule, so the classroom teacher and I arranged for two more classes in the fourth week. As the last day approached, I realized that students would benefit from a final one hour session to finish their projects.

Both the classroom teacher and myself began the novel study by reading the first chapter to our respective groups. Students were given the chance to hear the beginning of the novel and I hoped they would want to continue reading independently. As lessons continued, the classroom teacher and I made observations about how well the book discussions went and we reviewed the work in the students' Platform Booklets. I recorded my observations in my research journal on a daily basis. I was able to have a formal, audio

taped discussion with the classroom teacher twice during the three weeks. We also talked informally throughout the three weeks, as noted in my journal.

The students were given a flexible timeline and were encouraged to read the novel independently within two weeks. Gear (2006) discussed two types of questions that students need to begin asking themselves while they read: *quick questions* and *deep-thinking questions* (pg. 53). I hoped students would have discussions using both kinds of questions, particularly the deeper ones because they encourage students to think beyond what is written on the page and have potential to engage students more with the text. I included sample questions in the novel study booklet and I also provided room within the booklet for students to write the questions they would like to discuss while reading the novel. My plan was for the classroom teacher and myself to jot down notes and key words that the students used during their discussions.

At the end of the two weeks provided for reading the novel, the students were given two topics for their final project. I also explained that students could prepare their own idea for a final project. They would just need to let me know what their plans were before they started. I planned on having students work together on their final projects. However, at the time of assigning the topics, I changed my mind because of how differently each student was progressing through the novel and because of the potential for one or two students to be excluded from a group—assigning individual projects was a good way of getting around that issue. And thirdly, I wanted to see if there was a difference in choice of activity for the final project between the girls and boys. If students worked in groups, certain students may then have been influenced by their partner in choice of activity or how much effort they would

have put into the final project. Not one student asked to work in a group, which is the first time I have experienced this reaction from a group of students this age. Each student worked on his or her own final project. Students continued to work in gender separate groups in separate classrooms and talked among themselves while working on their projects.

I described the criteria for final projects in terms of effort and details. When I talked about effort I suggested that their final project should take approximately five hours to complete. I also told them that it was important to refer to the novel to be sure that they included intricate details that were described. Students knew that the final project was worth 30% and their platform booklets were worth 70%.

At the end of field testing this novel study I had collected a variety of artifacts of student learning, including completed Learners' Platform Books, my recorded meetings with the classroom teacher, questionnaires (see Appendix B) describing student experiences, and my own observations journal.

Data Analysis

Once I collected all the data from my sixteen sessions in the classroom I coded the data to find answers to my research questions. I reviewed my journal notes and colour coded my comments. I used green to indicate teacher's influence, red for student behaviour, black for boys' behaviour and questions and blue for girls' behaviour and questions. As I read through my notes, I made margin notes about connections to the literature or inferences that were forming as to the meaning of the data. I then highlighted the word "quiet" because I noticed that I used that word many times in my journal notes, which encouraged me to reflect upon my own expectations of students in my classroom.

After coding my journal notes I transcribed the recorded conversations I had with the classroom teacher. I underlined key phrases that the classroom teacher used in reference to boys' and girls' behaviour and interest in the novel study. I then sorted my coded notes according to their relevance to each research question on large data and analysis sheets. Throughout this process, I reflected on my practices and recorded additional thoughts and interpretations of the data. This process resembled the double-entry note-taking and note-making recommended for bringing voice to student research by Brown, Klein, and Lapadat (2009).

While examining the student questionnaires, I was most interested in learning about students' perspectives of their experiences with this novel study. I calculated how many boys and girls stated that they liked or did not like working in gender separate groups. I noted key words that boys and girls used in reference to their enjoyment of or displeasure with the novel study and their preferences related to working in gender separate groups. Key themes emerged, which I then added to the data and analysis sheets for each research question.

When grading the students' platform booklets, I noted the challenges that boys and girls chose to complete. I kept all recorded data from the boys on one sheet of paper and from the girls on another sheet. While grading the students' final projects I used a similar approach. I recorded the type of medium each student used and the type of final project they completed as well. Students used a variety of media to display their final projects, including paint, clay, pencil, and pencil crayons as well as mixed media constructions of wood, large styrofoam pieces and cardboard. Projects were designed to illustrate students' visualization and inference skills. Visualization and inference are two of Gear's (2006) featured

comprehension strategies or reading “powers” for fiction, although Gear’s approach differs from multimodal teaching in that she questions the use of arts-based projects for promoting and assessing comprehension. I wanted to give the students the opportunity to demonstrate how they visualized particular scenes in the novel. I believe that inferencing was evident through the details students included that were not specifically described in the novel. After recording all the numbers and data from the students’ platform booklets, final projects and questionnaires, I calculated percentages of boys and girls choices of activities. When looking at key words the students used, I calculated the percentages of boys who used particular key words and girls who used particular key words when referring to reasons they did or did not like working in gender separate groups.

Once all numbers were recorded and data was written on the appropriate data analysis sheets, I was ready to analyze what I had learned throughout my 16 sessions in the classroom. In the next chapter, I reflect on my planning, teaching, and assessment practices and my preconceived ideas of appropriate classroom behaviour in light of the academic literature I reviewed.

Chapter Summary

Conducting professional inquiry influenced by action research allowed me to conduct my field work in a way that best suited my teaching and learning style. Within the action research method is the cycle of action which included planning, doing, reflecting and revising. While I worked with the students during my field work I was continually reflecting on what happened within the classroom and the gender separate groups.

Part of the cycle of action research is planning. I referred to my literature review to guide my planning of the novel study unit. I incorporated activities, and discussion questions that would appeal to girls and boys. There was a focus on *technical* or *emotional activities* throughout the novel study so that boys and girls had the opportunity to find activities that were of interest to them.

Once the planning of the novel study was finished, I began field testing the unit, dividing students into same gender groups and sharing teaching duties with the classroom teacher. The students were organized into gender separate groups so that I could determine if separating boys and girls by gender was an effective way to increase engagement and productivity. The students were expected to work independently in their *Platform Booklets* and complete a final project.

When the students completed the novel study I began to analyze the data that was collected. I coded the data and reflected on my practices throughout the analysis. I reviewed my journal notes, recorded conversations with the classroom teacher, and students' Platform Booklets, final projects, and questionnaires. Once all data was coded and organized, I was able to interpret the information and synthesize answers to my research questions. The process of my analysis and the writing of this report accessed all four of Brookfield's (1995) critically reflective lenses: (a) my own autobiography as a teacher and a learner, (b) my student's eyes, (c) the perspectives of colleagues, including the classroom teacher and my academic supervisor, and (d) the research literature (p. 31).

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND INTERPRETATIONS

On the first day of teaching and gathering data in the Grade 6/7 classroom I arrived feeling nervous anticipation. I wanted to collect data to show that separating boys and girls would inspire them to work harder, have in depth discussions about the novel, and become creative. To my disappointment, all of my goals were not achieved by the end of the three week novel study but I did learn that 70% of boys in this group preferred to work in boy only groups for a variety of reasons and that boys and girls chose a variety of activities throughout the novel study. Most importantly though, I learned about my own expectations and assumptions when teaching boys and girls a novel study using the Learners' Platform approach with a gender equity orientation.

Throughout this chapter I reflect on the observations I made during my fieldwork and how those observations helped answer my research questions. In the first section, I discuss the language arts teacher's role in creating conditions for gender equity for students. I acknowledge how I may have influenced student learning during the 16 sessions I spent with the grade six and seven class through my expectations of behaviour of the students and the design of the multimodal novel study I provided for students to complete.

I will begin by discussing evidence that related to my first research question: "What can teachers do to increase equity of opportunity for students of both genders in language arts?" First of all, inviting students to choose from an array of activities during a novel study may be the most important contribution to equity within language arts instruction. I will then

discuss the importance of establishing teachers' expectations for student behaviour during working time during language arts. While discussing teachers' influences in the classroom I will show how a quiet classroom may not be a productive, on-task classroom. I was surprised to find that, although the students were quiet for much of the time I worked with them, completion rates for their Platform Booklets were low. To conclude my exploration of what a classroom teacher can do to increase opportunities for equity in language arts, I will discuss the importance of ongoing formative assessment.

The next section will focus on the responses to the novel study and the choices of activities of boys and girls, which helps answer my second research question: "How do boys and girls respond and what choices of activities do they make within a multimodal novel study?" I present unit completion and final project completion rates and compare those rates for girls and boys. I discuss gender differences in the students' choice of activities. Lastly, I reflect on the surprisingly different ways the boys and girls responded to my approach to instruction during the 16 sessions I spent with them.

I then explore my third research question: "Do gender separated classes show promise for improving achievement and interest in novel studies for both girls and boys?" I use students' comments to illustrate their level of interest in the novel study. I reflect on completion rates and student grades as I consider achievement levels. The conversations I had with the classroom teacher also aid in my understanding of the interest and achievement exhibited by these students for the novel study that I designed. I also focus on the differences in behaviour when boys and girls were separated in comparison to when they were in the classroom together.

Throughout Chapter IV and in my final chapter, I refer to the questionnaire results (see Appendix B) to reflect upon my learning. At the end of the chapter I discuss how the students described their experiences of working in gender separate groups. I then reflect upon my understanding of why the students answered the way they did, using literature to support my interpretations.

Classroom Teaching Practices

My overall research question was “What can a classroom teacher do to increase equity of opportunity for students of both genders in language arts?” As a classroom teacher, my inclination is to claim responsibility for my role as a positive influence in my students’ learning and their lives, whether they are girls or boys. Students of both genders and all orientations deserve the best language arts education that teachers can provide. As I read through my observation notes, I began to discover the attitudes that I bring with me to the classroom and to reconsider how those attitudes may affect student experiences of inclusion and equity as well as their behaviour and achievement.

Student Choices

The novel study included a variety of discussion questions, writing snippet ideas and challenges that included both emotional and technical types of topics. By designing these activities and choices, I wanted to be inclusive and provide opportunities for boys and girls to express preferences in their choices. This did not mean that girls and boys could not answer any question they liked or write about any topic they preferred. As a female teacher, it is important that I understand that boys may be interested in topics that do not occur to me or in which I have little interest.

I have come to the conclusion that providing students with choice may be the most effective way to ensure equity in the language arts classroom (Taylor, 2005). I wanted to be sure that there were many choices for students in the hopes that they would each find options that interested them. Two students, one girl and one boy, indicated that the reason they enjoyed the novel study was because they were invited to choose the activities that they liked. The classroom teacher appreciated the variety of choices of activities for the students as well, noticing that if they were in the mood to work on vocabulary they could, but if they wanted to work on the code challenge they could. This freedom of choice kept the students more engaged in their work and promoted focused behaviour.

I included a final project with the novel study to provide students with an additional opportunity to make choices. I did not expect all students to only do writing exercises but I wanted to offer those students who liked working on arts-based projects a chance to work with their hands with a variety of media. They were invited to choose what they worked with, whether it was clay, paint, paper and pencil, wood or anything else that they wanted to use.

As students worked in their novel study booklets I wanted them to feel a sense of responsibility for their work and their choices. I believed that if students believe they are able to make choices that suit their learning style they are more likely to experience success. One female student wanted to begin working on her final project before she was finished her novel study booklet. I told her that it was her choice to make. She needed to be a responsible student in making her choices and understand that the novel study booklet was worth 70% and the final project worth 30% of her final grade. I wanted to give her the

freedom to make the decision for herself. I think many times teachers become too prescriptive and students then rebel and feel they have no control over their educations. The more students feel they are a part of the learning process, I believe they will feel more ownership and pride in what they do in school.

I learned that supporting this student's choice of what to work on helped her to understand that I had confidence in her ability to get her work finished. I saw that as a teacher I did not need to control all decisions the students made. This way of thinking was something new to me. I have always wanted to control my classroom, telling students what needs to be done and in what order. I now have the realization that many students may be capable of making decisions that best suit their learning needs for that day. This particular student showed engagement with all her work and this may be due to the increased responsibility and decision making.

I came to understand that although there may be some learning differences between boys and girls, it may not be most productive to treat all girls the same and all boys the same. Boys and girls can have a variety of interests that are much beyond boys being mechanical and girls being emotional. Boys and girls can be interested in using their hands to construct a model or in telling a story about an experience from their lives. However, thinking of assignments as technical/mechanical and emotional/relational may help teachers to provide a wider variety of assignments and address all interests. Combined with an expectation that students will choose activities to build on their strengths and to "stretch" into new areas, a wide range of choices may invite both girls and boys across a gendered spectrum to be authentically themselves, in spite of gender rules.

Students showed interest in the challenges that I included in the novel study. There were many activities for them to choose. Eighty-two percent of the boys and eighty percent of the girls completed at least one challenge. I interpreted this level of participation to mean that many students were interested in the topics, although it must be acknowledged that some were simply completing additional assignments for an increased grade.

One aspect of the challenges that surprised me was the variety in choice of activities made by both girls and boys. My literature review led me to expect that girls would choose mostly the emotional/relational types of activities and the boys would choose mostly the technical/mechanical activities. The evidence in this study did not show this assumption to be true. Out of all the challenges that the girls completed, 71% of the activities were technical/mechanical. Of the challenges completed by boys, 69% were categorized as technical/mechanical activities. Although these figures showed that both genders gravitated toward the technical/mechanical activities, evidence from a single classroom is not strong enough to discount the wealth of literature reporting girls' preferences for emotional activities and boys' preferences for technical ones (Millard, 1997; Sax, 2005; Taylor, 2005). From my own observations with this group, I also believe it is essential for teachers to understand the preferences of each unique group of students and to continue to provide an array of choices to expand students' interests.

Expectations for Student Behaviour

Before distributing the platform booklets it was important for me to establish ground rules and expectations for behaviour. When I first entered the classroom, I was very firm with the students about my expectations for behaviour during our work sessions. I believed

that in order for students to know what the expected behaviour needs to be, that behaviour needs to be described by the teacher. Teachers cannot assume that all students just know what kinds of behaviours are expected by each teacher. After my introduction, students understood that while the novel study was in progress they were expected to work in their Platform Booklets, read the novel, and have open discussions within their self-selected groups. After talking with Ms. S. I learned that students' behaviour was more on-task during this novel study than during other class time when I was not there. However, I believe that student behaviour also improved because boys and girls were separated by gender, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Teachers need to create a learning environment that includes expectations for behaviour for students (Gurian & Ballew, 2003). Establishing a classroom climate that is exciting and creative and enhances learning for all students is important but I believe this climate is only possible once an orderly environment is established, an insight that is confirmed in effective schools research (Lezotte, 1991).

When I was giving instructions to the entire class during the fourth session I wrote about three students who ignored me during teaching time. Two girls were making something with needle and thread and one boy was tossing an eraser in the air and catching it. When I saw these behaviours I stopped the lesson and told those students that they needed to be listening to what I was saying. If they did not hear my instructions I would not repeat them and they would be responsible for getting the information from someone who was listening. As I reflect back on my comments from my journal notes I was not showing an understanding of how some students listen during instruction.

Some students are able to listen and perform repetitive tasks at the same time. Research shows that some students listen better if they are drawing or if they have something in their hands (Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Tyre, 2008). When it appears as though students are ignoring the teacher and are distracted by something in their hands they may actually be listening intently. Although it still seems to me that students would be distracted while playing with something at their desks, I am learning that they may need to participate in small movements to keep themselves from being distracted. Gurian and Ballew wrote about how “movement seems to stimulate male brains and helps to manage impulsive behaviour” (p. 18). If I do not allow for some small movements during instructional time, I may not be providing an equitable education for all students. It is important, however, that the students who need to move around during instruction do not impede the learning of those who need to sit and look at the teacher. Further, it may be helpful for teachers to have focused discussions with students about their learning needs, and to distinguish between helpful strategies and distracting behaviours.

