

Authentic Literacy in the Classroom:
America and Middle East Connections

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

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April 2011

Authentic Literacy in the classroom

Authentic literacy in the classroom is becoming a more common practice amongst educators. Research has indicated that activities which center around real-world experiences can increase student motivation, literacy learning, and instill a purpose for learning rather than instruction which is centered around isolated activities with no real purpose or relevance to their real lives. Middle Eastern culture and relevant literature were used in this study as a focus on implications of authentic lessons to foster connections between American students and the Middle East, increase student motivation, and track changes in previously held biases. The results of this study suggest that authentic literacy can be used to support literacy processes, increase student motivation, and shift student thinking towards a more tolerant and open-minded view of societies in general.

Authentic Literacy in the Classroom: America and Middle Eastern connections

A common complaint or challenge that is faced with school teachers and authentic literacy is the lack of time allowed between the standardized tests and core curriculum, lack of support from administration (in order to permit students participation in authentic activities), and most commonly- teachers do not know how to implement it in the classroom and make it part of their daily instruction. According to Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau (2007) the question most frequently posed amongst educators is, “what combination of experience and explicit instruction best facilitates when new language forms?” (p.8). Authentic literacy has several definitions attached to it, but all explanations describe students engaged in classroom activities that serve a social purpose. Purcell-Gates et. al (2007) define authentic literacy activities as, “a.) reading and writing of textual types or genres, that occur outside of a learning –to-read- and-write context and purpose...prototypical authentic texts would include such written genres as novels, news articles, fliers, memos, health procedures, greeting cards, and so on- all of the text types read and written by people as part of their social and cultural lives” (p. 14-15.)

Often times, student’s instruction centers on isolated activities with no real purpose or relevance to their real lives. Students quickly forget the material taught, or become bored and disengaged. This can manifest itself in lack of student motivation during the school day, and create a sense of detachment from academics and producing quality work. Therefore, my research will be exploring various methods of application in the classroom and the true value of authentic literacy to support student learning and motivation.

What is authentic literacy?

In order to grasp a deeper understanding of ‘authentic literacy’, it is important to identify what authenticity means. Ableser (2008) defines authenticity in activities as “including both processes and products that involve real-life experiences” (p. 75). Duke et al., (2006) define authentic literacy activities as, “those that replicate or reflect reading and writing activities that occur in the lives of people outside of a learning-to-read-and-write context and purpose” (p. 346). As teachers, by showing our students the relevance of their activities and lessons to the ‘real-world’, we can foster deeper connections to their learning, and prepare them to participate in genuine societal practices, in which they can see more clearly a purpose in their reading and writing. These activities are opportunities for students to engage in events that they could do outside of the classroom. This is what is meant by authentic or ‘real-life’ educational activities and instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Applying what we know about literacy directly affects our teaching practices. Being aware of who our students are as people- their backgrounds, culture, passions, families- enables teachers to apply these practices in the most constructive and beneficial way. There are many different theories in literacy today from which to analyze and evaluate our teaching practices and the implications in the classroom (Kucer, 2005; Wolfram, 2002). Larson and March (2005) define literacy as a, “critical social practice constructed in everyday interactions across local contexts” (p. 3) Larson and March’s use of the word ‘interacting’ is an excellent description of how children participate in meaningful ways with literacy events.

The theory that closely aligns with my practices and research question is the Sociocultural theory perspective that, "...learning is inherently situated in social, interactional, cultural, institutional and historical contexts, and constitutes the context of learning in which teachers and students construct authentic opportunities for learning" (Larson and March 2003, p. 110; Putney et. al 2000). Authentic literacy activities correlate with the Sociocultural theory on teaching because it, "presents a culturally focused analysis of participation in everyday life, both formal and informal learning settings, that offers teachers and researchers a way to meaningfully use or analyze students' practices in the classroom or research project" (Larson and March 2006, p. 101).

In addition, authentic learning activities that are centered around this theory allow children to construct and add to their pre-existing knowledge when they have opportunities and instruction that is relevant to their own lives. In order for them to not have an isolated view of teaching and lessons, they need to see that their learning is providing insight and knowledge into experiences outside the classroom (Purcell-Gates et. al 2007). Sociocultural theory is embedded in the belief that children are social learners: their environment, social practices, cultural values and traditions effect how they interact with new knowledge. Furthermore, many researchers connect sociocultural theory to the belief that, "knowledge is not abstract but rooted in context and culture- that is, it is situated...Situated learning emphasizes the need for students to be provided with the opportunities to participate in activities which are relevant to the application of learning, and which take place within a culture similar to the applied setting" (Choo, 2007, p. 187; Lave, 1988; Lave and Wegner, 1991).

Exposure to different cultures, experiences in life, solving real-life problems, inquiry based instruction, encouraging children's questions and ideas, and addressing real life obstacles and dilemmas- makes children eager to come to the classroom because they know they are gaining valuable knowledge that is retained and then used in their lives as needed (Steiner, Nash, and Chase 2008). In addition to the sociocultural theory being a foundation of authentic literacy activities, it also is based on the child's experiences and interactions with people in their lives. It depends on the context in which they are gaining knowledge. Duke et. Al (2006) explain that, "these contexts make a big difference in learning, and this it is difficult to transfer learning to new contexts. Language is best acquired within functional contexts" (Duke et. al 2006, p. 345; Gee, 1992; Lemke 1994; New London Group, 1996; Reid, 1987).

The child's discourses and language is dependent on their culture and upbringing. A parent's attitude towards school and education, positive, negative, or indifferent, can affect the child in enormous ways. As educators, we have the ability to compensate for parents that may have (unintentionally) 'turned off' their children to the love and appreciation of reading or simply provided little to no exposure towards it. Children are aware early on in their lives that the adults surrounding them are experiencing a world which they are not yet a part of, and this curiosity builds up within them (Kucer, 2005). Children recognize that the world is filled with communication and, "language facilitating the interactive process among individuals. Once again, the child experiences the socializing effects of language not only personally, but also vicariously as language as a social vehicle is used among others in the immediate, observable environment" (Kucer, 2005, p. 251). How adults treat this curiosity affects children's attitudes and beliefs towards literacy and overall education. Children who have parents that over-emphasize

form or structure, rather than meaning, develop language more slowly. When a parent is constantly having a child imitate or repeat words and phrases - the child does not understand the context of when to use the language and often do not respond to this direct instruction (Nelson, 1973; Kucer, 2005).

Children discuss what they are surrounded by, and if they are surrounded by literacy events, various forms of print, and literacy experiences in their every day environment, it helps them value and appreciate reading long before they reach school age (Goodman 1984). These literacy interactions influence their, "...belief in their ability to learn to read and write" (Goodman 1984, p. 318). Shirley Brice Heath (1982) says that as children experience reading books with their parents, they have also learned to "listen, waiting for the appropriate cue which signals it is their turn to show off this knowledge. They have learned the rules of getting certain service from parents (or teachers) in the reading interaction [process]" (Heath, 1982, p. 78; Merritt, 1979). These are social cues that children are learning and engraining which make them more apt to function 'appropriately' in classroom and real-world settings.