Quiet and Learning

Working with the boys in the first few days was an enjoyable experience for me. Students worked quietly reading the novel and writing in their platform booklets. Reviewing through my journal notes, I noticed that I used the term “working quietly” nine times and equated quiet work with good work. This is an area in which I have come to challenge my own thinking. I began to reconsider the meaning behind a quiet classroom when I was assessing the platform booklets and students did not show the learning I expected. I began to reflect upon my belief that a quiet classroom must be a productive, learning environment. I

now have a better understanding that a quiet room does not guarantee that students are learning. Biddulph (1997) wrote about teacher's expectations of students in a classroom, which challenged me to think about how a quiet classroom does not provide a positive learning environment for each student.

The learning environment of schools seems designed to educate senior citizens, not young people at their most energetic. Everyone is supposed to be quiet, nice and compliant. Excitement doesn't seem to belong in this kind of learning. The passivity required by school contradicts everything we know about kids, especially adolescents. Adolescence is the age of passion. Boys (and girls) crave an engaged and intense learning experience, with men and women who challenge them and get to know them personally-and from this specific knowledge of their needs, work with them to shape and extend their intellect, spirit and skills. (p. 136)

Over my years of teaching, I have heard many teachers receive compliments about their quiet classrooms. It is assumed that teachers are of high caliber if they can keep their students quiet! I have always believed that as well, until I started to understand that a quiet classroom may not be an equitable classroom. As Biddulph (1997) suggested, compliance and passivity in my classroom had become ends unto themselves instead of the means toward student engagement and learning. Further, unquestioned acceptance of this assumption was professionally disempowering and did not serve my interests as someone who did very much want students to learn.

Expecting a quiet working environment at all times may not provide an equitable learning space for all students in language arts. I have come to believe that if I want students to have discussion that is meaningful, they need to be allowed to discuss the novel at any time during language arts class. If students are excited about learning, they may actually make noise, and that needs to be okay with me. This does not mean that the classroom becomes a chaotic environment where no one is able to learn, but one where there are

curiosity, questions, and excitement about what is being learned that day. I have come to question *why* I have the expectations I do and begin to challenge my way of thinking to encourage each student greater opportunities for learning.

Most students were not willing to ask me many questions and yet their achievement as assessed at the end of the unit was disappointing . As a teacher I need to be aware of those students who sit quietly and are not engaged with their learning, which I found challenging with this class. Many students would sit quietly during work sessions and I would be sitting at the front of the class working on my own. If the students did not ask me any questions I did not interact with them. I see now that my lack of interaction with students was a mistake. I needed to be circulating through the class, listening to discussion and assessing progress in order to guide students through their work. If my expectation is for students to be engaged as learners, then the expectations I have for myself need to be that of an interacting teacher/ learner. I came to this realization as I was beginning to write this chapter. At this point, I discovered that I was not able to write detailed descriptions about students' choices of activities and what they were *thinking* while working on the platform booklets, because I had not interacted with them or observed them closely.

As I reflect back on my practice, my unintentional neglect of those quiet students did not provide them with an equitable education. Sax (2005) wrote that boys only ask the teacher a question as a last resort but girls are more readily able to connect with the teacher. If this is the case, boys may not learn as much as the girls if the teacher is not engaged with all students.

Again, I need to challenge my assumptions about how a learning environment should look. Ignoring students who do not ask questions, who are shy or have not made a connection with the teacher is something that needs to be addressed. This is an area in which I need to seek understanding because I have never been that kind of a student. The students who, like me, ask questions and are outgoing may receive a higher quality education because of the time the teacher spends with those students. In order to provide all students equitable learning opportunities, I believe teachers need to engage with all students on a daily basis, especially the quiet ones who are trying to be ignored.

My belief surrounding teachers engaging with quiet students came to the forefront while I was assessing the students' platform booklets. My observations showed a classroom where behaviour was not an issue, so I assumed they were learning. As I marked the platform booklets I realized that although students were not misbehaving, their assignments did not show that much had been learned. I was disappointed by the low completion rates, which then encouraged me to reflect on what my part was as the teacher.

The literature supports my new understanding that teacher engagement is important for student achievement. Biddulph (1997) confirmed my understanding that teacher interactivity is required for student engagement when he wrote about the importance of teachers becoming connected to their students. He described a school that restructured teaching schedules to allow teachers to spend more time with their students, which was effective for establishing deeper relationships so that students became "more actively and successfully engaged in their learning" (p. 157). Since the time this field work was

conducted, my classroom practice has changed and I will continue to attempt to interactive with all students so that relationships beneficial to student learning can be formed.

Student Assessment to Promote Gender Equity

Teachers' assessment practices have implications for promoting an equitable learning environment for all students, in that they occur at the intersection of teacher interactivity and student engagement. I went into the classroom with criteria for assignments included in the novel study booklets. Including the criteria allows students to understand what they need to do to accomplish the learning goals that will result in satisfactory grades. They were expected to fill out the learning log after they completed each lesson. My intention was for students to use the criteria listed for post-lesson self-assessment and during lesson self-monitoring. All students did not use the criteria the way that I had intended.

I observed students quickly filling in all of their learning logs nearing the final due date. I believe that by the end of this novel study, many students were tired of filling out each criteria sheet. It was becoming boring and too repetitive for many students. Teachers need to be aware of the needs of their students. I would not be interested in doing the same thing over and over if it was not rewarded or if no meaning was attached to it. Assessing students is an important role of teachers and in order to provide equity for students, there needs to be more variety in the criteria and how students are assessed. In the unit I planned, I may not have provided enough guidance or variety in self-assessment strategies for these students. Another possible explanation for students disengagement with self-assessment may be that the process was unfamiliar to them. Without follow-up conferences with a teacher

who encouraged revision and helped to celebrate improvement or goal achievement, self-assessment appeared to lack meaning for students.

Student self-monitoring according to criteria develops over time and with explicit teaching and follow-up support, so that students thoroughly understand what they need to do. Although I did some explicit teaching, I know I did not do enough so that all aspects of the novel study were clear to all students. The biggest area of lack of understanding was with the writing snippets. This was something new for the students and they did not fully understand that I had developed this strategy to help them gain writing fluency with topics of their own choosing. To ensure equity for students, in future units I would include specific exemplars and discuss them with the entire class so students understand the goals of the lesson and the implied expectations in the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). I found that many students did not follow the criteria for the writing snippets but did not ask me questions throughout the novel study work time. I have learned that I need to guide students' learning and not expect them to understand my way of thinking. Although I believe students need to take responsibility for their learning, I, as the teacher, must first do my part by being interactive and involved during their work time. I can be the one to ask them questions about what they are learning so that we both understand how their learning is progressing.

When I first started teaching, I just assumed that once I taught a lesson, all students should know what to do. I would become frustrated that student work would often show a lack of understanding of the concepts. As I reflect upon my learning through this novel study, I now have a better understanding that students need my support and guidance

throughout their work, not just at the beginning. New approaches to assessment, as advocated by Stiggins, Arter, and Chappuis (2007) and many others, recommend that students are the primary users of assessment information, and that sharing and using this information be ongoing throughout the learning process. That means that teachers need to help students see what they have understood or accomplished so far, and what they might work on next and they achieve small, progressively more sophisticated goals on the way to a learning outcome.

The other area that some students had difficulty with was understanding my expectations for the challenges. I talked with the whole class about their opportunities for choice, but again, talking is not enough. Some students need visual clues and examples to aid in their learning. In future, I would include an example in the novel study booklet of what an “A” challenge looks like. Exemplars would allow all students access to the same information so that they know how much effort they need to put in if they want an “A”, with the hope that eventually the high quality learning would, at least for some, replace the grade as the motivator. Those students who consistently put in their best effort may not need exemplars, but those students that do not have an understanding or are not comfortable asking the teacher for help could benefit from exemplars of student work included within the Platform Booklet.

The one way I tried to interact with all students was to look through each Platform Booklet once per week during class time. This gave me a chance to give each student verbal feedback about what they were doing well and what they needed to work on in their booklets. I tried to give descriptive feedback to each student about what they had written so that they felt more confident about their work. There were a few students who had not

completed anything in their booklets so this also gave me an opportunity to talk with these students about what was preventing them from working. I believed that students would be more accountable for their work if they knew the teacher would be looking through their work at various times. However, in this research setting, I did not have an ongoing relationship with the students, which may have reduced the external motivation that I usually found effective with my students, and certainly limited the intrinsic motivation I was able to develop through interaction with them

Responses and Choices: Gender Differences or Similarities?

During the teaching of this novel study, I considered my research question, “When a multimodal novel study is taught, how do boys and girls respond and what choices of activities do they make?” After I collected each novel study booklet I first checked to see the percentage of boys and girls who completed the entire novel study. I then looked at the challenges that they chose to do. The challenges were optional, not only as a way to increase their final grade but as a way to personalize student learning. Because students chose each challenge themselves, I hoped they would be able to demonstrate their learning at a higher level than if I told them what challenges to complete. I compared the types of challenges chosen by boys and girls.

Platform Booklet Completion Rates

Only 29% of the boys and 40% of the girls completed their Platform Booklets. When I was checking for completion, I did not include any of the challenge work. A completed novel study booklet included having all criteria marked, discussion questions written, learning logs completed and writing snippets included. Challenge work was optional so if

students did not complete any challenges but did complete all other work, their booklet was assessed as complete.

Of the 29% of boys who completed their novel study booklets and 40% of girls, all of them completed at least one challenge. The girls did more challenges than the boys. Of the four girls who completed their entire Platform Booklets, they did eight, five, four and three challenges. The five boys who completed their Platform Booklets chose seven, six, four, two, and one challenge. I was surprised by this outcome. First of all, I expected more students overall to complete the Platform Booklets. I expected a higher completion rate because of how well students behaved while I was in the classroom. While students worked on their Platform Booklets it seemed that they were engaged with their work. Again, I have learned from this study that I cannot make the assumption that quiet students are engaged with their work. The low completion rate of the Platform Booklets is an indication that quiet students are not necessarily productive students.

I have learned that multimodal teaching and engaged learning requires interactive and explicit teaching. I was not interacting enough with the students during instruction. I would attempt to strike up conversations with the students, but I needed to become involved with each student as they worked within the Platform Booklets. I interacted more frequently with the students while they were working on their final projects, and, interestingly, the completion of the final projects was higher for both girls and boys, although there may have been other reasons such as greater student confidence with familiar media. I would ask students questions about what they were doing, I would talk to them about how to show details in their 3-D projects, and the students wanted to talk to me more about what they were

doing as well. After working with students for three weeks, it may have been that we were just becoming more comfortable interacting with each other.

I also looked closely at the final projects the students handed in as a completion project for the novel study. I wanted to give all the students an opportunity to become highly creative and engage with the novel. Some students are more apt to build and work with their hands and others would prefer to draw or paint. I gave students two choices for final projects but also invited them to come up with their own ideas. The first project idea was to display either the night scene or the day scene as a diorama, drawing, or using any media they preferred. The second final project suggestion was to create a 3-D map of the city of Ember, including the Pipeworks. Students were asked to include a legend and to use clues from the book to help them create an accurate map.

Completion rate of final projects was much higher than for the novel study booklets for both girls and boys. Eighty-two percent of the boys and all of the girls completed their final projects. The completion rates seem to show that these students prefer hands on activities over written work. I believe that part of the problem with novel study booklets not being completed was the organization and presentation of the booklets. These students were overwhelmed by what looked like a massive amount of work and the repetitive organization of the novel study booklet. The classroom teacher had mentioned on more than one occasion that work completion was an issue with this class but I think more specifically students were reluctant to engage in written work, perhaps because of a history of low grades and a lack of perceived success.

In future novel studies, I may use hands on activities to build confidence through success with preferred activities and to build my relationship with the students. When students feel success in one area they may then be able to venture into areas in which they are not as confident, such as writing and group discussions. It is my role as the teacher to encourage students to try tasks that may be daunting because as they achieve success in a variety of activities, they will become more well – rounded, confident, and free of gender stereotypes that limit achievement.

Students' Choices

I have analyzed the types of challenge activities the students chose. Many of the suggestions for challenges were made by me but students had complete choice as to the type and number of activities completed. Out of the eight female students who completed challenges, 88% of them completed the “secret code” challenge. The “secret code” challenge is categorized as a technical activity. Of the fourteen male students who completed challenges 57% chose the “secret code.” This type of activity was creative and was related to the grade seven social studies curriculum.

The threat of losing electricity for the entire community was the fundamental problem in the novel *The City of Ember*. One challenge activity invited students to discover more about electricity and to think about what they would do if they no longer had electricity. Sixty-three percent of the girls and forty-three percent of the boys completed this challenge. Although this challenge used electricity as part of the work, there was also an emotional connection that could be made when students thought about what they would do if they did not have electricity anymore. Imagining what life would be like without electricity

was an example that Sax (2005) discussed as an activity that girls relate to but boys may not. My analysis confirms that this activity appealed more to girls but that choice was essential to allow boys to expand their options. Perhaps linking technical and social topics, in this case electricity and community planning, helped boys extend themselves into the less preferred realm of social and emotional thinking.

Another challenge activity was based on finding out who invented the light bulb, accompanied by a labeled diagram of a light bulb's working parts. Only 13% of the girls chose this challenge, as compared to 43% of the boys.. I included this challenge about light bulbs because the literature has shown that boys enjoy participating in mechanical activities (Millard, 1997; Sax, 2005). The boys did, in fact, show more interest in this activity than the girls. The boys' interest in labeling the light bulb, together with their lower level of interest in the electricity challenge compared to girls, suggested there may be, as described in the literature, a gender difference along relational and technical lines. Providing a broad range of choices seemed to invite engagement, even from reluctant learners unfamiliar with this type of teaching. Gender preferences were exhibited as expected but enough students chose outside of the expected preference to illustrate the value of choice for expanding student activity beyond gender stereotypes.

For their final projects, the completion rate was much higher than for the novel study booklets, yet both boys and girls chose similar activities and ways of presenting their projects. Many students used clay to represent their maps and scenes; the classroom teacher commented that this class had enjoyed using clay throughout the school year.

Students Responding to Me

One difference that was clearly evident was in how boys and girls responded to me and to the novel study in general. There was a certain group of boys that wanted to get high marks on this novel study and had many questions for me during whole class question time. Only three times did a girl ask a question in the whole class environment, although four particular boys consistently asked questions about marking, expectations, writing snippets and due dates. These were the same boys who handed their platform booklets on time. The classroom teacher explained that these boys have consistently high grades in her class and she was not surprised by their questions. The gender difference in questioning was discussed by Sax (2005) as being opposite to what happened in this particular classroom.

Sax (2005) wrote that girls easily ask the teacher questions and want to develop a relationship with their teacher, whereas boys are not concerned about building a relationship and will only ask the teacher questions as a last resort. I did not find this to be the case in this grade six and seven classroom. The boys were outgoing with me and engaged with me in conversation about a variety of topics. The National Hockey League playoffs were occurring at this time so I would talk with the boys about the Vancouver Canucks and about hockey in general. I wore my hockey jersey to school a few times and some boys would mock my favourite team. They engaged with me in a friendly competitive way. I think my competitive nature and love of sports is an important connection that I can make with the boys in the classroom.