If the child has a purpose in their learning, as authentic literacy activities provide, they are more apt to responding to activities that make sense to them, and can help them relate to their own cultures and backgrounds. Barnitz (1994) reiterates this importance and describes the research Robisheaux (1993) conducted on Hispanic students. These students had the risk of, "successfully complet[ing] a program in English as a Second Language but [could] fail in the regular classroom not because of a language barrier, but because their non-Hispanic teachers were not aware of the important cultural differences" (p. 587). Sociocultural theory has the underlying principle that a child's background and culture is inevitably intertwined and directly related to their purpose and attitude towards

learning. Authentic literacy has demonstrated its' effectiveness with students from all backgrounds and tapping into their interests and passions. Therefore, teachers have the great responsibility to use the literacy research, authentic activities, and multi-cultural literature, to differentiate for each child depending on their background and proficiency. Kucer (2005) believes that, "development typically continues through the course of one's life as long as literacy is encountered and used in new or novel ways" (p. 250). These 'new' and 'novel' ways are to be taught and facilitated by teachers and educators based on relevant research, current literacy theories, and allocate new literacies to enter the classroom (ie: technology).

Research Question

Authentic Literacy is becoming a popular 'buzz word' in the education field and is gaining frequency in discussion amongst educators, principals, and researchers. What exactly is authentic literacy? Why has it become so crucial in effective instruction? What are the implications from teaching authentic activities and how does it ultimately prepare our students to become more proficient in literacy? Given that sociocultural theory aligns with many principles of authentic literacy instruction, the action research project asks, what do authentic literacy activities look like in the classroom and how do students respond to these activities?

Review of Literature

There have been hundreds of peer-reviewed journal articles and research conducted on authentic reading and writing activities that argue the case for it and how implementing these activities in our instruction can ultimately help children solve real world problems, increase student motivation and become independent learners (Ableser,

2008). In my research paper, I will identify components of explicit instruction and authentic experience instruction in the classroom, how they correlate with one another and effective teaching practices to implement both methods. In addition, authentic literacy tasks to support literacy processes, including projects that are inquiry based and child-centered will be examined for their value and relationship to authentic literacy instruction. Finally, given that classrooms are incredibly diverse, and students learn in a multitude of ways, authentic literacy practices that support diverse learners will also be analyzed in my research findings.

Explicit instruction versus authentic experience

Applying authentic literacy activities in the classroom can be implemented in many different ways and across the content areas and curriculum. Educational reformer Schmoker (2007) argues that effective, authentic instruction is not as challenging as some teachers may fear (VanDeWeghe, 2008). Teachers also contend that it is nearly impossible to implement authentic literacy events in the classroom when standardized testing, test score accountability, data driven administrations and “content heavy curriculum...[are] often identified as the culprit[s] that hampers implementation of holistic and integrated learning” (Choo, 2007 p. 202). However, Eileen Eckert and Alexandra Bell (2004) poignantly refer to many teachers adopting a “one size fits all” policy in their classroom which leaves no room for differentiated instruction, meeting individual student’s needs and “cannot have the desired effects of enabling adult learners to achieve the work, family, and community goals they set for themselves when they participate in [authentic] activities” (p. 178

Instructors who adopt one method of literacy versus another typically have a philosophy behind their teaching and instruction. An underlying principle of sociocultural

theory is that students add to their pre-existing knowledge when have access to instruction and classroom activities which pertain to their own lives. An observation was conducted on two different teachers in the upper elementary grades who implement a schooled literacy approach versus situated literacy. Powell and Davidson (2005) refer to the comparison between ‘schooled literacy’ and ‘situated literacy’. The biggest difference between these two literacies is situated literacy being “embedded within real-world events [and] as a medium for genuine communication...[while schooled literacy] is taught as a neutral tool, i.e., as a series of skills or processes that can be mastered and later retrieved” (p. 249). Teacher One has his/her students read a book, discuss vocabulary terms, take notes during lecture, and respond to short-answer comprehension questions afterwards. The assignment point value is emphasized. Teacher One “teaches directly through definition and application and holds students accountable through homework and quizzes. Students read to find answers to questions” (VanDeWeghe, 2008, p.105). In this same study, Teacher Two approaches a challenging book with his/her students with subtle but enormous differences than Teacher One, according to Schmoker (2007). Teacher Two, “invites students to speculate on what an allegorical name might mean and tries to make reading assignments connect with students’ thoughts and beliefs” (p. 105). Teacher Two poses controversial questions about the book before reading and allows students to read with a purpose to help shape their opinions and beliefs. Teacher Two also provides opportunities for students to share their personal connections, argue their viewpoints, and explore their interpretations of the text (VanDeWeghe, 2008). They are engaging in authentic literacy and learning for a purpose that connects with real-life applications.

Schmoker (2007) believes that many teachers misuse valuable instruction time on, “activities that have marginal effect on literacy development” (VanDeWeghe, 2008, p. 106). He argues that no matter what the teacher’s purpose is - increase reading levels, raise standardized test scores, or improve skills and strategies, the surefire way to accomplish these goals (and more) is to provide, “straightforward literacy instruction- that is, by having students read many interesting texts, create arguments based on evidence from those texts, and write to explore understandings, refine interpretations and bolster those arguments” (VanDeWeghe, 2008, p. 106). Schmoker acknowledges that repetition and drilling of facts and concepts can cause test scores to have a “short-term boost but then test scores eventually plateau. We have yet to learn that thoughtful reading, writing, and discussion, and redundant abundance, promote faster, more enduring achievement gains on state assessments than quick-fix approaches (VanDeWeghe, 2008, p. 106). However, according to Purcell-Gates et. (2007) and Gee (2000):

The failure of the addition of explicit instruction to authentic immersion to show and effect in this study also adds badly needed empirical information to the ongoing discussion of how language forms, discourses, and genres are best learned...To conclude that explicit instruction, writ large, is best for language learning is premature. Language learning is not one-dimensional but multidimensional. There are many types and dimensions of language knowledge- oral and written genres that each requires pragmatic knowledge that is socially and culturally specific and determined (p. 41).

As educators, the forefront of our instruction should be guided by students’ individual learning needs, cultural backgrounds, and aspects of their literacy that are developed and not developed. This can be determined through a variety of assessments,

observations, and teacher expertise and knowledge. Through this knowledge acquisition, research, and professional development opportunities, we can determine the best approach to enhance student learning and ultimately make them independent readers and problem- solvers. A teacher's instructional purposes can co-occur with students' authentic purposes (Purcell-Gates et. al, 2007). Having new approaches to learning is crucial in preparing students for our ever-changing, fast paced society, where nothing is predictable when we walk out of our classroom doors.

Professors in secondary schools are teaching their students that, "alternative curricula maximize the educational possibilities for those learning to teach...and in teacher education programs that seek innovation and value student ownership [a key component of authentic literacy] it is important to understand students' perspectives as they make sense of their educational experiences" (Fang and Ashley, 2004, p. 45). Part of a research study done in a secondary education facility, was placing 28 pre-service teachers in a tutoring capacity with younger students who struggle with various elements of reading comprehension. Much alike to our own experiences at St. John Fisher, pre-service teachers stated that, "it was extremely beneficial to assess an actual child's literacy potential, instead of using examples on worksheets" (p. 45). In regards to formal assessments, "teachers might supplement assessments of how well students understand content with assessment of how they apply what they have learned to situations in their everyday lives" (Eckert and Bell 2007 p. 185). We need to recognize where our students' abilities lie and identify their strengths and areas of need. Many teachers lose sight of the end goal as educators, to shape our students into critical thinkers, who can solve real-life problems using skills and strategies independently. By incorporating authentic literacy projects, field trips, challenges, and purpose for their learning- they realize the value of

their education as a citizen in society, not just as a student. (Ableser, 2008; VanDeWeghe, 2008).