However, Millard (1997) presents an alternate view that may explain the difference between these boys' outgoing response to a new teacher, as compared to the girls' passivity.

Millard asserted that boys consuming inequitable amounts of the teacher's time is an area that needs to be addressed in many classrooms. When boys take up teachers' time and attention, the girls who sit quietly no longer have equal access to their teacher. Developing a relationship with the teacher is important for student success (Tyre, 2008). In this classroom, I was aware that many girls did not come to me for help or ask me questions. When working with the girls' group I would try to engage them in conversation asking them about *American Idol*, a popular television program. The girls would give me one word answers, then go back to talking with each other. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I felt as though I was not able to connect as strongly with the girls as I did with the boys. Nearing the end of my sessions with the girls, more of them were willing to have conversations with me. These girls may have just needed more time to build the trust that a relationship between teacher and student requires. However, their response made me think about how unintentional oppression can occur when teachers are more concerned about control than about building relationships that support learning. Both boys and girls can be socially oppressed and have their learning inhibited when an emphasis on classroom control mistakes compliance and passivity for learning.

Gender Separate Groups

I separated gender groups because research has shown that girls and boys who work in single-sex groups generally perform better than mixed-sex groups, particularly in language arts classes (Biddulph, 1997; Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Sax, 2005). I wanted to discover whether gender separated classes would show promise for improving achievement and interest in novels for both girls and boys in this school and in this community. Because I did

not know these students, I consulted with the classroom teacher about whether she noticed a difference between boys' and girls' achievement and interest in this novel study. I also drew on my journal observations about how engaged the students appeared during their sessions working on the novel study.

My first three sessions were spent with the boys, who showed interest in the book and listened well when I read aloud to them the first day. On the second day, the boys spent time reading the book themselves. Some sat at their desks while others sat on the floor to read. I did not have any requirements about how they were to read. If they wanted to put their feet on their desks they could; if they wanted to lie down when they read they could do that as well. Within an all boys group I was able to allow the boys room to move when needed without complaints that they were bothering the girls. When boys and girls are in the same room I am constantly concerned about how students impact the learning of other students in the room. Gurian and Ballew (2003) wrote about boys' need for movement. "Movement seems to stimulate male brains and helps to manage impulsive behaviour" (p. 18). Again, allowing for movement during reading time challenges my expectations in the classroom. I did not say to the boys that it was okay to move around but I did not correct those who did. I was aware that I was continually redefining my vision of appropriate behaviour in the classroom. I had and continue to have a fear of the boys taking advantage of the situation and not getting any work completed as they move around the classroom. My fear may stem from my own feminized way of thinking which I am now able to reflect upon and address in my future teaching; a revised critical and feminist stance may reject gender-based fear and control in favour of developing a democratic sense of community in the classroom .

The third session with the boys began positively. They broke into discussion groups for about fifteen minutes. One boy arrived late and a group allowed him to join without incident. According to the classroom teacher, some boys were not always welcoming to other boys in the class but while working in a boys' only group they appeared more willing to be inclusive – perhaps because there were no girls to witness their displays of power and status seeking. The rest of the class time was used to work on their novel study booklets and to continue reading. Two boys told me that they were enjoying the novel. During reading time two boys were whispering in the back of the class while they were lying on the floor. One boy at the front of the room continued to “shush” them because they were distracting him from his reading. I did tell the two boys to separate because they were disturbing others. Noise during reading appeared to be a distraction to some boys.

When I worked with the boys' group, most boys continued to read for the first two or three days but I observed many who quit reading the book. I encouraged those boys to read the chapter summaries so that they could continue with working in their novel study booklets, but I did not observe any boys reading those chapter summaries. Those boys who quit reading the book generally did not distract those around them. They would sit quietly at their desks staring or just looking through the book. I would encourage these boys to read, and they would agree but would not engage with reading the book. I found this to be frustrating but I was not sure how to encourage these boys to read the summaries so that they could engage with their novel study booklets.

There may be a variety of reasons why these boys were not engaged with this novel study. I think some of the work that was required may have been too difficult, which was

frustrating for them. I talked with the teacher about these particular boys and she said that they both were on modified and adapted programs. I could understand how the platform booklets may have seemed overwhelming for these boys because of the quantity of work that was required. In the future, when I am in my own classroom, I would make modified booklets for these students so that they could work within the classroom, using the same novel, but complete work that is at their learning level.

The classroom teacher and I had difficulty assessing the quality of students' group discussions. Whenever I approached a group, whether it was boys or girls, the discussion would stop. I would stay near the front of the room and try to listen to their discussions but that was also difficult because the students would be talking quietly. The classroom teacher said that she also had difficulty listening in because of the same issues that I had. Because of these factors I was not able to assess whether boys and girls discussed different elements of the book or not.

In future, in my own classroom, I would certainly engage with students more during discussion groups. I would model a conversation about a book so that students understood my expectations. During the first few group discussions I would participate with the students. I would lead the discussions so that they could see how a novel can lead to deep connections with the world around them. I would develop a cooperative learning structure where someone in the group is responsible for reporting what was discussed. I would provide within the platform booklet space for students to take point form notes about what the group discussed and if they had learned something that they had not thought of before.

I think there is a preconceived notion that an all boys' class will be chaotic and noisy at all times. As I indicated above, some boys need absolute quiet while reading a novel so that they are better able to concentrate. Balancing the needs for all students is the challenge that intermediate teachers face on a daily basis. I believe an active classroom where productive work is being accomplished is different than a noisy classroom where students are off-task, or not engaging with the learning activities. As the classroom teacher, I would assume the authority of having students alternate between quiet independent times and more active group times. By setting up my classroom in this way, I believe this allows all students the opportunity to engage with their work and learn from their fellow students as well.

When I first began working with the girls group they quietly began reading the novel and working in their Platform Booklets. We were in a very small room that did not have desks. There was one small table in the room where three girls sat and the remaining girls sat on the floor leaning against the wall. One girl asked me to check her writing snippet to see if she had completed it correctly. I checked it over and discussed with her what she had done well and how she could fine tune her writing. She had not done the writing snippet the way I had intended so we discussed in more detail what made an effective writing snippet. When our conversation was finished she sat down to revise this writing snippet and continued to work on another. In a similar situation in future, I would discuss with her the criteria for the writing snippets. She could have compared her snippet with the criteria and discovered that she had not followed the criteria closely. I took too much control of the situation by talking with her about my expectations rather than using the criteria as the learning tool where she could take control of her learning. This art, the daily practice of

assessment to support learning and empower students, may be best learned by reflecting on interactions such as this one in collaboration with other teachers (Kaser & Halbert, 2009).

Again, I learned that I needed to include writing snippet examples within the platform booklets. I would teach the students by presenting three snippet samples to the class. I would then have students discuss which sample is best and what makes it so. Then we could generate criteria as a whole class. I now believe that if students are more involved with generating their own criteria, they will be more engaged with their learning and their work output will increase.

During my second session with the girls, they formed discussion groups and talked about elements of the novel. Most girls came prepared with discussion questions. After group discussions were finished each girl began reading more in the novel and working in her novel study booklet. No one had questions for me. They seemed engaged with their work. I use the word *seemed* because each girl had the novel open or had their novel study booklet in front of her. They were very quiet, but as I discussed earlier, a quiet student does not always mean a productive student. Because of the low completion rate for the Platform Booklets, I can make the assumption that being quiet was not an indication of a high degree of engagement.

The quiet students were the classroom teacher's biggest concern. When I asked her about whether she thought separating the boys and girls increased student achievement, she did think this was true for both girls and boys in the class. The classroom teacher commented on how easily the girls were able to work when they were away from the boys. Because of the large imbalance of boys to girls ratio, the classroom teacher observed that the girls were

less distracted from their work when they worked in the single gender group. Most of the girls in this class were students who achieved average grades but whose work habits were below average. That is, it did not seem as though these girls were realizing their academic potential, due to social distractions and perhaps the expectations of their community and their teachers.

The classroom teacher commented on how some boys were able to focus better without having girls in the classroom. She said that the behaviour of the boys improved and used the words “quiet” and “sat at their desks” to indicate better behaviour. I noticed the same kinds of behaviour from the boys when I first started working with them. However, as the sessions progressed I did notice more movement, louder talking, and more distraction. The boys tended to play with their materials while talking in small groups. Clay was one material that the boys liked to play with while they talked. At times I encouraged the boys to use their time to their best advantage because the due date was fast approaching.

When looking back to the proportion of girls who handed in a completed Platform Booklet, maybe being distracted by boys is not the only issue. If students are not motivated externally by grades or internally by engaging with the learning material, separating genders will not make a difference. I expected that achievement would increase because the boys and girls were separated but this was not clearly evident, although the classroom teacher believed there was some improvement in behaviour for the girls. The boys seemed less distracted away from the girls as well but the difference was not substantial.

When working with the boys, I found that they could be described in terms of two categories. One group was engaged with their work and talkative with their peers. The other

group was quiet and disinterested in the novel and the work involved. However, when the boys were working on the final projects I could see a different level of involvement. Many boys worked with the clay and sculpted a map that was a replica of the city of Ember. The interest of the boys increased when the writing was completed, as was evidenced by their grades. The average grade for boys' Platform Booklet was 70%. (This average did not include two zeros for the two boys who did not hand in their Platform Booklets.) The average grade for the final project was 87%. Unfortunately, there were three boys who did not complete a final project. I did not take those three zeros into consideration because this would not give a clear picture of the quality of work done by those who did complete the Platform Booklets.

The girls' grades were similar to those of the boys. The difference was that all ten girls handed in their Platform Booklets, although only 40% completed all required work. The average grade for the Platform Booklets was 69% for the girls and the average on the final projects was 80%.

Each girl completed her final project and three boys did not complete any final project at all. However, the boys who completed their final projects earned higher grades than the girls. When comparing the two gender groups, of those students who handed Platform Booklets in and completed their final projects, the boys, on average, achieved higher grades than the girls. These findings are not consistent with research by Biddulph (1997), who described a school with gender separation. The results showed that boys' grades increased dramatically: by 400%, and the girls grades increased as well, but the girls outscored the boys by a large margin (p.144).

There were varying degrees of effort evident in the final projects but the average grade for completed final projects was 81%. The boys used a variety of media to depict scenes from the novel or create a map of the city of Ember. Of the fourteen boys that completed the final projects, three did a diorama, one created a map using the computer, four used clay, three used clay and paint, two did a drawing and one used paint, pencil crayon and wrote a short paragraph. Of the ten girls, one made a diorama, five used clay, three drew a picture, and one wrote a summary.

When students were working on their final projects they worked in their gender separate groups and chatted with each other. Both boys and girls used the class time to their advantage and worked well with each other. Many students worked on their projects at home because they wanted to use supplies from their homes and they knew that they needed more time to finish their projects. When I evaluated students' final projects, I felt that there were no differences in quality between boys' projects and girls' projects. Both groups chose similar styles of projects and showed varying degrees of effort. One group did not stand out as choosing one particular final project activity over the other.

What is important though, is why it was only boys who did not hand in their Platform Booklets and did not complete their final project. These boys were disengaged from the beginning. During working time on the final project, one boy sat at his desk and stared at the front of the room. I looked at him but did not say anything to him. I shrugged my shoulders but did not want to interact negatively with this student. The challenge is to find ways to engage with students who do not care about the work that is assigned. I gave the students an opportunity to hand their Platform Booklets in one day early to earn bonus marks. I was

working with the girls' group when I thought about this so I told them first. They had no reaction. Then I stepped into the classroom where the boys were working with the classroom teacher and told them the same information. There were three boys whose hands shot up to ask how many bonus points they would get for handing the booklets in early. I did not tell them. I decided to give all the students an opportunity to earn bonus marks because I was interested to see if there would be a difference between the number of boys and girls in who handed in their novel study booklets early. There were three early submissions from boys, and none from girls. I was surprised by that. Then I had to stop and ask myself *why* this was surprising to me!

While I analyze this data, the central issue here may be one of motivation, complicated by gendered preferences and responses. There seemed to be little intrinsic motivation, either for boys or girls. I will discuss how I, as a teacher, can help reframe the experiences of students so that they may assume new ownership of their learning and their futures.

Behaviour in Gender Separate Classes

The classroom teacher said that there was a noticeable difference in positive behaviour with the girls. When they were working on their final projects they worked well with the materials and focused in on the task to be finished. I did not observe any girls playing with their materials. Sax (2005) wrote about improving effectiveness by teaching math to girls using manipulatives but teaching math to boys by using number theory. The boys use manipulatives as toys to be thrown around the classroom. I have made this same

observation through my years of teaching grade seven. Boys will turn just about anything into a toy, whether it's a paper clip, an eraser, a pencil or art materials such as clay.

I do not agree that boys should not use art materials but they need to be engaged in such a way that they do not feel they need to use play as a distraction from learning. Giving clear, concise criteria may help boys stay more focused on the task they need to complete. I did not include clear criteria for the final project for the students. I did explain that I would be looking for effort invested in their final projects. Most students who completed their final projects put in tremendous effort and their grades reflected that effort. However, current assessment practice questions the validity of grades received for effort, and teachers now are making a shift to assessing achievement of outcomes as evident in representations of student learning, such as projects. For example, I might have determined that accuracy and thoroughness of details from the novel were important criteria to show that reading comprehension was evident in the project. I may have added a third criterion for effective use of the chosen medium, drawing on outcomes from the visual art curriculum, such as contrast.

In my experience, discipline is a major concern for teachers of intermediate students. In the past five years of teaching, I have noticed that teachers spend many hours a week dealing with behaviour issues of students during class time. One afternoon when I entered the classroom, the environment was chaotic and noisy. The classroom teacher was using a classroom management method of putting marks beside names on the board. It took about five minutes to get the students ready for learning. I asked the classroom teacher if I could spend a few minutes discussing the students' inappropriate behaviour and she was willing for me to do so. By the time the students were ready to start learning, about ten minutes of class

time was gone. The problem of missed learning and teaching time may be the biggest issue that could be addressed if girls and boys were separated for at least part of their instruction during the intermediate years. Although the data showed little difference in achievement when boys and girls were separated by gender, there were substantial differences in behaviour.

Overall, the final projects were completed well without the aid of criteria; perhaps the students and I had a common understanding of quality for this kind of work. I did include many sets of criteria in their novel study booklets and this did not encourage them to do their best and complete each section. I can conclude that giving students specific criteria may not encourage students to complete their work. The type of assignment may be more important than having criteria included. If students are not interested in the work that is given or they think it is boring or beyond their abilities, it may not matter how specific the criteria is; the students will not learn as readily as if the assignment was something they were excited about.

To ensure higher achievement and interest from both boys and girls, the work needs to be of interest to the students and they need to see it as relevant to their lives and interests. The amount of work expected cannot appear so overwhelming that students feel they cannot complete the expected work load, so then quit. The work load needs to be manageable for all students in the classroom. Expectations can be different for some students: I am coming to the belief that equity is increased through differentiation. All students cannot be treated the same and differentiated instruction is something that teachers need to understand if they want students to be interested in learning. For example, there was more difference within the boys group than there was between the boys' and the girls' group, in terms of engagement and

achievement. Gender may be one of many considerations that influence differentiation of instruction.