In correlation with not teaching authentic activities in the classroom, for certain teacher's defense, some wish they were able to implement the authentic literacy approach in their classroom and lesson plans, but feel they do not have the time with the state department, administration, and curriculum supervisors breathing down their necks and demanding higher test scores and reading levels. Ableser (2008) says that some teachers claimed, "it was not their responsibility as teachers to focus on social and emotional development but only to teach the content areas (Ableser, 2008, p. 74). Teachers also expressed a fear of not feeling prepared to deal with children's questions on controversial topics or in times of crisis. They felt it easier to stick with the basics (textbooks, worksheets), and not step outside of the box in regards to their lesson planning. As a result of these comments and emotions, Ableser (2008) and many other researchers have interviewed teachers and conducted research studies which have led to the discovery of methods and strategies to incorporate authentic activities, while still fulfilling the necessary state requirements and curriculum exit outcomes, and feeling more prepared emotionally when children come to us with real life problems and concerns.

Authentic literacy tasks to support literacy processes

First and foremost, in order for children to venture out of their comfort zone, and start challenging their thinking, they must feel they are in a safe, nurturing, intellectually safe environment. If teachers expect their students to take risks, it must be an atmosphere where mistakes provide opportunities for learning, collaboration, peer and teacher dialogue and respect is constantly present. Once this community is established, Davidson and Powell (2010) and Ableser (2008) believe that addressing real-life issues, often times

emotional or difficult issues, are easier to disclose and reveal. Listening to children's questions, and discovering the source of their curiosity helps us better instruct and fulfill their needs. As teachers, it is important that we, "...redirect and engage children in learning activities that give them a feeling of control, competence and empowerment in their own lives and in the world. Purposeful projects, like fundraising, conducting experiments, putting on a play, can help children cope with stressful times" (Ableser, 2008, p. 75). Projects that are child centered, inquiry based and real-world applicable, spark interest and critical thinking beyond a solitary comprehension worksheet or experiment with no follow up or application of the solution (Powell and Davidson, 2005; Purcell-Gates et. al 2007; Ableser, 2008; Barnitz, 1994).

An incredible example of student's awareness of the world around them, and a teacher taking the opportunity to challenge her students, is the case of Teacher M and her first grade class, a group where 60% were Caucasian and the remaining 40% were Asian, Hispanic, and other ethnicities. This class called themselves the "Hurricane Group" because of the tragic effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans occurring at the beginning of their school year. Students in Teacher M's class were being bombarded by media outlets showing coverage of this national tragedy and this quickly manifested itself into questions for their teacher. Teacher M took this opportunity to put her philosophy of 'critical literacy' into practice. According to Silvers et. al (2010), critical literacy curriculum, "makes diversity and difference visible and helps teach children to critique their world, examine their own assumptions and beliefs, and take on new identities as they try to make a difference through social action...[This theory] believes that even with young children, literacy practices should include teaching for social action, cultural critique, and for democracy, both inside and outside of school (p. 383; Leland and Harste,

2004; Bomer and Bomer, 2001; Dewey, 1939). Critical literacy and authentic literacy are often used interchangeably and center around the, "...notion of empowerment. Such a model engages students in real-life literacy and values students' worlds and their ways of making meaning" (Powell and Davidson 2005 p. 250). From a sociocultural theory perspective, instruction that engages students in a multitude of communities, rather than just the classroom, builds literacy development and piques curiosity into what students' roles are in their society.

Hurricane Katrina and Teacher M's students' curiosity and puzzlement related to New Orleans residents' calamity, developed into a yearlong social action project where students were engaged in discussions, research, presentations, and also, "demonstrated ways that Teacher M's critical framing provided opportunities for instruction that...use[d] multiliteracies to gather information from many sources, examine multiple perspectives and begin to ask questions related to power and privilege...[making it] possible to add a new dimension to the district's existing language arts and social studies curriculum and expanding the potential for student learning" (Silvers et. al, 2010 p. 389). Students may not realize that they are yearning for opportunities to get involved, be challenged, and see relevance in their learning outside of getting a 3 or 4 on a rubric scale, or whether their test scores qualify them for AIS services- they need opportunities to have their voices heard and be involved in activities they can see long-term benefits to (Silvers et al, 2010; Powell and Davidson, 2005).

Another example of an authentic literacy experience that promoted student's value and role beyond their school was an inner-city kindergarten class organizing and creating their very own Donut Shop. Students were initially instructed to visit various donut shops with their parents, and gain 'field' experience into what makes a successful

and appealing food business. The school districts objective for this project was to, “engage children in meaningful experiences, but also to make the project culturally relevant by tapping into children’s ‘funds’ of knowledge...Because a donut shop is within walking distance of a Midtown school and is a small, community-based business, we decided to use this theme for our literacy project” (Powell and Davidson, 2005, p. 251; McIntyre et. al, 2001; Moll, 2001; Moll and Gonzalez, 1994).

Once the project idea was established, students were able to interact with real business owners, create their own donuts, and acquire a true sense of what goes into making their product. Multitudes of literacy and content areas were addressed in this project, including their mathematical skills as they learned how to borrow money for a ‘business loan’, pay interest, and budget their funds. The structure of formation of the Donut Shop, was also a crucial step in their learning process, and taking measurements, using physics, and analyzing construction plans were necessary skills during this phase. In addition, students journalled their experiences, created books documenting the Donut Shop project phases, and immersed themselves in literature that pertained to food, shops, and teamwork. This project began as the formation of a classroom business and evolved into students feeling a, “...sense of accomplishment when they worked toward and achieved their goal. Further, visiting with building inspectors and bank executives, greeting dozens of visitors at the Grand Opening [of their donut shop], and appearing on the local news broadcast helped these children to feel what they were doing was significant” (Powell and Davidson, 2005 p. 254). This is a key component of sociocultural theory and authentic literacy intertwining in the classroom and curriculum as students gain experience with everyday jobs and practices, serve their community, and work as a team (Larson and March, 2005).

Through research, surveys, and studies, teachers can weed out good practices from great practices and apply these to the classroom. Another component of authentic literacy is allowing students to have choices in what they are reading and writing, and fitting it into their own interests and passions. According to Purcell-Gates et. al (2007) authentic purposes for reading texts, “would include reading a novel for relaxation, escape, or entertainment” (p. 14). How are we to determine what kind of book our students are in the ‘mood’ to read, or what their specific purpose is for choosing a book? Research studies conducted by Dr. Andrew Pachtman (2006) and a fourth grade teacher, Karen Wilson, emphasize the importance of student choices in their learning to increase motivation in the classroom. Pachtman (2006) and Ms. Wilson adopted this authentic reading principle and had a vested interest in student’s opinions about reading practices and what they found meaningful and engaging to them.

The purpose of their study was to affirm research that, “when students make choices about literacy activities, they gain responsibility for and control over their learning situation” (p. 681). Students in the survey overwhelmingly voted on ‘choosing their own books’ as their biggest motivation to read. As one student remarked, “I like to choose my own books because sometimes I’m in the mood for a sad book, or a happy book, or a really different book” (Pachtman and Wilson 2006, p. 683). When students are put at the forefront of their education, they have a ‘say’ in what goes into their curriculum and day-to-day routine, as opposed to a teacher directing them and choosing for them the kinds of books they should read. Teachers have the privilege of “soliciting and taking advantage of [student] preferences or ignoring them. [Instead] they can give students a voice in their own learning, which increases motivation to learn” (Pachtman and Wilson 2006 p. 684; Vygotsky 1934/1962). Teachers and students participate in authentic

literacy experiences everyday when they branch out into the community, work as a team, and make a connection between literacy and feeling like a valued and contributing member to their world. However, because students come from so many different 'worlds', teachers also need to orient their instruction to support diverse learners.

Authentic literacy to support diverse learners

Rebecca Powell and Nancy Davidson (2005) stress that, "students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but rather active participants who choose to react to tasks that they find meaningless or degrading in creative and often subversive ways. Given the inherent irrelevance of many schooled literacy practices and the ways in which these practices marginalize and even devalue the cultural knowledge of many of our students, it is perhaps not surprising that students of color drop out of school in greater numbers than their white counterparts" (p. 250.; Kaufman et. al, 1999). Students come from different backgrounds and lifestyles, and it is unrealistic and naïve to think that they will interpret learning and text in the same way, or in a way that teachers think they 'ought' to. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) remind us that, "people read and write differently out of different social practices, and these different ways with words are part of different ways of being persons and different ways and facts of doing life" (p. 9).

John Barntiz (1994) also stresses the importance of the teacher's attitude and approach to instruction that includes opportunities for authentic discussions and inclusion on diversity. Part of student success is, "using literacy that grows out of culturally authentic talk surrounding literacy events at home" (Barnitz, 1994, p. 586). He emphasizes the need for teachers to become familiar with and sensitive to the various discourses students use in their home environment. By communicating our understanding of student backgrounds and languages, they feel a stronger sense of self-worth and

acceptance in the classroom- therefore, performing more successfully. Barnitz (1994) describes an experiment conducted by Au and Mason (1981) that revealed the effects on Hawaiian children's reading abilities and literacy learning, when teachers began to, "[allow] collaborative and conversational discourses in reading lessons- authentic discussions about ideas in texts, rather than the traditional recitation and repetition of important information" (Barnitz, 1994, p. 587; Tharp and Gillmore, 1988). Hawaiian students showed an immediate and then gradual increase in their reading abilities once these discussions became part of the school day routine.

There are many ways teachers can expand their awareness of their students' cultural and discourse influences. Barnitz (1994) suggests, "studying some of the published research on cultural variations of family narratives, question-answer and bedtime story routines, and other language learning child-rearing practices of urban and rural communities...Newspapers can also be a[n authentic] source for talking about the world, national, state, and local events and human interest features" (p.589; Heath, 1983; Kochman, 1981; Labov, 1972; Ward; 1971). Another source of authentic text is multicultural literature. This ever-growing and increasingly popular genre can allow students to see themselves and their families on the pages of a book and make more personal connections. When a teacher uses literature to foster discussions about students' home life and lifestyles and make comparisons to others, this is authentic literacy! Steiner et. al (2008) believe that multicultural literature can not only open up student's perspectives and views of other races, families, and religions but can also, "encourage students to seek change that does not discriminate against any individual regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences. It cultivates respect, empathy, and acceptance of all people" (p. 88.; Vasquez, 2003).

Books and text that lead to discussion and students interacting with one another is crucial in allowing students voices to be heard. When students have numerous opportunities to share their learning, thoughts, and ideas, they feel like a valued member of the classroom. Students that feel comfortable and safe in taking risks with their classmates, in turn, become more receptive to new instruction (Barnitz, 1994; Larson and March, 2005). Using literature for Reader's Theater, poetry share-alouds, small group role-playing, or any reading presentation that requires a real-audience are all examples of promoting student voices. In the upper grades, student textbooks, which are typically 'cut and dry' resources that are skimmed over, only to seek out the answers to the unit review sheet, can be used for authentic purposes when, "readers use them seeking answers to their own questions (due to curiosity or to find information for a friend or relative)" (Purcell-Gates et. al 2007). This supports a key component of authentic literacy where students can use materials that align with the curriculum (and/or are school-mandated), in a meaningful way, when their function has a personal connection to them.

Culham (2005) provides teachers with additional guidelines in implementing authentic talk in our classroom. Creating a writing workshop, where students not only view authors as models for 'real writing', but one another as well, allows them to form a personal connection and a sense of pride as they interact through peer-conferencing. They are also able to receive immediate feedback that forms a faster connection between paper errors and what components of writing are deemed pleasing and provoking. Another method for creating real-life discourse is having dialogue journals between teacher and student. These can provide a form of communication that is real and authentic without intimidation of speaking verbally in front of peers, or discussing uncomfortable topics in person. The purpose of these journals is to also, "facilitate the language growth of native

and non-native English speakers” (Barnitz, 1994, p. 589). In addition to peer-conferencing, teacher- student conferencing is a tool and forum to facilitate authentic talk about academics and instructional strategies that focus on “process rather than language structures alone” (p. 589). Authentic literacy activities also align closely with the Experience-Text Relationship Method (Au, 1979) the Language Experience Approach (Rigg, 1989) reciprocal teaching, and other dialogue, interactive based styles of teaching.

Tools for implementing authentic literacy

A method of literacy instruction that has been gaining recognition in the education field has been that of the “ACCESS” framework, which is, “designed to help teachers plan instruction that improves’ students’ reading proficiency while also empowering and motivating students” (Parsons 2008, p. 628). By having activities that immerse learners in a variety of teaching styles and promote higher level thinking within authentic tasks, as well as peer collaboration, students naturally feel more motivated as they see relevance in their instruction and it pertains to their interests. ACCESS is an acronym that stands for tasks that are, “*authentic*, that require *collaboration* among students, that *challenge* students, that culminate with an *end product*, that allow *self-direction* by giving student’s choices, and that *sustain learning* across time” (Parsons, 2008, p. 628). The center of the ACCESS framework is students’ *self-regulation*. Our lesson plans as educators should focus on students participating in authentic activities that have genuine purpose to real life situations and issues. Parsons (2008) states that, “tasks that culminate with meaningful product encourage self-regulation because students set goals and monitor their progress toward those goals” (p. 629). While school districts have ultimately chosen the curriculum units and classroom activities, students are in charge of working on the end product within groups, individually, meeting with the teacher for guidance and

instruction when needed, and have true ownership of their learning. In authentic literacy experiences, the teacher's role in these tasks becomes that of a "facilitator".

Technology and authentic literacy go hand and hand within the classroom. These literacies are revolutionizing how students are accessing information, making meaning, reading text, participating in literacy making events, as well as understanding how technology works. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) believe that, "learners need new operational and cultural 'knowledges' in order to acquire new languages that provide access to new forms of work, civic, and private practices in their every day lives" (p. 11). Applying methods to solve problems in our everyday lives is central to authentic literacy.