Separating boys and girls for three weeks was not enough time to get a good sense of whether separating gender groups is effective for increasing achievement and interest.

Within the three weeks the biggest difference that the classroom teacher and I could see was that there were fewer behaviour issues within both groups. Gurian and Ballew (2003) wrote about the advantages of separating boys and girls during the intermediate years. “There are more conflicts when the genders are mixed. In single-sex classes, competition between the sexes is avoided. In classes by themselves, girls are better able to concentrate; they seem more focused. The boys work much better together and help one another more, and there are fewer discipline problems” (p. 172-173). I did observe this to be true for both groups.

I observed positive behaviour from the boys. One example of this behaviour is when one boy arrived late and the boys were already in discussion groups. One group was very welcoming to this particular boy, who was known to have difficulty relating to other boys in the class. They may not have been as welcoming if girls were in the room at the time. At times two boys worked together at the computer researching a topic for one of the challenge activities. While working on the final projects, most boys were on task and had few behaviour problems. While working with mixed groups of intermediate students, I have seen how boys will throw clay around and misuse their supplies. Gurian and Ballew (2003) wrote about boys this age focusing on girls and competing with other boys for the girls’ attention. I have observed this behavior and come to similar conclusions over my years of teaching. I did not observe any of this kind of behaviour in gender separate groups. The

classroom teacher was confident that the behaviour of the boys improved during this novel study. She also believed that the boys did not feel the need to perform for the girls and just concentrated on doing what needed to be done.

The girls also showed positive behaviour. There was one session when the girls were working in the library on their final projects where they started at separate tables.

Throughout the session, the girls gathered together at the same table. Two girls who had completed their final projects helped another girl paint the background of her scene. They chatted about a variety of topics but stayed on task throughout the hour long session.

Questionnaire Results

I wanted input from the grade six and seven students who participated in my novel study fieldwork. I gave them a short questionnaire after they completed the novel study booklet and final project. I asked the students if they preferred to work in all boy or all girl groups and why they did or did not. Seventy percent of the boys preferred working in an all boys group, 18% said they did not like it while 12% said it did not matter. The girls' responses were slightly different. Fifty percent of the girls preferred working in an all girls group, 30% did not like it, and 20% said that it did not matter to them. Some students gave poignant reasons why they would rather work in gender specific groups.

Boys' Responses to Gender Separation

The boys gave a variety of reasons why they liked to work with boys. Three out of the seventeen that responded used the words "quiet" and "less distractions" when the girls are not around. This response from these boys shows that they do want to focus on their learning and do not like to be distracted during class time. I believe that boys do want to

learn during school and appreciate a positive learning environment where they can focus on what needs to be done. It is also interesting that these boys considered the girls to be distracting. As educators we need to be aware that adolescent students can become intensely aware of how they interact within a social situation. When adolescent boys and girls are in the same classroom, more focus can be on social interactions than on the academic learning.

One boy mentioned how he liked working with an all boys' group because he does not get nervous when there are only boys around him. This is another indication that it can be difficult for adolescent boys to focus on tasks. During many novel studies, students are expected to join groups and discuss the literature. If some boys are nervous when they are put into groups with girls, they may not say what they want to say about the book. They become nervous and may react with inappropriate behaviour or not saying anything at all. The teacher sees these boys as trouble makers or boys who do not care about literature because they say nothing. These same boys may have deeper thoughts about the literature but become too nervous to have thoughtful discussions because girls are nearby. If boys and girls learned in separate gender groups, these same boys may show increased achievement and interest because they may be more willing to be themselves and share their ideas.

Boys like to relate to each other in a way that boys understand. Two boys said that they relate better to guys in the room than to the girls. Through this answer, these boys show an understanding that there are differences in social interaction between boys and girls. Many boys prefer to relate to each other through activity, while girls may depend more on conversation as a way to develop relationships (Sax, 2005). I did observe the boys involved in conversations with each other while working on their final projects. They would talk with

each other while molding clay, drawing their pictures , or constructing their maps.

One boy mentioned that girls just talk about “stupid stuff” and that was the reason he preferred to work in an all boys’ group. As teachers we need to allow for boys and girls to be different from each other. This boy’s opinion shows that he does not understand why girls talk the way they do. During adolescence, boys should be allowed to connect with other boys without the distraction of having girls around to discount what they say or what they do, and girls should be free of negative judgments and put downs. Tyre (2008) wrote about how boys felt when girls criticized them for giving an answer in class. “The girls in the fifth grade would talk about what kind of answer you write” (p. 215). If the boys feel they will be criticized by girls in the group, they may become reluctant to share their answers. If boys are not sharing their thoughts during class discussions, the teacher may make the assumption that they are not participating in class or have not done their assignment, which may reflect on their grades.

Not all boys like to work in all boys’ groups, although within this particular class only two boys out of the seventeen did not like only working with boys. One boy said that he felt uncomfortable and did not have a lot to talk about with the other boys. His statement is one reason why gender separate classes would not work for all students. Some boys do relate better to girls and would find it difficult to have to spend all classes with boys.

Girls’ Responses to Gender Separation

Girls from the grade 6/7 class from my fieldwork had responses similar to those of the boys on the questionnaires. Although the girls’ group is small, they gave some insight about their experience of working in an all girls’ group. Three out of the ten girls liked that it

was quiet and there were less distractions when working away from the boys. The girls did work very quietly and showed no problems with behaviour. I do want to reiterate the issue of quiet students. These girls did work quietly but only four out of the ten girls completed their novel study booklets. They liked the quiet but this did not necessarily encourage them to produce quality work, although all girls completed their final projects. The classroom teacher commented that the girls' behaviour was much better when there were no boys around. Although the girls' behaviour was better in a single gender group, it did not translate to higher achievement or interest in the Platform Booklets.

Sometimes girls want a chance to get away from the boys in their classroom. Two girls out of the ten who responded said that they preferred working in the all girls' group simply because they were "away from the boys." I think these girls may get tired of being around boys for a variety of reasons. Sometimes girls do not feel like they can be themselves when boys are around, especially at the age of 13. The atmosphere was one of relaxation in the girls' only group and this may be why these girls did not use the time to best advantage for learning. One girl who preferred working in the all girls' group made the comment that girls had a "different understanding than boys." Some girls would prefer to work with students with similar understanding and views. They may feel that this will decrease chances for conflict and behaviour issues. However, some girls did not like working in an all girls' group for the very reason that everyone agreed with each other.

One girl wrote that she did not like working in the all girls' group because there were "less perspectives" when boys were not around. She may have agreed with the girl who thought that boys and girls had a different understanding from each other. One girl liked it

when most girls had the same understanding but the other girl thought it was limiting. She may have wanted to have discussions with boys about their thoughts and ideas to better understand the world around her. This is an important issue. If girls and boys are surrounded by people with the same perspectives all the time, their educations will not be balanced and well rounded. This is where the teacher needs to aware that there are many perspectives and needs to consider when challenging both boys and girls to begin developing a more balanced view of the world around them.

One girl wrote about the loneliness she felt when working within the all girls' group and how she worked better with the boys. Just as one boy felt uncomfortable in the all boys' group, this girl had more in common with the boys. It is this discomfort and loneliness that is the biggest challenge for me when thinking about working with gender separate groups in the classroom. However, a classroom culture that respects differences and invites students to choose from a variety of options may allow individual students to access experiences that are engaging for them.

Reflecting on Gender Separation Responses

The boys' and girls' responses to the questionnaire showed that the majority of both groups either preferred to work in gender separated groups or had no preference. These students appreciated the quieter atmosphere and they were less distracted when working within their gender groups. The classroom teacher confirmed my observations for both groups.

Through these students' answers I can presume that other students may have similar responses. Boys and girls are aware that they interact socially in different ways. Some boys

relate to other boys easily because they have similar interests. These common interests allow boys to communicate with each other in ways that girls may not understand. If girls are not around to criticize the boys, males may be more open during discussion because they will not be nervous.

If boys feel discomfort or nervous around girls during adolescence they may spend more time thinking about how girls perceive them than working on their academic studies. School becomes a social institution where some boys may feel the need to perform for the girls or act out in inappropriate ways because they do not know how to deal with their nervous feelings. It may be important to allow boys and girls time away from each other so that both groups are better able to concentrate on their academic learning.

However, the small percentage of students in this class who did not like working in gender separate groups may also represent other students at this age. A boy may not connect well with other boys and feel like an outsider because he does not share similar interests with the majority. This holds true for some girls as well. If a girl does not fit in well with other girls, she may experience loneliness, as one girl mentioned. Girls may not be inclusive with nonconforming girls; I have witnessed exclusionary behaviours among girls over my years of teaching grade seven. Because this class had fewer girls, it became obvious when a certain girl was not accepted in the peer group. If there were more girls with a variety of personalities, loneliness may not have been an issue.

Boys' and girls' achievement and interest did not show any dramatic improvement that could be attributed to gender separate groups. The classroom teacher commented that she felt many students were engaged in the novel study, in particular the final project.

However, the students who showed interest and high achievement were the same students who showed interest and achieved high marks throughout the year.

The area that showed promise from students being in gender separate groups was in better behaviour, which holds true for both boys and girls. If students are better behaved in the classroom, learning should be easier for them and over time, could be expected to contribute to achievement. Through my fieldwork, I have broadened my definition of what constitutes good behaviour. A quiet student is not one that is necessarily learning and completing the task at hand. Good behaviour consists of asking questions, having open discussions with classmates, and showing interest in what is being taught. As Lezotte (1991) noted in his description of the *second wave* of school improvement, an orderly environment is more than the absence of negative behavior; effective learning occurs when students know how to help each other learn.

Separating genders for language arts may establish an effective learning environment for most students but separating genders may also be seen as sexist and promoting gender stereotypes. One boy mentioned that some people may find it sexist when boys and girls are separated in schools. If boys are only taught about war, fighting, and violence and girls are only taught about emotions, cooking, and love, then I would agree that gender separated classes may constitute a sexist environment. It is up to the teacher to provide a balanced program for both girls and boys. I believe that if boys and girls are taught in gender separated classes, they will feel more comfortable expressing themselves authentically and not have to feel like they need to uphold social expectations of male or female behaviour.

However, it is because of each individual students' needs that teaching in a way to include all students at all times is a continual challenge.

Chapter Summary

Teachers can influence their students within the classroom. Through my inquiry, experimentation, and reflection, I have come to understand that I need to provide students with an array of choices in activities during language arts. Although boys and girls chose many of the same types of activities during the novel study, I believe that the option to make those choices increased student interest in learning. Another way I influenced students was by discussing with students the expected behaviour during the novel study. If students do not know what is expected of them, they cannot meet those expectations. However, I also came to understand that expressing my expectations clearly may have inhibited the development of relationships I needed to have with students, as well as limiting the development of students' sense of ownership of the classroom environment and of their learning.

While analyzing my journal notes, I observed how many times I used the word "quiet" when describing the classroom. I came to the conclusion that a quiet classroom is not one that shows engagement with learning. The students were quiet but my assessment of their Platform Booklets showed a lack of work accomplished, which then contributes to a lack of learning. This was particularly true of two of the boys in this classroom. My desire for a quiet classroom was an indication of my teaching style and through this study I learned to be more flexible and to envision and appreciate a lively learning environment.

Overall, my analysis showed that more focused behaviour from both boys and girls was evident when they worked in gender separate groups, although the boys did not

accomplish as much as the girls in their platform booklets. There may be a variety of reasons for this such as students' chronic lack of interest in school , an undeveloped relationship with me because I was only teaching them for a short time, or a lack of confidence about what to do because I did not explicitly teach each section or provide examples. In subsequent classes that I am teaching throughout the school year, I will have opportunities to reflect on such causes, revise my teaching strategies and observe student responses, and interact with students to gain their insights on how their needs have been or might be addressed.

In this study, cycles of action and reflection allowed me to learn more about my own teaching style and my expectations of students. While journalling I learned about my need to become more interactive with all students and to show examples of expected outcomes during the novel study. In Chapter V, I will discuss how I will apply the learning from this professional inquiry to increase opportunities for gender equity for students in a language arts classroom.

CHAPTER V

INCREASING EQUITY IN LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

Teachers have a major influence on the learning atmosphere in their classrooms, although the influence that I had when I worked in the grade six and seven classroom was not the same as if I had been their classroom teacher the entire year. I constructed the novel study in a way that I hoped would pique their interest in reading, writing about and discussing the novel, *The City of Ember*. Vocabulary study and writing routines were built into the novel study unit as a familiar platform from which to investigate new content for each section of the novel. Although some students were interested in the work in the platform booklets, overall I would say that it was too repetitive for most of the students. Perhaps their engagement might have increased if the assignments were differentiated appropriately for their skill level, if students had built a history of success through self-assessment of their own achievement of outcomes, if our teacher-student relationship had been stronger. I realize now that I could have built student confidence with explicit teaching and guided practice before expecting independent work.

As a result of this study, I am more conscious of the impact of the decisions I make for teaching language arts, which include the reading materials that I choose, the type of written work that I expect, and the variety of activities and assessment strategies that I provide, as well as the relationships I am able to build with various groups of students. Inviting students to connect first with what they enjoy and then expand their understanding to a wider variety of novels is one way that I hope to increase gender equity and appropriate differentiation to all students in language arts.

After my *City of Ember* novel study was taught in the grade six and seven classroom, I can say that boys and girls chose a variety of activities that did not stand out in a gendered way. There was no great difference in choices of activities that the girls and boys chose and boys and girls did the same types of final projects as well. Both groups used a variety of media to depict the scenes or maps that they chose to make. Again, one medium did not stand out as preferred by either group. Although boys and girls did not chose different activities, I will continue to plan units that invite students to make choices. Providing opportunities for choice is another way that I can work towards increasing engagement and equity for all students in language arts.

Separating Genders

Although in this brief study separating genders did not result in improved achievement, there were many other factors relevant to achievement that a reflective, experienced teacher would address, including building confidence through material selected, differentiated assignments, and instruction and assessment strategies. Seventy percent of the boys in my fieldwork grade six and seven class preferred to work in a gender separate group. They were less distracted and liked to relate to other boys in their class. Fifty percent of the girls preferred working in gender separate groups for the same reasons as the boys. If boys and girls feel distracted by the other gender, teachers can assume that learning becomes more difficult for both groups. The main difficulty with separating genders occurred when boys and girls related better to the other gender group.

During discussions about literature, boys and girls may have different needs, as identified in other studies. However, the issue of separating boys and girls within a

classroom environment can be logistically difficult. I am the only classroom teacher and cannot leave students unsupervised. I have strong convictions about teaching language arts to boys and girls differently but I am also aware that I may not be able to separate boys and girls for instruction because of the constraints of the public school classroom. So, instead of focusing on separating genders during language arts as the only answer, I am going to use what I learned through my study to develop other commitments for shifting my practice toward more gender equitable language arts instruction.

My Commitments for Gender Equitable Language Arts

Gender equitable education needs to come to the forefront if we expect to see a decrease in the gender gap between boys' and girls' achievement and interest in language arts. The gender gap is increasing, yet many educators do not want to talk about the learning needs of boys. *The Vancouver Sun* published an article on Saturday, June 20, 2009 entitled, "Mind the gender gap in the classroom: Female students are leaving their male peers behind at a rate that is worrying some educators." Within the article Peter Jensen, a lawyer whose daughter was graduating from high school, noticed that most high school scholarships went to female students. He started to investigate why there are such differences in graduation rates and success between girls and boys. The author's opinion, as expressed in this article, is that many BC educators, including those in the Ministry of Education, do not want to discuss the gender gap. Not only do educators need to start discussing the needs of all our students but we need to begin taking some action in the classroom.