Baron (1999) states that, "as new technology spreads and becomes popular and familiar to people, a new literacy spreads across the population" (p. 71). Accessing these new literacies enable us to connect on a deeper level with our students and build up their confidence and expertise in an area that most are very familiar with. Hui-Yin Hsu (2009) details a research study in which pre-service teachers in her graduate course, were required to use 'weblogs' as a means of responding to classroom discussions, posting assignments, and interacting with one another. Weblogs are similar to Wikiboards and Facebook pages- all areas of authentic communication about a particular topic of vested interest to the person posting a response. Hsu's (2009) belief that weblogs would be an effective tool in communicating with her students and responding to assignments evolved into a tool of personal communication where, "pre-service teachers could examine their own cultural identities and diversity experiences, share these identities, and these experiences might clarify or justify teaching philosophies regarding students from diverse population...[this] widen[ed] their discussion in a way which limited class time cannot" (p. 171; p. 178).

Ikpeze and Boyd (2007) provide further examples of how students apply their critical and authentic thinking skills while using technology- specifically WebQuests. They believe that, “WebQuests are designed to make effective use of learners’ time and support their thinking and active involvement at the levels of analysis, synthesis, transformation of information, decision-making, and evaluation” (Ikpeze and Boyd, p. 645; Ridgeway, Peters and Tracy, 2002). These are huge components of authentic literacy and effective questioning. Students are asking questions on deeper levels, activating their prior knowledge, and making the topics meaningful and relevant to their lives, while using the computer (Ikpeze and Boyd 2007). When students are “engaged in activities that are intrinsically motivating...they are actively engaged in learning through exploring, discussing, questioning, and constructing their own knowledge” (Ikpeze and Boyd, 2003, p. 651). Other forms of technology that foster authentic learning are virtual field trips, SmartBoard lessons, creating and publishing student work on the computer, surfing the Internet, and using the computer as a primary resource for student learning.

Smartboards are practically classroom staples as students become more technology savvy, with the desire to not only have visuals, but visuals that are attractive and digitally created. Heather Wall (2008) discusses the use of interactive writing on the Smartboard in the classroom, what it looks like, how it is effective, and ways it can be modified to include upper elementary grades, as well as special education and ESL students. She believes that teachers often have difficulty implementing grammar, punctuation, and spelling in meaningful and relevant ways to their students. Wall’s research concluded that, “grammar rules are best taught in authentic writing experiences, rather than isolation” (2008, p. 149). Van DeWeghe (2008) stresses the point that, “what too often passes for ‘writing’ in schools is either formulaic writing, worksheet exercises,

or ‘research papers’ that get turned into dreaded rites of passage rather than the engaging inquiry opportunities they ought to be” (p.108) Mrs. Wall considers interactive writing on the Smartboard, when taught in the proper context along with guided mini-lessons, as an engaging and successful approach to teach these concepts to students.

Interactive writing can be used as an engaging inquiry opportunity and entails the teacher, “guid[ing] students through the process of writing a text...The intent is for the end product to be free of spelling and grammatical errors, which requires that time to be spent on discussion of phonics, grammar rules, and spelling patterns” (Van De Weghe, 2008. p. 149). While still a systematic approach to writing, where the authentic and inquiry portion of meaningful writing processes comes in, is throughout these discussions the teacher calls on different students to write about a classroom or home experience, book summaries, or personal stories- to name a few examples. The teacher and students participate in this writing process by providing ideas, suggestions, and most importantly, application of grammar rules either previously taught in mini-lessons, or new concepts that are being introduced in that moment to the student currently writing in full view on the Smartboard. Because the Smartboard has so many features for writing, including different colors, fonts, and letter sizes, it appeals to students yearning for a fast and technology-based showcase of their work. Mrs. Wall states that, “as students receive this repeated practice in composing sentences, while also using resources such as word walls, memorizing sight words, and applying phonetic skills, their own writing improves” (Van De Weghe, 2008, p. 149).

Mrs. Wall also deems interactive writing to be an authentic and useful teaching strategy, because it allows her to differentiate for students. For example, certain students that are struggling with punctuation or use of adverbs will specifically be chosen to write

particular segments. She has also used this approach with special education students and was able to individualize her instruction to meet their particular needs in a small group setting versus whole classroom approach. In her third grade classroom, Mrs. Wall provides weekly opportunities for her students to write the classroom news whole group. She affirms that, “although in the beginning students’ attention spans and sentence variety were minimal, as the year progressed we incorporated various grammatical concepts as we learned them, our class news became more sophisticated as students were able to attend for longer periods of time” (Van De Weghe, 2008 p. 149). Allowing students to engage in their learning through technology, not only with the teacher at the front of the classroom, but with their peers, fosters and encourages student dialogue, a central component to authentic literacy (Davidson and Powell, 2005; Purcell-Gates et. al, 2007; Silvers et. al., 2010). It is imperative for students to feel comfortable in their classroom environment where they can freely ask questions, make mistakes, and have positive and supportive feedback.

Eventually, the applications of more formal rules are implemented as a child goes through elementary, middle, and high school. Goodman sums it up by saying, “after a period of time using size, shape and number to invent written language children develop alphabetic principles to relate oral and written language” (p. 321). Kucer believes that, “Development typically continues through the course of one’s life as long as literacy is encountered and used in new or novel ways” (2005, p. 250). Of course, the ‘new and novel’ ways are to be taught and facilitated by teachers and educators based on relevant research, current literacy theories, and allowing new literacies to enter the classroom- ie: technology. It is important to showcase information in various forms to appeal to all styles of learning and make it relevant and authentic to students. With thousands of

software programs, websites, WebQuests, etc, technology needs to be appropriate and meaningful in the classroom. Dennis Baron (1999) states, “new communication technologies, if they catch on, go through a number of strikingly similar stages. After their invention, their speed depends on accessibility, function, and authentication,” (p. 71). For an invention, computer program, video game, website, etc, to make an impact and become a success- it needs to be user-friendly, affordable, authentic, stimulating and accessible to a wide-range of people. The more competent and comfortable teachers get with technology, the more effective they will be in exploring this new form of literacy acquisition.

As described in the afore-mentioned subheadings, authentic literacy has been gaining its’ rightful place in the classroom and teacher curriculum. Educators are moving away from the traditional teaching approach, that can be isolated and redundant for students, to a more inquiry-based, student centered theory that connects their learning to the outside world. While explicit instruction is an essential part of instructional practices, it is now being accompanied with authentic tasks and projects that promote student discussion, field trips, and ties to the community. Students are seeing that their learning matters and makes a difference beyond their textbooks. Given that these research based practices have proven to increase student motivation and discussion, I will be implementing authentic literacy tasks in my sixth grade reading class and documenting my observations, student responses and work, and the overall climate of the classroom once this project is put into place, for the Methods portions of my research project.

Methods

Context

Research and data collection for this study will occur at Watersgate Middle School, located in Watersgate, New York. This school district will be under a pseudonym to ensure privacy and participants' rights. According to the New York State Report Card, Watersgate School District has 87% of the student population of white racial background, 7 % Black or African-American, and 4 % Hispanic or Latina racial background. 14.5% of the student population has been classified with a disability. Watersgate, New York is a small, rural farming district with a population of approximately 7,000 residents (Census 2000). This town employs many farmers who specialize in fruit growing and local agriculture. According to the 2000 Census, the average income for families living in Watersgate is \$51,000 annually. Watersgate Middle School is comprised of students in grades 5 through 8, and the current enrollment is 384 students. Students are provided a wide opportunity of advanced placement courses, innovative technology classes, and extra-curricular activities. Students participating in this research study are enrolled in the 6th grade Enrichment Reading class which takes place everyday during the school year from 8:30 to 9:20 a.m.

Participants

Participants in this research study will be eleven sixth grade students ranging from ages 10 to 11 years old. There are four female students, Chalyn, Raquel, Austin, and Clara, and eight male students; Brendan, Cameron, Anthony, Gehrig, Paul, Xavier, Liam, and Theo. One female student, Chalyn, is African-American, and the other students are Caucasian. All students vary greatly in their family background and socioeconomic status, with some students living in notoriously poor areas of Williamson, while others

are living in the wealthier neighborhoods, closer to Playshore, New York. Playshore is a lakeside hamlet geared towards tourists with various gift shops, fine dining, boat marinas, and a yacht club. Playshore is very picturesque and is often frequented by the wealthier families in Watersgate, New York. Students living in the poorer parts of Watersgate reside in small, run-down mobile homes, with juvenile crime on the rise. Many of these mobile homes have minimal electricity, and minimal private shower facilities. The post office does not deliver mail to this area of town, and families often have one or no car for transportation. Xavier, Liam, and Gehrig are part of single parent families, and Brendan and Paul are being raised by their grandparents.

Students in 6th Grade Enrichment Reading have performed above average on their New York State Assessments and grade level assessments, but because of emotional or maturity concerns from their previous years' teachers, they are deemed 'not ready' for Advanced 6th Grade Reading. Based on my observations as their teacher, all twelve students in this class struggle with meeting their full potential- meaning their intelligence and academics are on par, but the effort and motivation is frequently lacking in their assignments and class work. However, with the exception of Chalyn, Austin, and Gehrig, students are eager to participate in class discussions, and often need reminding to let others have a chance to share! During the fall marking period, my co-teaching, Mrs. A, and I discussed what it means to have an 'open mind' and creating a classroom where students feel comfortable sharing their opinions and ideas on subjects, without fear of rejection or mockery. This concept was very well received, and based on our observations, students have displayed a sensitivity and sense of camaraderie throughout the school year.

Researcher Stance

I am currently working on my Master's degree in literacy education. My previous job experiences have included teaching third, fourth, and fifth grade classes in the surrounding suburban school districts. At Watersgate, I am working as a library and reading teacher for Kindergarten through Eighth grade. My position is divided between two buildings and requires travelling to the Elementary School at 11:30 each day. Job responsibilities include reading and literacy instruction at all grade levels, as well as ordering resources, literature, and materials for the district.

My role in this research study is that of a teacher and active participant. I co-teach 6th grade Enrichment Reading with my fellow colleague and teacher assistant, who will be referred to as Mrs. A, to protect the rights and privacy of all research participants. I will be facilitating several lessons that will introduce and implement my research method, as well as guiding various student discussions and focus groups. As described in the theoretical framework, my teaching philosophy and authentic literacy are embedded in sociocultural theory- and my interactions and lessons with students will reflect this teaching method.

Method

During this study, I took on an active participant role as my students' teacher through data collection using informal student interviews [Appendix B], focus groups, and open-ended statement and response questionnaires [Appendix C]. Further specifics about my data collection is outlined in the data collection portion of my paper. My purpose was to facilitate authentic learning opportunities, as defined by Ableser (2008) and Duke (2006) in the introduction portion of my research paper. My research and data collection pertaining to authentic literacy activities took place in the context of my 6th

grade Enrichment Reading class over the course of two weeks, with projects extending for approximately one month after my formal research. The foundation of these activities used the book (and true story) *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson (2006), and created opportunities for discussions that pertained to students lives', their opinions on controversial topics, cultural awareness of the Middle East and Afghan people, and projects that involved helping other young students living in the Middle East.

Students completed Statement/Response questionnaire [see Appendix C] prior to reading *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson, to share their authentic opinions and viewpoints on beliefs frequently held about Middle Eastern cultures and government. Subsequent discussions were held, and my opinions were noted after students completed these response questionnaires. Directions for the questionnaire were simple and straightforward. Answer as honestly and openly as possible and there are no right or wrong answers. When students become comfortable with the concept that their responses would not be judged or dissected, but rather discussed in a safe and comfortable class forum (the expectation for all class discussions)- they were reassured and reminded that our sixth grade reading classroom is a classroom community free of judgment and disdain- a key aspect of authentic literacy practices (Kucer, 2005; Larson and March, 2005; Powell and Davidson, 2005).

For the student interviews, three questions were posed, with the implication that either student or teacher can elaborate on questions or responses depending on the direction of the conversation. We did not want students to feel limited to answering the three specific questions, but rather showcase their viewpoints in a one on one setting. The interview was approached and explained as a method for Mrs. A and myself to “have an opportunity to chat with you guys about your feelings now that you are halfway through

the book. We want to see if your feelings and thoughts have changed, and if so, how and why?" Again, this is another element of authentic literacy practices, as meaningful discussions that are not isolated or contrived can show students how their education connects to real-life issues (Schmoker, 2007).

Overall, these lessons clearly aligned with my philosophy of teaching, which is embedded in sociocultural theory, and authentic literacy activities as students, "[gain] knowledge [that] is not abstract but rooted in context and culture- that is, it is situated...Situating learning emphasizes the need for students to be provided with the opportunities to participate in activities which are relevant to the application of learning" (Choo, 2007 p. 187; Lave, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991). In addition to facilitating these lessons, I also conducted small focus groups, which fostered discussion amongst students about the book, connections to their own lives and the lives of Middle Eastern boys and girls. Their interest and motivation was assessed through informal interviews between myself and my students, questionnaires, and whole group discussion. My co-teachers' and my classroom was a forum of implementing authentic literacy activities and observing the results that ensued. As previously mentioned, further information and details of the method collection will be discussed in the data collection section.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Research studies need to have the assurance and credibility that all data is accounted for and of quality and trustworthiness. Mills (2007) provides guidelines to ensure research upholds the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of the research accounts for and explains unusual patterns or 'complexities' that could not be easily noticed. Mills (2007) suggests applying several methods to ensure credibility including, "prolonged participation at the study site;

persistent observation; peer debriefing; and practice triangulation” (p.104). All of these elements will be factors in my research study, including the advantage that I have in being my participants’ full-time classroom teacher (hence the prolonged participation). There will be numerous opportunities for peer debriefing (in and out of class time) and I will be collecting data through multiple methods to compare student work and guarantee triangulation, as outlined in the data collection section of this paper.

In addition, an essential part of research is presenting the data without bias but rather, “to facilitate the development of descriptive, context-relevant statements” (Mills, 2007 p. 104; Guba 1981). This is referred to as ‘transferability’. My research will reflect transferability by thoroughly explaining and clarifying the research process and setting to ensure the reader can determine what is relevant to their particular situation or context. This can allow them to replicate the setting, should they wish to apply a similar research method with their students, and/or bridge a connection to their own lives.