I see creating a more equitable learning environment for all my students as an essential part of my teaching role. Although I have always been an advocate for equitable

learning, I focused more on the needs of girls than boys. My views of the needs of boys has changed because of my study and what I have learned through my literature review. After learning about the experiences and preferences of these students who participated in this study and reflecting on my own learning, I want to make commitments to my practices when I enter my grade seven classroom in September.

Having different expectations for boys and girls can be harmful for both groups of students. I needed to challenge myself when I was surprised that it was *only* boys who handed in their novel study booklets early. If I only expect girls to get their work handed in early, my expectations may be limiting opportunities for success for male students. Having lower standards for boys is detrimental to their learning. Sax (2005) discussed the issue of how boys and girls are interested in different reading materials. This can lead to girls “reading John Steinbeck and F. Scott Fitzgerald while the boys are reading *Sports Illustrated*. Kids notice that contrast. Boys start to believe that maybe great literature is only for girls” (p. 111). If I just expect that boys are interested in *Sports Illustrated*, I cannot give them equitable literacy learning. I need to challenge my assumptions of what boys can be expected to perform and not be surprised in the least when they rise to the occasion. At the same time, I need to investigate why students of either gender remain passive and fail to complete assignments, not just at the end of a unit but in the process of each day’s lesson. Although the novel study that I taught during my field work was not the success that I hoped for, the action and reflection cycles of professional inquiry allowed me to learn about myself as a teacher and to come to a deeper understanding of the needs of my students. This is the

beauty of critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) and professional inquiry – the questions posed may not lead to expected answers, but the learning is nevertheless invaluable.

My commitments for encouraging gender equitable learning in language arts, described in more detail in the following sections, are as follows: I will do what I can to encourage all students to be engaged in their learning; I will become more involved with students; I will explicitly teach students so that they will understand what they need to do and will encourage them to understand the degree to which their efforts have been successful as they continue to work toward improvement. I will encourage a lively, productive working classroom where students feel free to discuss and work together to accomplish their learning outcomes. Above all, I will continue to think critically about my practice through the lens of power relationships in the classroom, endeavoring to learn to build an orderly environment conducive to learning that go beyond eliminating negative or off-task behavior, in what I think of as a shift from control to engagement. Next steps in my learning may be to reflect with other teachers sharing power with students through assessment for learning or to explore the effect of explicit discussions of gender rules with students.

From Control to Engagement

As a feminist teacher, I was surprised to discover how controlling I was with the students. I know through gender studies courses, that control and dominance of one group over another breeds oppression of the group being controlled. As I reflect upon my learning from this study, I can acknowledge that I thought that I, as the teacher, was supposed to control the students into doing what I expected. Of course, this does not educate the students, but encourages them to disengage from their learning. Any student who does not

feel a connection to what is being taught, or learned may disengage or misbehave or become quiet, in the hopes of being ignored.

This brings me back to me thinking that a teacher who is able to maintain a quiet classroom is a master teacher (Fenwick, 1998). Teaching based on that belief is all about controlling students' behaviour. I now believe that if students feel controlled by their teacher, they will not be as open to learning and they will not become independent learners which is what the Learners' Platform is supposed to evoke out of the students. In order for students to be authentically themselves, they must be given the opportunity to think for themselves without being controlled by their teacher and being told what to think.

Fenwick (1998) conducted a study that involved a group of successful teachers who taught adolescent students. "Teachers talked positively about discipline and their practice as disciplinarians, as something much different than stipulating regulations and enforcing student compliance through reward and punishment. The teacher does not impose discipline so much as become enmeshed within it along with the students. Mutual respect was both the compelling force and the implicit objective in classroom discipline" (§ 50) Fenwick quoted Ricardo, a teacher who participated in the study who explained, 'I have to respect that in being disciplined and in disciplining them, I am asking for their respect for others... That's what discipline is. It's not control, it's order. Order for others... Structure allows freedom'" (§ 50) I do believe that as I move away from controlling students' behaviour and work with students is creating management structures that they respect, they in turn will more readily be engaged in their learning.

It is difficult for me to admit that I was trying to control students into learning, especially when my feminist ideals have taught me not to control others around me. As I have become more critically reflective, my paradigm has shifted from power over the students to power with the students which I understand to be a feminist ideal.

Students need to be interested in what they are doing in the classroom. When students are not engaged, they will underperform academically. Interaction between teachers and students may slip into patterns of attempts to control met by resistance through misbehaviour or passive inaction. As a result of disinterest or unfamiliarity with school success, students may behave poorly during class time or sit and do nothing at all. However, aspiring to increase student engagement challenges my previous way of thinking. I have always thought that students should come to school to learn and I am there to teach, not put on a show to entertain my students. Now that I understand what engagement means to students and how other teachers have facilitated active learning, I agree that providing experiences that keep students interested in learning is an important part of my responsibility.

I have changed my outlook on what it means to have students engaged during lessons. I did not fully understand that student engagement was a crucial ingredient to student learning. I thought that if a student is attentive to me, the teacher, then the student must be learning. If the student is quiet during work time, the student must be learning. I no longer think of student engagement as chaos but as critical to a positive learning environment.

I may have missed opportunities to have a more engaging classroom because of my fear of confusion and chaos. Because of this fear and my assumption that to be a competent

teacher I needed to be the one in charge, I focused more on controlling student behaviour than on scaffolding their learning. I have always wanted my students to be engaged with their learning and develop deep-thinking discussions but I had difficulty in setting up structures and criteria that guided my students toward that goal. I am committed now to increasing equity of opportunity for success for all students by transitioning to a teaching style that emphasizes learning rather than teacher control.

My role as a teacher is to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn and to adjust my instruction until student achievement shows that the opportunities I provide have been effective. There are a variety of ways that learning can happen, which do not always involve sitting at a desk, writing on paper, or discussing how the student feels while reading a novel. I want my classroom to feel alive and be a place where students are excited to achieve their very best. Unfortunately, I do not think the novel study booklet I developed for *The City of Ember* helped to create that excitement for this group of students.

As a teacher, I need to be willing to change my approach to teaching language arts. If my end goal is to include all students and for students to become excited about what is being taught, then I need to listen to what students are telling me. Poor classroom behaviour is one way that students communicate with an observant and reflecting teacher. Failure to complete assignments sends a message as well. In future, I need to listen more closely to what students are saying and be willing to challenge my own preconceived notions of good learning.

I have believed that requiring large amounts of written output from students showed that they were learning. If students did not do their required work, I would become frustrated

with the students and attempt to control them through grades and consequences for poor work habits. I have a better understanding now, that quality work is more important than the quantity. If students are required to write in journals on a daily basis and they do not feel that there is an end result to that writing, they may not feel compelled to complete the assignment.

Teacher Interaction

As the teacher, I need to become more interactive with all students in the classroom. I believe that if students feel connected to their teacher they will become more productive and willing to learn. I will not sit at the front of the classroom, but will circulate through the room while students are working, or in discussion groups so that I can *see* and *hear* what they are doing, and can comment, encourage them, or let them know that they can ask me questions for guidance if needed.

Many times I would be sitting in front of the classroom, and would be available for questions, but many students would not approach me for help. Reflecting upon my strong role as a disciplinarian I may have discouraged students from asking me questions. I believe that as I become more involved with students' learning, they will also then feel more comfortable in asking me questions. I will change that practice when working in my own classrooms.

Admitting that I have not always interacted with my students during instruction is difficult but something that I need to address. Brookfield (1995) speaks of the difficulty of examining assumptions and confronting our own inadequacies: "Who wants to clarify and question assumptions she or he has lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find they

don't make sense?" (p. 2). However, there is also a great deal of satisfaction in embracing the mysteries of our own teaching and becoming agents in our own learning. I am focused now on celebrating the teacher I am becoming rather than mourning the teacher I was. I am transitioning into a more involved teacher who is an interested partner in their learning, I have confidence that students will become more engaged in their language arts learning. That will be my goal for my future classrooms. When I become more involved with my students, I am convinced that their learning will increase, as will their own engagement. Students will see my enthusiasm and involvement with their learning, and my hope then is that they become as enthusiastic and engaged as their teacher.

Explicit Teaching

Through what I learned in my fieldwork, I am committed to ensuring that students have an understanding of assignments before they attempt to do the work. Explicitly teaching intertwines with me becoming more engaged as a teacher as well. As I become more involved with teaching students, my hope is that the students will react positively to the assigned work.

I want to give all students the best opportunity to learn within my classroom. I feel confident that by explicitly teaching all aspects of a novel study and co-creating criteria with students most students will respond by trying to meet that criteria. When students feel involved in their learning they may become more successful and engaged with what they are learning. Developing a positive learning environment is also a role that I am committed to in the future.

A Lively Productive Learning Classroom

As a teacher, I have always had a good understanding of my own expectations in the classroom. I have always liked a quiet room, where students would be sitting at their own desks working on their own assignments. I believed that any teacher that was able to accomplish this type of classroom should be heralded as a great teacher! After completing my field work and literature review I no longer hold the value of “a quiet classroom is a productive classroom.” I am committed to creating a learning environment that is rich in discussions, movement and productivity. But most importantly, I want to foster a positive *learning* environment for each one of my students.

I will remember that a noisy classroom does not need to be a negative descriptor. By encouraging students to discuss books, and work on projects there will be noise. If students want to create a play or demonstrate their learning through various activities these tasks will require noise. As I mentioned in the section about student engagement, noise will be a part of showing understanding and learning within the language arts classroom.

Throughout my fieldwork and literature I have become transformed as a teacher. I have learned about myself and I have made commitments to becoming a more engaged teacher. The last section will show how I have become transformed and how I cannot go back to being the teacher I was before I began this professional inquiry.

My Shift of Thinking

I now have a better understanding of what it means to be an effective language arts teacher. The learning that I have acquired through my literature review and fieldwork has encouraged me to become critically reflective (Brookfield, 1995). My reflection is not

merely a technical one focused only on the day to day mechanics of teaching but also critical because I am concerned with larger issues of access within society for all students.

My shift in thinking began with understanding why I developed my orientation to controlling learning as well as behaviour. Through the behavior modeled by my own teachers and by my colleagues, I learned it was my job as the teacher to control the learning that needed to occur for each student. Students would then want to learn because I was telling them what to learn. As I reflected upon this way of thinking I am aware that I was part of a system that functioned to sort students rather than to ensure that all students had access to the benefits of society. This awareness of my role in maintaining an inequitable status quo has made me aware of other messages and my own ability to choose and shape my teaching role, in line with the kind of school system and the kind of society that I want to be part of.

Kaser and Halbert (2008) wrote about how some educators are changing their teaching so that students become more engaged with their learning. Kaser and Halbert wrote about educators in their study that were “interested in pursuing equity and quality outcomes simultaneously” (p. 56). Through my fieldwork I have shifted my way of thinking along with these educators. Not only has my thinking shifted but there is a larger shift in education generally that is moving away from sorting students but instead is focused on the learning of students.

I have a vision of what type of teacher I would like to be when I get back into the classroom. This vision includes being more aware of gendered learning differences in my classroom. I want to become more creative in developing Learners’ Platform Units so that

students do not become disengaged with the repetitive nature of *The City of Ember* novel study that I created. I want to learn more about creating a multimodal novel study and use that novel study in my classroom

I wanted students to enjoy the discussions that I included within the platform booklets. I did not explicitly instruct the students on what makes a good novel study discussion. I will show and teach my future students the qualities of a productive book discussion. I will start by using newspaper articles so that students can have debates over current events or popular culture. Students can discuss their favorite television programs and write about why they enjoy a particular program.

I did not expect to be challenged in my assumptions about the qualities of what makes a good teacher. When writing in my journal notes I continually wrote that students were quiet. The classroom teacher used the same vocabulary when describing hard working students, although she did mention her concern about those quiet students who sat and did nothing. I began to think about what a quiet classroom means. I started to do some reading of authors that I respected which allowed me to understand that a quiet classroom may be a classroom devoid of learning and life.

I want my classroom to feel alive and energetic. Adolescent students are filled with energy which should not be squashed by the teacher. Biddulph (1997) wrote about students who needed a passionate teacher and a positive learning environment in their school.

Some kids are more passionate than others. Their specific passions and talents (not just their testosterone levels) make certain kids itch to do something of significance, something real and socially useful or something really creative. If this vitality is not engaged with, then it turns into misbehaviour and troublemaking (p. 136-137).

Many students want to learn in an enriched, lively environment, but are not given the opportunity because of expectations of the teacher. Just because I prefer a quiet place to learn, that does not mean this holds true for the adolescent students I teach.

Lively and noisy does not equate chaos and disruptive. Some students do learn more effectively when their environment is quiet. I will ensure that there are times of quiet learning and lively, fun learning. I want my students to be excited about coming to school and to want to complete the work assigned. I will continue to push myself in delivering lessons that encourage movement and self expression.

Summary

When discussing action research in Chapter III, I noted that action research must contribute “actively and directly to processes of democratic social change” as well as generate valid social or technical knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p.3). I believe that I have achieved this goal by learning about how important it is for teachers to be aware of how they influence the learning of each student in their classroom, not just in the materials they choose and the way they design the lessons, but in the way they approach social interaction as well. I am one teacher within a large community of teachers. I have made a paradigmatic shift within the North American education system from sorting to learning, from exclusion to inclusion, from external to internal motivation, and from controlling to engaging all students, regardless of urban or rural residence, socioeconomic status, race, language or culture, or gender.

I believe that by developing novel studies in language arts that focus on equity for all students in the classroom social change will occur. Boys may become engaged in reading

and language arts and may see themselves as readers. This realization may contribute to more success in school.

My philosophy of how to teach language arts has drastically changed over the course of my study. I look forward to developing new book studies that I can use in my classroom. I can take what I have learned and apply my learning to a real classroom. As a teacher I am always learning and adapting to my environment and I will be committed to continually learning about the needs of all my students.

The basis of my study can be summarized by Rush, Eakle, & Berger (2007), “reaching out to all learners is not just a responsibility of educators, parents and community members; it is a moral obligation to assure equitable treatment to all individuals in a democratic society so they can become productive citizens” (p.3). I began my study and fieldwork thinking that I would learn more about how to provide optimum learning in language arts for boys and girls. I learned that students and teachers are a part of a larger system and that through critical reflection I can work within the system to provide an equitable learning environment for all my students.

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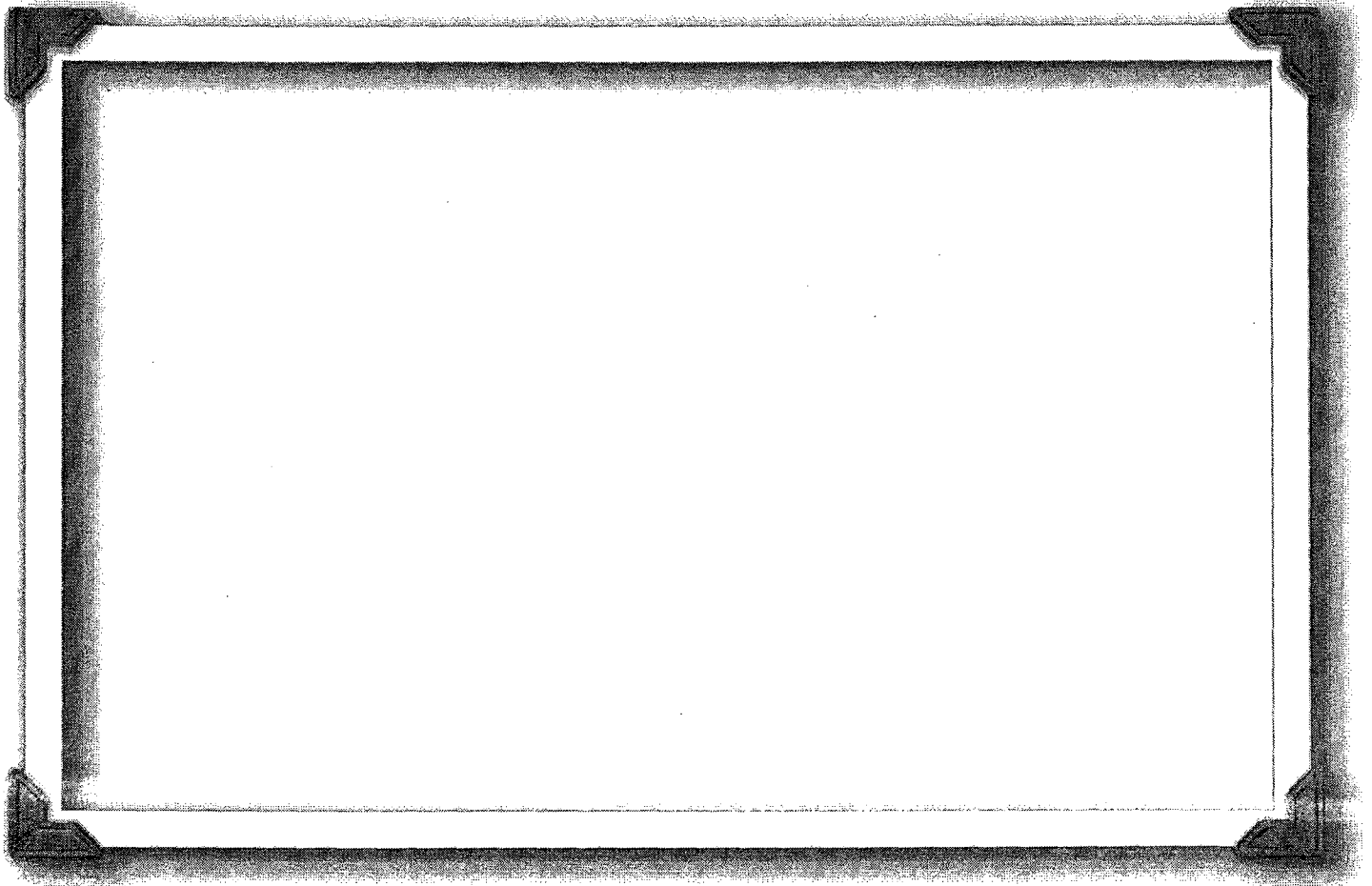
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Novel Study: The City of Ember

By: Jeanne DuPrau

Complete the title page with a drawing or anything that you think represents the story.



Name: _____

Due Date: _____

UNIT GRADE: Platform Book & Challenges = 70%
Final Project = 30%

About this Unit...for parents and students

Reading a novel can allow students a variety of learning opportunities. While students read *The City of Ember* they will enter a world that is different than what we know. The citizens depend on electricity for light, and the generator is failing. Two twelve year old citizens, Lina and Doon, are determined to find a way to save Ember. The story revolves around a mysterious message from the past, friendship, the human dependence on light and human determination.

In this unit, the students will be responsible to read the novel themselves. About three weeks will be devoted to the entire unit so chapter summaries have been included for students that have a difficult time keeping up with the pace. There are four main components to the novel study which includes vocabulary work, group discussion, daily writing and short challenge projects. At the end of the novel there will be one final project for students to show their understanding through creativity.

There will be many choices for students within the group discussion, challenge projects and the final project. Giving students choice allows them independence in their learning and they will then become more engaged in what they learn. As the students progress through the unit, they will be expected to come up with many of their own ideas of projects and discussion questions. While students read the novel, by coming up with more of their own activities, this shows a deeper understanding of what they read. The purpose of this novel is to encourage students to become engaged in their learning and to participate in activities that are most meaningful to them.

Ms. Susan Euverman, MA Candidate, UNBC

LA/City of Ember Novel Study- Platform Book Table of Contents

Lesson Title	Platform Book Pages	Date Completed	Parent or Mentor's Initials
Vocabulary Ch.1-5			
Group Discussion Ch.1-5			
Writing Snippets Ch.1-5			
Challenges Ch.1-5			
Vocabulary Ch.6-10			
Group Discussion Ch. 6-10			
Writing Snippets Ch.6-10			
Challenges Ch.6-10			
Vocabulary Ch.11-15			
Group Discussion Ch.11-15			
Writing Snippets Ch.11-15			
Challenges Ch.11-15			
Vocabulary Ch.16-20			
Group Discussion Ch.16-20			
Writing Snippets Ch.16-20			
Challenges Ch.16-20			

Basic Platform Work:

C= $\frac{45}{70}$ Add _____ for challenges,

Subtract _____ for incomplete work=Platform Book Grade

70

Record of Challenges Completed for this Unit

Challenge	Date Submitted/ Presented	Parent or Mentor's Initials
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

LA/ CITY OF EMBER: Developing Vocabulary Chapters 1-5

Students will:

→ use the features and conventions of language to express meaning in their writing and representing

Developing vocabulary should be a life long skill. When students enrich their vocabulary they will become better writers, readers and thinkers. If students are encouraged to “own” the words they read, they will be better able to communicate their thoughts and feelings to those around them.

Please replace the highlighted word with a word or phrase that does not change the meaning of the sentence.

Students will use context clues to help in their understanding of the word. Sentences before and after the indicated sentence may need to be read to get a better understanding of the word. Dictionaries will not be used during this part of the unit which includes Chapters 1-5.

Pg. 11 Pipeworks laborers worked below the storerooms in the deep **labyrinth** of tunnels that contained Ember’s water and sewer pipes.

Pg. 13 Then he **stalked** back to his desk and flung himself down.

Pg. 27 From the clock tower of the Gathering Hall came a deep **reverberating** bong.

Pg. 29 “What you need to learn, children,” she always said, in her **resonant, precise** voice, “is the difference between right and wrong in every area of life.”

Pg. 29 “My confidence in you has been seriously **diminished** since I heard about the **disreputable** activities in which you engaged on Thursday night.”

Pg. 40 A **raucous clamor** filled the room.

Pg. 41 After a moment a man emerged from the **throng**.

Pg. 44 Puddles stood on the floor of the tunnel, and water dripped in brown **rivulets** down the walls.

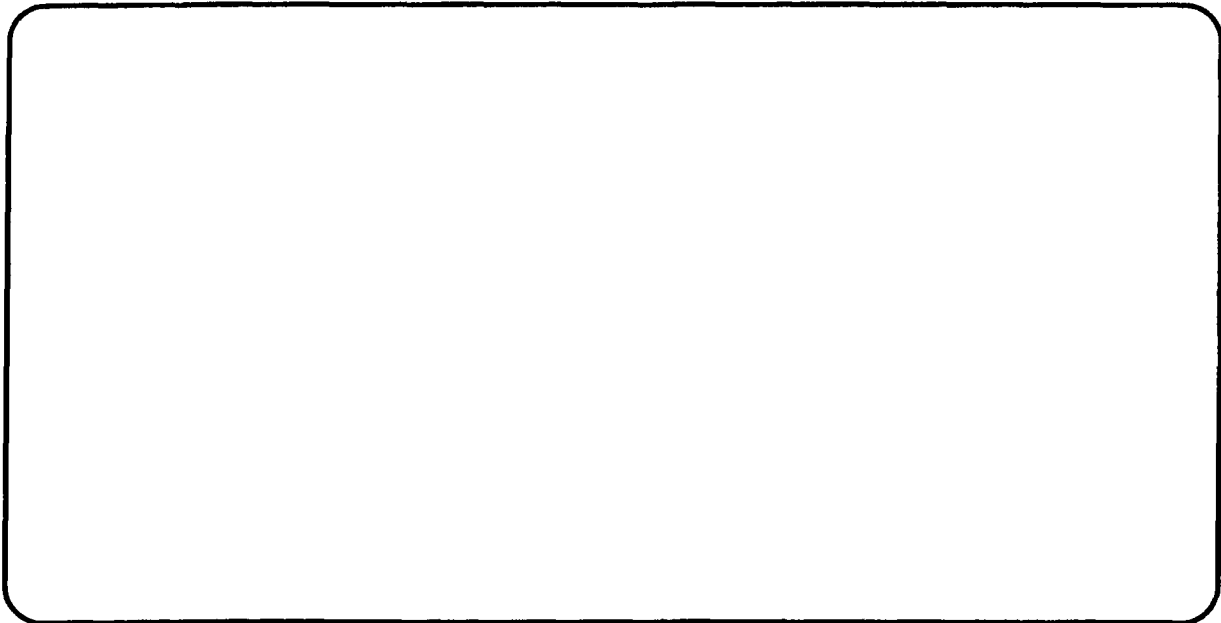
Pg. 55 She found Poppy sitting on the floor of the shop, **enmeshed** in a tangle of yellow yarn.

Pg. 58 Every day a team of people **methodically** sorted through the trash heaps in search of anything that might be at all useful.

Pg. 77 They were hers now; she felt a **fierce, defiant joy**.

Pg. 79 In the distance someone called out **Incoherently**.

Doodles, ideas, thoughts....



LA/CITY OF EMBER: Group Discussions Chapters 1-5

Group discussions enhance students' understanding of what they read. They can ask questions to their classmates for clarification, or reinforce their thoughts as they hear other responses. While discussing a novel, they may be able to make connections to the world or personal experiences. Discussion may aid in thinking about a topic in a new way, something that the student may not have thought of before.

During the group discussions, students can get into groups that range in size from 4 to 6 students. Each student needs to come to group discussions prepared to talk about something related to the book. Questions for discussion will be provided, but students are expected to formulate their own questions while they read.

After each group discussion, each student will complete a self reflection on how well they think they participated and added to the discussion.

Students will be able to:

- ➔ use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of :
 - ➔ discussing and analysing ideas and opinions
 - ➔ improving and deepening comprehension
- ➔ select and use various strategies when interacting with others, including :
 - ➔ making and sharing connections
 - ➔ asking questions for clarification and understanding
 - ➔ taking turns as speaker and listener

Prepared Questions:

Chapter 2:

1. Lina had fallen out of the habit of friendship with Doon. Do you think some friendships become habits? Why do we stay friends with the people we do? How does friendship change over time? When a new friend shows up, does that change your current friendships? How? (pg.21)
2. The author uses the light and dark imagery in this chapter. What do you think that means? What does light and dark represent?
3. What do you think is in the Unknown Regions?

Chapter 3:

1. Doon was having a discussion with his father about working in the Pipeworks. His father says, "What you get is what you get. What you *do* with what you get, though...that's more the point, wouldn't you say?" What do you think Doon's father meant by this? What do you think Doon will with his job in the Pipeworks? (pg.51)

Chapter 4:

1. Have your ideas changed about what is in the Unknown Regions? What are two possibilities?
2. Why do you think some residents of Ember are curious about the Unknown Regions while most people do not care about knowing?

Chapter 5:

1. What do you think Granny is looking for? What clues did the author give in Chapter 4? (pg.70)
2. Lina desperately wanted to buy coloured pencils. She overpaid to buy two of them. What is something you have always wanted and would pay just about anything to get? What do you think about Lina's decision to buy the coloured pencils? Was it too extravagant or do you think it was justified? (pg.76)

Student's Questions:

[illegible]

How do you think you did during the group discussion?

Criteria		Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) ✓ Fully participated in each discussion group ✓ Shared the connections I made while reading the novel ✓ Did not interrupt at any time while someone else was speaking 					
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) most days ✓ Mostly participated in each discussion group ✓ Shared some connections I made while reading the novel ✓ Sometimes I did interrupt at while someone else was speaking 					
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Came to group without prepared question(s) ✓ Did not participate in each discussion group ✓ Did not share the connections I made while reading the novel ✓ Interrupted while someone else was speaking 					

Student Comments:

Doodles, ideas, thoughts....

LA/City of Ember: Writing Snippets Chapter 1-5

There is a strong connection between reading and writing. In order to develop writing skills there needs to be practice. The way you will practice your writing is with short snippets that you will work on each day. These snippets will be 3-5 sentences ONLY. You will start with a topic sentence, then give one or two details and end with a concluding thought. The more snippets you do, the better writer you will become. This is the criteria you will use for Chapters 1-5. Here are some of my suggestions:

Chapter 2:

Think about how we develop habits. A habit can be something good for you, or a negative habit. What are some of the good habits you have developed? What about some that you would like to change?

Chapter 4:

Is electricity a renewable or nonrenewable resource? What do these terms mean? What is the difference? Do you think we will run out of electricity?

Do you think we could survive without electricity? What 5 things would you miss the most? What kinds of entertainment would you look that does not use electricity?

What do you imagine is beyond our own galaxy?

Would you want to go beyond the Earth to see what is out there, or are you content with staying home and learning from what other people say? (pg.67)

The student will:

→ use writing and representing to extend thinking by:

- developing explanations
- analysing the relationships in ideas and information
- exploring new ideas

→ reflect on and assess their writing and representing, by

→ relating their work to criteria

Can you come up with some of your own?

Criteria (A)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
3 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in all snippets		
6 or more snippets		
Variety of informational and relational topics		

Criteria (B)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
2 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in most snippets		
3-5 snippets		
Some variety of informational and relational topics		

Criteria (C)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
1 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in some snippets		
1-2 snippets		
Little variety between informational and relational topics		

LA/City of Ember: Challenges Chapter 1-5

Students will:

⇒select and use various strategies during writing and representing to express and refine thoughts, including:

⇒accessing multiple sources of information

⇒consulting reference materials

⇒use writing and representing to extend thinking, by:

⇒exploring new ideas

⇒developing explanations

I. Give step by step instructions explaining how a generator works. You can research using any method you like. Please indicate where you found the information.

II. Trash sifter is a new job that has been created in Ember because of need. Research online 3 brand new jobs that have been created in the past 10 years. Choose one to write a detailed description to present to the group. Why was this job needed in today's society?

III. What group of people discovered fire? (Look in Grade 7 Social Studies text book to get started). How did fire change the life of these people? Give four different ways life improved for this group of people.

IV. Who invented the light bulb? The flashlight? Using a diagram, show how a light bulb or flashlight works. Remember to label your diagram.

V. Is electricity a renewable or nonrenewable resource? What do these terms mean? What is the difference? Do you think we will run out of electricity? Do you think we could survive without electricity? What 5 things would you miss the most? What kinds of entertainment would you look that does not use electricity?

What challenge(s) did you choose and why?

LA/City of Ember: Vocabulary Chapters 6-10

Continue to develop your understanding of the vocabulary in the next five chapters. Choose a partner to work with and discuss what you think the meanings of the words are. Again, write down a synonym for each word on the blank line. Use context clues to help in your understanding. Please indicate who you worked with during your vocabulary development.

Students will:

- ➡select and use various strategies during reading and viewing to construct, monitor, and confirm meaning, including:
 - ➡figuring out unknown words

My partner's name: _____

Pg. 85 The next day a notice appeared on all the city's **kiosks**.