Thirdly, dependability, which is another crucial component to implement in research studies, refers to the stability of the data (Mills, 2007). Several methods are recommended to reinforce the data’s stability, including, “[using] two or more methods in such a way that the weakness of one is compensated by the strength of another” (Mills, 2007 p. 104; Guba, 1981). This can be reinforced by having several different opportunities for students to respond to a lesson, besides just teacher observation- i.e. interviews and focus groups. My students will have numerous occasions to provide their opinions and thoughts after lessons, which will add and/or compensate to my personal observations, and these will be included in my journal write-ups after each day. My data collection goes into further detail on how student responses and teacher observations will be documented.

Finally, the last key element of trustworthy and quality research is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the data being ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’, free of the researcher’s stance or bias (Mills, 2007; Guba, 1981). Once again, this can be achieved through practicing triangulation, or collecting data from a variety of sources, and crosschecking the information to compensate for any gaps. It is also imperative to practice “reflexivity; that is, to intentionally reveal underlying assumptions of biases that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way” (Mills, 2007 p. 105). My research will be open and forthright in presenting my philosophies and background knowledge should they pose a bias in the data collection and research study. However, because I firmly believe in the trustworthiness of my research, the above-mentioned criteria of quality research will be at the forefront of my research method.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Before beginning my research, I am obliged to collect parental permission slips and student consent forms in order to use their work, ideas, and thoughts in my research study. I will send out parent information letters in my monthly newsletter, informing them of my research study, and assuring them that their child’s name will be under a pseudonym. I will also outline the purpose of my study, context of my graduate work, and ask them to contact me with any questions or concerns. During whole group class time, I will share with students the purpose of my study and encourage their questions and comments. All participants’ names will be replaced with pseudonyms and their privacy and confidentiality will be respected and guaranteed.

Data Collection

As mentioned in the Method section, I collected data in multiple ways. First and foremost, I kept a journal to write down my thoughts and observations immediately following each reading class for the two-week data collection period. The journal consisted of the day's agenda, student comments, student work collected [see Appendices], portions of the book that were discussed at length, and any other data that was relevant to authentic literacy characteristics. In addition, I looked at student statement and response questionnaire before and after we began reading *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson (2006). This indicated to me whether their opinions about controversial topics frequently mentioned in our everyday lives and the media shifted or changed since our exposure to Greg Mortenson's experience in Afghanistan, our study into Middle Eastern culture, and focus groups where students were provided opportunities for inhibited, authentic conversation. These focus groups also provided a segue way into informal student/teacher interviews, where I asked them their thoughts on experiencing literature and lesson activities that pertained to real life issues and created personal connections to their own lives. I made note of these interview sessions in my journal during and after my conversations with students.

Data Analysis

My observational period with students lasted approximately two weeks in the classroom. During this period, I collected many different forms of data which were analyzed and then explained in the Findings and Discussion section of my paper. My first initial reactions to the data was how insightful it was for me to have my students write their opinions and reactions to controversial topics, and how their background knowledge and lifestyle influenced their viewpoints on the Middle East and its' culture.

When I first read through the statement/response questionnaires, I was impressed with the sense of equality many students felt for girls and their education, and helping other countries in need. I was also intrigued by their thoughts on Middle Eastern people and their connections to terrorism. As I read through the data a second time, including the interview responses, I began to notice patterns in their responses which formed my three categories for sorting the data: drastic viewpoint shifts, piqued interest in war, and balanced awareness of American and Middle Eastern connections. Once these categories were determined, I was able to sort the data accordingly, as well as note the evidence indicating shifts and changes in students thinking during and after reading *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson. I have also included data [Appendix A] showing students' feelings and viewpoints prior to reading the book, which is clear evidence that a change took place, falling into the three themes previously mentioned.

Findings and discussion

Analysis and evaluation of the data collected revealed three notable and different changes and shifts in student learning and motivation **after** immersion in authentic literacy literature and class discussions. First, support for authentic literacy in the classroom shifted students' viewpoints so drastically that their previous opinions on the Middle East changed to something equally as limited on the opposite end of the spectrum. Therefore, while a change took place in their thinking, students still resorted to 'stereotyping' the Middle Eastern culture. Secondly, support for authentic literacy in the classroom piqued the students' interest and motivation towards war and the negative aspects of Middle Eastern culture and religion. More specifically, students formed a fascination with the violence and turmoil often connected with Middle Eastern terrorist groups and their effects on America. Thirdly, support for authentic literacy in the

classroom shifted student learning and knowledge to a balanced awareness of similar connections between American culture and Middle Eastern culture.

Barnitz (1994) stresses the importance of inclusion of multi-cultural literature in the classroom as a crucial authentic literacy teaching practice. As discussed in the ‘Authentic Literacy to Support Diverse Learners’ portion of this research paper, literature that deals with other cultures and lifestyles allows students to expand their knowledge on social issues they may have limited exposure with, or in the case of my sixth grade students, biased opinions or stereotypes that have developed from discussions at home, media outlets, and subjective classroom teaching. Mrs. A and myself chose *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson to encourage just the opposite of students’ previous interactions with Middle Eastern learning. We wanted students to have the opportunity to read about other aspects of Afghanistan and Pakistan, specifically, that was not immersed and ridden with terrorism and war references, but rather presented another side of this culture and its’ people- one of hope, need, and innocence; three characteristics that are not often associated with the Middle East. Again, the goal of my research was to explore various methods of application in authentic literacy practices and the effects on student learning and motivation.

While nine questions were asked on the questionnaire, the following chart will indicate student responses to only five questions that became the center of authentic discussions surrounding *Three Cups of Tea*. I will highlight notable student responses for each question. These questions and responses are strong indicators of students’ feelings towards the Middle East, the government, education, and the war **prior** to reading the book and class discussions. The general sentiment and conclusion drawn from these questionnaires, was the sorting of student viewpoints into three categories: drastic

viewpoint shift, piqued interest in war, and a balanced awareness of American and Middle Eastern cultures.

Statement and Response Questionnaires [Appendix A]

<p><i>The government should be responsible for running schools. Agree or Disagree?</i></p>	
<p>Seven students agreed.</p> <p><i>Because they should be concerned about education.</i></p> <p><i>So you pay the taxes out of the government for school.</i></p> <p><i>They should because they built it so they are responsible.</i></p> <p><i>I agree that the government should because they run everything else!</i></p> <p><i>They should because they could decide what we learn.</i></p>	<p>Four students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Because government takes too much money as it is.</i></p> <p><i>It depends on how the government is.</i></p> <p><i>The principal should run the school, not the government.</i></p>
<p><i>When Americans become involved in helping people in other countries, it is always a good thing. Agree or Disagree?</i></p>	
<p>Five students agreed.</p> <p><i>Americans are helping other students for good things.</i></p> <p><i>It depends. Americans can help but it could make an outcome of war.</i></p> <p><i>Even if it's a small thing, it can make a difference.</i></p>	<p>Six students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Disagree. Operation Iraqi Freedom.</i></p> <p><i>It only makes the country more confused.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes we bond with country, but then they can get mad at us.</i></p> <p><i>Wrong. It may result in WAR.</i></p>
<p><i>It is more important for boys to be educated than girls. Agree or Disagree?</i></p>	
<p>One student agreed.</p> <p><i>Because girls don't have jobs in Afghanistan. All men are terrorists there</i></p>	<p>Ten students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Girls need to learn to make money and help family.</i></p>