Pg. 87 The mayor's voice kept coming in blasts of **incomprehensible** sound....

Pg. 103 This word is **illegible**, that word is **illegible**, these numbers are **illegible**. It's his favorite word, **illegible**.

Pg. 112 She **vaguely** recalled the **incident** of the light pole.

Pg.118 ...someone had left a dishtowel too close to an electric burner on a stove, or a cord had **frayed** and a spark had flown out and **ignited** the curtains.

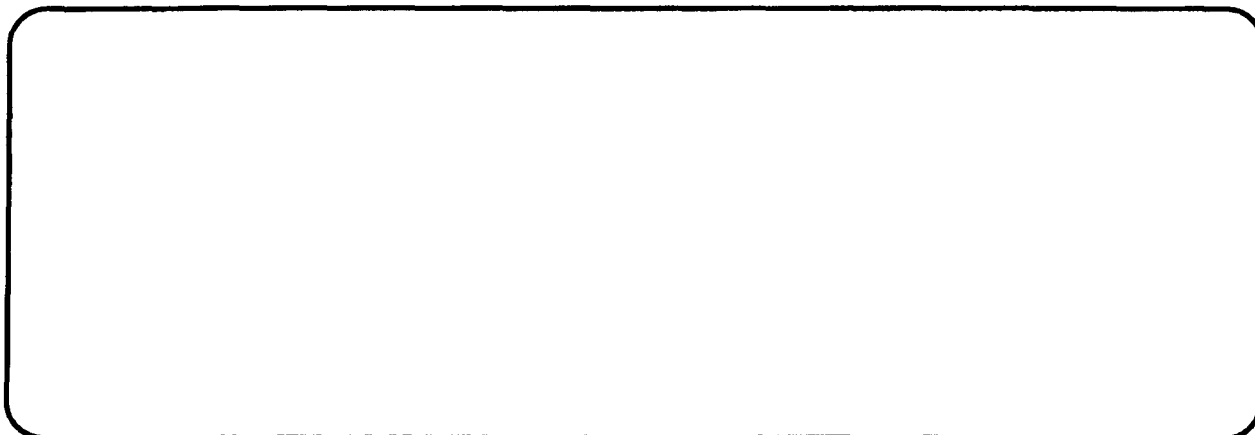
Pg. 122 He looked around, and Lina felt suddenly **self-conscious**, seeing her room through his eyes.

Pg. 122 On the wall, clothes hung from hooks, and more clothes were **strewn** untidily on the floor.

Pg. 131 A couple of guards, in their red and brown uniforms, **ambled** across the square, laughing.

Could you find any other words that you did not know the meanings of while you were reading these chapters? If so, write the sentence below and the synonym as well.

Doodles, ideas, thoughts....



Students will:

- Continue working on developing your discussion skills and writing your own questions. Sometimes it can be difficult to stay focused while having discussions with classmates, so you will be monitoring how well you do stay on topic during these chapters. Again, you will fill out the criteria, indicating how well you think you did around you. You will also write one sentence at you did.

1. Why weren't people talking about this blackout the same way they had previously? What do you think was different this time? (pg.84).
2. What do you think Doon's father meant by "When anger is the boss you get unintended consequences." Look up any words you do not know the meaning of to help in your discussion.

1. Who do you think Lina and Doon saw come out of the door? What do you think is behind the door? (pg.131)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a vertical margin line on the left side, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard ruled sheet of paper.

Student's Questions:

Criteria		Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) ✓ Always stayed focused during discussions ✓ Always avoided distractions during discussions					
B	✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) most days ✓ Mostly stayed focused during discussions ✓ Mostly avoided distractions during discussions					
C	✓ Came to group without prepared question(s) ✓ Was not focused on topic during discussions ✓ Was distracted during discussions					

Why I gave myself the Grade I did:

LA/City of Ember: Writing Snippets Chapter 6-10

Continue writing each day. You will still be writing 3-5 sentences for each snippet. Be concise with your words. Maybe look at some of the vocabulary you have learned and use those words in your writing. There are not so many suggestions for ideas, so you will be responsible to come up with your own. The more ideas that you come up with, the more interesting your writing will be. Write about topics that are interesting to you. Jot down ideas while you are reading so that writing the snippets will be easier for you each day.

Students will:

- use writing and representing to critique, express personal responses and relevant opinions, and respond to experiences and texts
- reflect on and assess their writing and representing, by:
 - relating their work to criteria

Chapter 7:

Has there been a time in our history (past 100 years) that goods were rationed? When was this? Who decided the amounts that people received? Do you think this could happen again as the world populations grow and the environment is changing?

If you found something that you weren't sure about, who would you talk to? Would you talk with anyone? (pg.98)

Is it difficult for you to keep secrets? Do you like to share your secrets with anyone? Who is that person?

Can you come up with some of your own?

Criteria (A)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
4 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in all snippets		
6 or more snippets		
Variety of informational and relational topics		

Criteria (B)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
3 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in most snippets		
3-5 snippets		
Some variety of informational and relational topics		

Criteria (C)	✓ Student	✓ Teacher
2 of your own		
topic sentence (1), body of paragraph (1-3), conclusion (1) in some snippets		
1-2 snippets		
Little variety between informational and relational topics		

LA/City of Ember: Challenges Chapter 6-10

Here are more suggestions for challenges for you to work on. Please feel free to come up with some of your own. You will need to get your topic approved by a teacher before you get started. Coming up with your own challenges shows that you are connecting with the novel while you are reading. Making connections to what you read shows that you are engaged and learning while you are reading the words on the page.

Students will:

⇒select and use various strategies before writing and representing, including:

⇒generating, selecting, developing, and organizing ideas from personal interest, prompts, texts, and/or research

⇒create meaningful visual representations for a variety of purposes and audiences that communicate a personal response, information, and ideas relevant to the topic, featuring:

⇒development of ideas by making connections to personal feelings, experiences, opinions, and information

I. Has there been a time in our history (past 100 years) that goods were rationed? When was this? Who decided the amounts that people received? Do you think this could happen again as the world populations grow and the environment is changing?

II. Create a secret code that needs to be decoded. You may want to check the grade 7 Social Studies textbook for ideas from ancient Egypt.

III. How do libraries organize their books? Can you easily find books? Do you prefer fact or fiction? When looking for a book in the library what are the steps you need to take? Please write down a list of the steps you took to find a book about electricity. Then write the bibliography for that book.

IV. Find the meanings to the four phrases on page 120. Then come up with one of your own.

Your own ideas:

LA/City of Ember: Vocabulary Chapters 11-15

Students will:

- ➡select and use various strategies during reading and viewing to construct, monitor, and confirm meaning, including:
 - ➡figuring out unknown words

There are only five vocabulary words given. This time it is up to you to find five of your own. Please write the sentence and page number where the sentence came from, underline the vocabulary word, and give a synonym for that word. You are encouraged to write the words down as you read them. If you find it difficult to find words that you do not know the meaning, think about words that may be difficult for someone else to understand.

Pg. 148 It was the best meal Lina had had in a very long time-but her enjoyment of it was **tainted** just a little by the question of where it had come from.

Pg. 157 Often they didn't even come out into the street but **beckoned** to a messenger from their doorway.

Pg. 170 Lina saw that Clary was no better at **deciphering** the puzzle than she was.

Pg. 177 He would choose a place he knew well-the school, for instance-and imagine himself walking through it, picturing it as he went in **minute** detail. NOTE: *Watch for the pronunciation of this word!*

Pg. 209 She pictured **frenzied** crowds of people, and Poppy tiny and lost among them.

Now your own:

1. _____

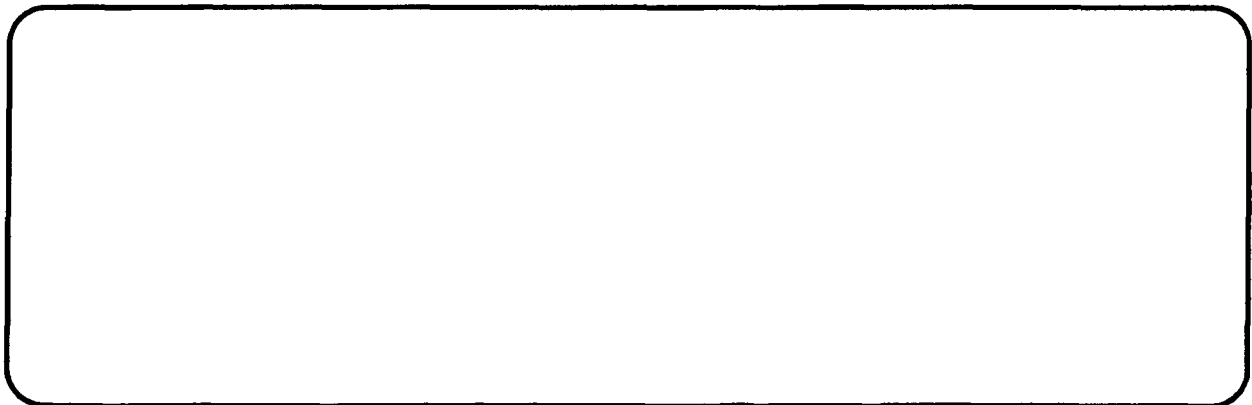
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Doodles, ideas, thoughts....



LA/City of Ember: Group Discussion Chapter 11-15

Reading a novel can give you the ability to learn more about yourself, or the world around you. Some questions that are given to you, are not only about what is happening during the story, but are questions that *come out of the story*.

During groups discussions try to focus on getting a deeper understanding of what you are reading.

Come up with some questions that the group can discuss that goes beyond the story.

While reading the novel, what are you thinking about? Jot some notes down for discussion. The more you discuss the novel with your group, the better understanding you will have about topics you think about while reading.

Students will:

⇒ use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of:

⇒ discussing and analysing ideas and opinions

⇒ improving and deepening comprehension

Chapter 11:

1. "The day had a strange but comforting feel to it, like a rest between the end of one time and the beginning of another." What do you think the author is telling us? (pg.141).
2. Is what Looper doing, actually stealing? Who is he taking these things from? (pg.151).

Chapter 12:

1. Should Lina and Doon tell anyone about their discovery? If so, who should they tell and why?
2. Why is the mayor hoarding the goods? Should anything happen to the mayor? Is there anyone who has authority over the mayor? When people in power do not follow the rules/laws what should happen? Who has power over these people?

Chapter 13:

1. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you would do *anything* to get it? (pg. 168)
2. What do you think Doon's intention is of finding a way out of Ember? Does he just want to be a hero or does he just want to help the people of Ember? Think of celebrities during your discussion. How far do some people go to get fame? Think of reality tv.

Chapter 15:

1. If Doon told his father about what was found, what advice do you think his father would give to Doon? (pg.195).

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a vertical margin line on the left side, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard ruled sheet of paper.

Criteria		Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
A	✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) ✓ Gained a better understanding of myself/world ✓ Contributed to the learning of others					
B	✓ Came to group with prepared question(s) most days ✓ Gained some understanding of myself/world ✓ At times contributed to the learning of others					
C	✓ Came to group without prepared question(s) ✓ Did not gain a better understanding of myself/world ✓ Did not contribute to the learning of others					

LA/City of Ember: Writing Snippets Chapters 11-15

During these chapters you will have more responsibility in coming up with ideas you want to write about. This time, the length of your snippets is up to you. While you are reading jot ideas down that you can write about after your reading for the day. Your criteria will be based on the amount of writing that you do. The more you write, the better you will become at writing. Work on keeping each snippet focused on your chosen topic. There are a few suggestions to get you started.

Students will:

→write a variety of clear, focussed personal writing for a range of purposes and audiences that demonstrates connections to personal experiences, ideas, and opinions, featuring:

→clearly developed ideas by using focussed and useful supporting details, analysis, and explanations

Chapter 11:

Are there circumstances where stealing is okay? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

Chapter 12:

How do you know when you can trust someone?

Chapter 13:

Is it possible to do something good, but for selfish reasons? Give an example. (pg.176)

Chapter 15:

The author has chosen to use the colours green and blue through out Lina's story. She picked the blue and green coloured pencils, and her new room is green and blue. What do you think is the significance of these colours?

Criteria (A)	Criteria (B)	Criteria (C)
15 or more snippets	8-14 snippets	Less than 8 snippets

LA/City of Ember: Challenges Chapters 11-15

Students will:

→use writing and representing to extend thinking, by:

- developing explanations
- exploring new ideas
- generating, selecting, developing, and organizing ideas from personal interest, prompts, texts, and/or research

Choose from any of these challenges, or if you can come up with your own, that is even better. Remember to write down any challenges that you do, on the record sheet on page 4.

I. Investigate 3 different types of farming methods, using three different countries. Give three details about each farming method, including what is grown.

II. Is there enough food grown to feed the planet? What country consumes most of the food? What country grows the most food?

III. Research genetically engineered food. Give three details about genetically engineered food. Do you think it is a good idea? Would you eat genetically engineered food?

IV. Did it seem strange to you that Lina and Doon did not know what matches and candles were? Please give clear instructions to someone who has never used an object that you are familiar with. Some ideas are how to download songs to your ipod, how to install and use a video game, how to put your hair in a pony tail. Try to come up with one of your own. Hint: Maybe illustrations would help as well. (pg.189).

V. What is the scientific name for someone who studies bugs? Choose one type of insect and draw a detailed picture, using only scientific names while you are labelling its parts. (pg.197)

VI. Write a short biography on an Explorer. You must use one book and one web site. Please include a bibliography. (pg.201).

VII. What are the origins of the song "Rock-a-bye-baby?" Write out the words to the song, what culture it comes from, and a short history to the song. (pg.202).

LA/City of Ember: Vocabulary Chapters 16-20

All the vocabulary is now up to you. Please write down the page number and sentence with the vocabulary word underlined. This time you will rewrite a new sentence using your vocabulary word to show that you understand the meaning of the word. Please find **five** vocabulary words. If you find any extras, you can earn bonus points.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

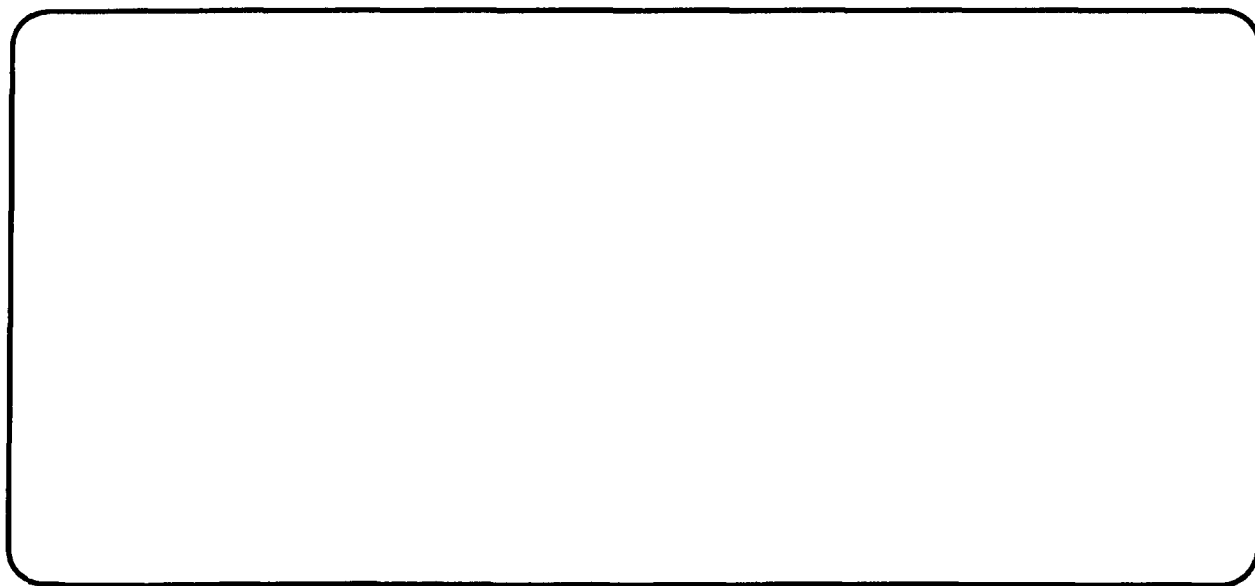
7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Doodles, ideas, thoughts....



LA/City of Ember: Group Discussion Chapters 16-20

While coming up with questions for discussion, it is important to think about the *kinds* of questions you will use. Adrienne Gear has come up with two types of questions; quick questions and deep-thinking questions. For this last section of group discussion questions you will be coming up with some deep-thinking questions. Here is a list of ideas that will help you come up with deep-thinking questions:

- *answer is not in the book
- *answer comes from you ("I think...", "Maybe...")
- *often there is no one right answer
- *usually leads to more questions
- *help us think beyond the story
- **need to matter*

(this list is taken from Adrienne Gear's Reading Power: Teaching students to think while they read, pg. 61).

Students will:

- ⇒use speaking and listening to respond, explain, and provide supporting evidence for their connections to texts
- ⇒use speaking and listening to improve and extend thinking, by:
 - ⇒questioning and speculating

During group discussions for the last few chapters of the novel, you will be responsible to come up with topics to discuss. You will be graded on the types of questions that you use. There are a couple of questions here to get you started. Remember to jot down questions while you are reading.

1. What does the mayor mean by "Curiosity. A dangerous quality. Unhealthy." (pg.217). Do you agree or disagree? Can curiosity be both a positive trait and a negative trait at times? Give an example of each if you can.
2. Can there be negative consequences to keeping secrets, to being the centre of attention? Give examples.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a vertical margin line on the left side, creating a narrow left margin. The paper appears to be from a notebook or a standard ruled document.

City of Ember Novel Study 29

LA/City of Ember: Writing Snippets Chapters 16-20

Students will:

- ➔ write a variety of imaginative writing for a range of purposes and audiences, including short stories, passages, and poems modeled from literature, featuring:
 - ➔ strategically developed ideas by using interesting sensory detail
 - ➔ effective word choice by using purposeful figurative and sensory language with some sophistication and risk-taking
 - ➔ an organization that includes an enticing opening, followed by a purposeful sequence of well- developed ideas that lead to an imaginative or interesting conclusion

For the last section of writing snippets you are required to come up with the ideas you would like to write about. It is best to jot down ideas while you are reading and complete a short snippet each day. This time though, you will take one snippet from this section and write a full paragraph about that topic using 10 or more sentences. You will be graded on the organization of your paragraph and that all sentences relate to your topic sentence. Come up with a topic sentence that is interesting and use language that displays strong imagery for the reader. End your paragraph with a fantastic conclusion that makes your reader want to keep reading your work.

Criteria (A)	Criteria (B)	Criteria (C)
10 or more snippets	5-9 snippets	Less than 5 snippets
Topic sentence "hooked" the reader	Good topic sentence	Short topic sentence
All sentences focused on topic sentence	Some sentences wandered off topic, but most stayed focused	Most sentences wandered off topic
Conclusion was interesting	Good conclusion	Short conclusion, or no conclusion
Used 3-4 strong images	Used 1-2 strong images	No strong imagery used

LA/City of Ember: Challenges Chapters 16-20

1. Write a song or poem about one of your favourite places you've been. (pg.222).

II. Choose any character and draw a WANTED poster. Think about the qualities that person would be “wanted” for.

III. Who wrote our national anthem? Write out the words and draw symbols that represent what the words mean to you.

Can you come up with some of your own?

[illegible]

City of Ember Chapter Summaries

Introduction:

The mayors of the City of Ember have kept a secret for many years about a box and what is contained inside. The last mayor to see it took it home to reveal for himself what is inside, but could not open it. He died, and the box was forgotten in his closet. The box was ready to reveal itself, and opened.

Chapter 1: Assignment Day

When students are 12 years old, they graduate from school to take on their role of worker within Ember. The jobs are randomly drawn by the students. We are introduced to the two main characters, Lina and Doon. Lina chose Pipeworks Laborer and Doon chose Messenger. Both Lina and Doon were extremely disappointed. After they left the classroom, Doon asked Lina to trade jobs and she said yes. Doon wanted to learn more about the generator and had ideas about how to fix the problems of the electrical outages.

Chapter 2: A Message to the Mayor

Lina lives with her Granny and baby sister Polly. Both parents have died. Lina is excited about her first day as messenger. She has rules to follow when giving and receiving messages. She loves the running and is feeling the best she has felt in her life. The last message of the day that Lina needs to deliver is to the Mayor from some weird looking guy. The message is "Delivery at eight. From Looper." While waiting for the mayor in The Reception Room, Lina began wandering around and found a door that led to some stairs. She went up the stairs to another door which led to the roof. She could see all of Ember and some people saw her and cheered and waved. The guard came and got her off the roof. Lina delivered the message to the mayor, who told her to stay out of trouble.

Chapter 3: Under Ember

Doon starts his job in the Pipeworks. He is fascinated by the massive river that flows beneath the city. His job is to repair pipes in the tunnels. He hears the generator and wants to see if he can figure out how it works. Once he sees it, he realizes that the generator is much more complicated than any other machine that he has fixed. He goes home where Doon lives with his dad. He found a worm a few days ago which is he keeping in a box. The worm has grown twice its size in the past few days. Doon is determined to find something important to do in the Pipeworks.

Chapter 4: Something Lost, Nothing Found

Granny is looking for something that is lost, but doesn't know what she is looking for. Her memory is failing and Lina is worried about Granny taking good care of Poppy. Lina went to deliver a message to Clary, a friend of hers from the greenhouse where her father used to work. As Lina was about to leave, Sadge came stumbling forward, weak and talking about the Unknown Regions and how dark it was. Clary and Lina discuss how life starts and how electricity works and what they imagine to be in the Unknown Regions.

Chapter 5: On Night Street

Lina heard about a store that sold coloured pencils and she wanted to see if she could buy some. She brought Poppy with her and left Granny at home. The store owner is Looper, the man who sent the message to the mayor a few weeks ago. He wanted five dollars for each pencil and Lina knew that was way too much to pay. She bought two anyway, a blue and a green. When Lina was ready to leave, Poppy had disappeared. While looking for Poppy, there was a blackout and Lina was petrified that she would not find Poppy. Finally, she did find Poppy. Doon saw her and brought Poppy into his dad's shop so that she would be safe.

Chapter 6: The Box in the Closet

The blackout lasted for seven minutes which is twice as long as any other blackout. The mayor called for a town meeting. He told the townspeople to not be afraid, do not panic and that solutions would be found. Doon was angry about the mayor's message. Lina went home to find Granny ripping the closet apart. There were piles of old things all over the place. Poppy was playing with a box. Lina looked inside and saw nothing. She found a piece of paper on the floor with writing on it.

Chapter 7: A Message Full of Holes

Lina tries to decipher the message on the paper. She writes a note to the mayor about the paper that she found but does not hear back from him. Food is being seriously rationed at this time. Lina begins to figure out some important words of the message. She thinks that it has something to do with instructions in the pipeworks, the river and a door. She decides to get Doon to help her.

Chapter 8: Explorations

Doon explores the Pipeworks and finds a door with a sign saying "caved in. No entry." He goes in anyway and finds a door that is locked. He also discovered a hatch in the ceiling of a tunnel but could not reach it. He could not find anything that was important to solving the crisis of Ember. He went to the library to find information about fire. Fires are not set deliberately in Ember, but Doon wanted to find out if he could make fire last so that he could explore the Unknown Regions. He could not find anything that would help.

Chapter 9: The Door in the Roped-Off Tunnel

Lina shows Doon the message and he agrees with her that the information looks important. They decide to go into the Pipeworks and look at that locked door behind the "No entry" sign. The door is still locked. They hear foot steps and a scraping noise coming from inside. They run out of the tunnel, but wait to see if they can find out who the person is behind the door. They see someone, but only his back, a dark coat and dark untidy hair. He walked with a lurching motion that looked familiar to Lina. Doon and Lina think that this person will tell the mayor what he found and will become a hero. Lina is more curious than ever to find out what is behind that door.

Chapter 10: Blue Sky and Goodbye

Lina stays home with Granny because Granny is very sick. Lina takes good care of her and Poppy. Lina and Poppy drew pictures with Lina's two coloured pencils. Lina draws a picture of

buildings and decided to colour the sky blue. She imagines what a real blue sky would look like. During the night Granny is calling for Lina. Lina lays with her for a while, then Granny tells her that she can go back to her own bed. In the morning, Lina had a scary feeling come over her. She went into Granny's room and Granny had died during the night.

Chapter 11: Lizzie's Groceries

Lina has moved in with Mrs. Murdo and feels safe and cared for. Lina went back to work and spotted Lizzie, a friend whom she went to school with. Lizzie pretended she didn't see Lina and kept on walking. Lina pulled at Lizzie and cans of food dropped out of Lizzie's coat. She had peaches, creamed corn and applesauce. Lizzie let Lina keep the peaches and creamed corn and ran home. That night Lina had the best meal of her life. The next morning Lina talked with Lizzie about where she got the food. She lied about finding it in the storeroom where she worked. Finally Lizzie told Lina that Looper was giving her the food that he found in old rooms. Lizzie wants Lina to keep quiet and offers to let her have some of the food as well. Lina says no, because she doesn't like sneaking around when no one else in the city gets any of the food.

Chapter 12: A Dreadful Discovery

While working in the Pipeworks, Doon went to check out the mysterious door again. There was a key in it, so he walked in. He couldn't believe what he saw. There was stacks of boxes with canned food, clothes, jars, bottles and light-bulb packages. There was someone in there and Doon couldn't believe who he saw. He ran out to find Lina. He told Lina that the mayor was in the room surrounded by food and light bulbs. They were not sure who to tell, but decided on telling Barton Snode, the assistant guard. They told him what the mayor was doing, he jotted down a couple of notes and said that the guards would handle the situation. Lina and Doon left the Gathering Hall feeling confident that justice would be served.

Chapter 13: Deciphering the Message

Lina decides to tell Clary about the mayor and about The Instructions. Clary was able to figure out the title. She suggests that the title of the message is Instructions for Egress, which means instructions to exit. Lina is excited that it may be possible to get out of Ember. She quickly goes to tell Doon about The Instructions. They both go back to Lina's room to try to figure out more of the missing message. They are both convinced that there is a way out. They are not sure what they will find but want to find it and tell the city at the Singing.

Chapter 14: The Way Out

Doon discovered the rock marked with an "E" so Lina went with him to the Pipeworks while the townspeople were practicing their Singing. Lina brought The Instructions with her and consulted them to help them along the way. They found the ladder and got down beside the river. They found a door that they finally opened only to discover a completely dark tunnel. They slowly walked down until they found two boxes that they brought out of the tunnel to discover that they found "matches" and "candles." They did not know what these were, but did figure out that match could ignite and light the wick on the candle to have "movable light." They made their way down the tunnel and found a boat and paddle, that they did not know what to do with either. They looked

at The Instructions and decided that the boat was something to ride down the river as a way to leave Ember.

Chapter 15: A Desperate Run

Doon and Lina discovered that there were many boats that the townspeople could use to leave Ember. They decided to wait until the night of the Singing to announce what they had found and that the mayor had been deceiving everyone. The next morning Doon was getting packed for the journey when he saw two guards asking one of his neighbours if she had seen Doon. They needed to find him because he was “spreading vicious rumors.” Doon realized the guards would be looking for Lina as well, so he quickly ran to her house. They decided to hide in the school until the Singing began. Doon thought that he and Lina should leave a note explaining what they had found and that he and Lina should go down the river themselves. They decided to write the note to Clary and leave it at her house. Lina was to deliver the message and Doon would wait at the school for her. As she was running to Clary’s house, two guards spotted her and chased after her.

Chapter 16: The Singing

Lina tried to run away, but the guards did finally catch her. They brought her to the Gathering Hall so that the mayor could decide what to do with her. The mayor said he had to make decisions for the people for their own good. The mayor told Lina that she would be going to the Prison Room, and so would Doon when he was found. The lights went out, and Lina made a run for it. She escaped and ran to the roof. The lights came back on and she could see the crowd below beginning to sing. As the people were singing the last song, the lights went out again. Lina saw a light moving and knew that it was Doon going towards the Pipeworks. Lina decided what she needed to do. The lights came back on, and she waited to see Poppy and Mrs. Murdo.

Chapter 17: Away

Doon was heading towards the Pipeworks when he finally saw Lina. Lina had Poppy with her to take along on their trip out of Ember. They went back down the ladder and to the boat. They loaded up the boat with the supplies they brought. They did not know what to do with the paddles because they had never seen them before. Lina and Doon got the boat into the river and tied it up so that they could get in. Doon got in, took Poppy and Lina got in last. The boat was rocking in the waves of the river. Doon pulled the ropes free and the boat started to move.

Chapter 18: Where the River Goes

The river current was extremely strong and Doon, Lina and Poppy had to hang on tightly while the boat was being thrashed around. They finally came to a place in the river where it was calm so Doon lit some candles. They were still in a tunnel. Finally they came to the end of the river where the boat could not go any further. Lina got out of the boat to see if there was a way out. She did find a path. Doon went to check it out as well. Poppy was chewing on something, which was a book. It had messages that looked like could have been written by someone else who left Ember, or maybe was from someone who was going to Ember. They got their supplies ready and headed down the path.

Chapter 19: A World of Light

Lina, Doon and Poppy walked up hill for a long time. It was very dark, so they used three candles so that they could see where they were going. Finally, Lina could smell something different in the air. They looked up and saw thousands of little lights in the sky. They could not see any other light in the distance, a city or people. They sat down and noticed that the darkness was beginning to change. The sky became coloured with yellows, and reds until it was completely light. Doon and Lina saw something flying around and did not know what it was. Lina remembered the book. She opened it up and read what was inside.

Chapter 20: The Last Message

The book was a diary written by a 60 year old woman. A group of people had gathered together and were going into a new underground city because the city they were living in was unsafe. Each couple received two babies to raise as their own. They headed into darkness into boats, and that is where the message stopped.

Lina and Doon thought there may be another way to get to Ember. They searched for a while in the warm air. Lina found a hole to squeeze into and called for Doon. He brought a candle so they could see. They looked down and saw light, it was Ember! They were too far away to call down for anyone to hear. They decided to write a note and put it with the note Lina forgot to bring to Clary. Doon wrapped it in his shirt and threw it down into Ember.

Mrs. Murdo was walking in the street and something landed beside her. She picked it up and began to untie it.

FINAL Questions for Students!

Male or Female?_____

What did you like about his novel study?

What didn't you like about the novel study?

Did you like working in boy/girl only groups?	
--	--

If yes, why?	
---------------------	--

If no, why not?	
------------------------	--

If you did not get the novel study completely finished, please tell me why.