<p>anyway.</p>	<p><i>I think boys and girls should be thought of as the same.</i></p> <p><i>We should be treated the same. Being educated means you can think more clearly.</i></p>
<p><i>Islamic families do not want girls to be educated. Agree or disagree?</i></p> <p>[Researcher's note: The phrasing of this question posed some confusion to students. Several students considered it a yes or no question, while others did not differentiate the difference between this question and the previously asked boy and girl education question. Responses will vary.]</p>	
<p>Three students agreed.</p> <p><i>They don't go to school anyway.</i></p> <p><i>Girls only should do chores.</i></p> <p><i>Islamic families do not want girls to be educated even though they should.</i></p>	<p>Eight students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Why would they not want the girls to be educated?</i></p> <p><i>They want girls to be educated to stop the terrorists.</i></p> <p><i>Girls should be educated so they can learn how to read and write.</i></p>
<p><i>A person is obligated to help someone in need. Agree or disagree?</i></p>	
<p>Seven people agreed.</p> <p><i>You should be glad to help someone instead of watching it go down.</i></p> <p><i>You should always help someone in need.</i></p> <p><i>Because you can make a difference.</i></p> <p><i>Agree, someone needs to be in charge.</i></p> <p><i>It's the right thing to do.</i></p>	<p>Four people disagreed.</p> <p><i>People make choices for themselves.</i></p> <p><i>You don't have to help someone in need but it would be nice.</i></p>

As indicated by student responses, and the varying differences between their viewpoints, this questionnaire served as an excellent tool and jumping off point for authentic discussion about the Middle East, where students are receiving their

information and background knowledge, and an overall instructional approach to *Three Cups of Tea* that subtly challenges their agreements or disagreements on the above real-life issues. This questionnaire also increased student motivation towards the book, as students were eager to have their current viewpoints challenged by the author and his experiences. As observed and noted in my observation journal after the questionnaire class discussion, many students felt firm in their beliefs, but could not elaborate or explain WHY they felt that way- they just believed that girls and boys are equal or that girls should have equal education.

The greatest value in giving the statement/response questionnaire was the discussion that ensued. This allowed me to start forming different ‘categories’ of student thinking and where their initial knowledge fell in regards to international relations, overseas education, and the Middle East in general. Students had a diverse set of opinions that they were eager to share after the statement/response questionnaire was complete. Gehrig stated that, “I know that the government makes decisions for us, but I’m not sure if that is a good or bad thing.” Brendan quickly jumped in and said, “We pay them taxes and enough money! Why should they decide what we learn? Plus, we don’t get enough time to learn all the stuff they want anyway. We should have more rights in our education”. I used this opportunity to ask students what exactly ARE taxes and what do they go towards. Does giving our money give us more rights into our education and rights? We did a quick brainstorm list on the board, and several students expressed surprise at how many ‘projects’ are paid for by taxes. This discussion centered around the sociocultural belief that literacy is about interacting with one another, engaging in real-life experiences, and solving real-life problems (Barnitz, 1994; Ableser, 2008). Based on

this data, and other data outlined in the following sub-headings, student insights and thoughts fell into three categories:

Drastic viewpoint shifts

Over half of our eleven students became so empathetic and concerned with the plights and hardships of Middle Eastern children and civilians, that their viewpoints shifted from thinking that all Middle Eastern people were ‘terrorists’ to all Middle Easterners were ‘poor’. *Three Cups of Tea* is the real-life experience of Greg Mortenson travelling in Pakistan and Afghanistan to help build schools and provide funding for Middle Eastern children. My sixth grade students were deeply affected by the conditions Greg found the children in; i.e.: no chalk or pencils, but rather using sticks as writing utensils, no running water, no buildings to house classrooms, Pakistani teachers’ pay being equivalent to one American dollar a day, and other drastic differences to THEIR current education standards in Watersgate, New York. Their viewpoint shifts were revealed in class discussions, but also student interviews that Mrs. A and I conducted halfway through the research and data collection time period.

All eleven students were excited to have one on one time with their teachers, and almost seemed nervous or apprehensive as we began the interview. While all eleven interviews provided meaningful insight and disclosure about their feelings, for this particular section of the Data Collection and Findings, I will highlight the student interview [Appendix B] excerpts that support a ‘Drastic viewpoint change’ from students believing that most Middle Easterners are ‘terrorists’ **to** most Middle Easterners are ‘poor’ and needing our help;

“We deal with economic and money stuff and taxes, and they deal with food and survival and stuff.”

“Economy and trouble with homework in the U.S. Starvation, poverty, no homework and no schools in the Middle East.”

“Losing our parents, fear of intruders and burglars are American fears. The Middle East has no education, very poor, homeless, illiterate...”

“We have to face lack of presidential control, the Oil Spill, disasters in other parts of the world that require our help and money. Also, the government and teachers do not give us enough time to do our homework and learn. In the Middle East, they barely have any education, but they value it 100%, lack of sanitation and disease control over there, plus they don’t have much clothing or materials!”

“Our parents might get drunk a lot, or leave their kids home alone. Kids have ADHD or mental disabilities. They don’t have money, schools, or healthy food.”

“Education will also help them make the ‘right choices’ and not get sucked into terrorism.”

“They don’t have the skills to do anything except for hunting, building, and capturing other bad people”

“They need an education to get a great job, and more money to pay for food and other survival stuff.”

“They are poor. They really need help. They don’t get how luxurious we have it. They need more and better food and water.”

“We’re more fortunate than they are- because they are worse off. They are very, very in need. They’re suffering.”

While these interviews provided fascinating insight into students’ depictions and interpretations of issues that American students face versus the Middle Eastern students, it clearly shows a shift in their thinking and background knowledge that ALL Middle Eastern civilians are poor, uneducated, and lacking in their basic needs being met. Mrs. A and were quite surprised and intrigued by this revelation, and concluded that Greg Mortenson’s experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan, while an excellent depiction of families struggling to gain an education, are not representative of ALL Middle Eastern lifestyles and families.

Piqued interest in war

While all students have an interest in war, especially during this time period, and since many of them have grown up hearing about the Iraqi War, this interest in war for several classmates was piqued during class sessions prior to reading the book, and after a lesson interacting with news media referencing the Taliban and violence in the Middle East. My conclusions were reached primarily on observations during whole-group and small-group class discussions.

After it was noted that students had adopted the general belief that many Middle Easterners are poor and suffering, I provided a dozen or so Times Magazine articles, Newsweek articles, and Afghanistan information books to demonstrate the distribution of information in authentic texts, and other news that is occurring overseas. During this class period, students were asked to read and sift through these different texts and share something new and interesting they learned about the Middle Eastern people. Considering that most news articles were oriented towards the war and violence amongst the American troops and terrorists, students were fascinated with the depiction of violence in the articles' photographs, and quickly developed another 'category' in their minds, of the Middle Easterners way of life. Anthony, Brendan, and Liam in particular, became infuriated that women were being terrorized and beaten for defying the Taliban and terrorist groups. Brendan was especially angry that American soldiers have been called to help other countries during the war. Below is a conversation between the three boys:

Liam: I cannot believe they could chop off a woman's nose [reference to Times Magazine article dated in January 2011] for not doing what she was told. How are we supposed to stop them from doing this?

Anthony: Yeah! And they have a million places to hide! How can we expect our soldiers to save everyone?

Brendan: It just pisses me off that our soldiers have to save everyone. Now we have to deal with Libya and the hurricanes? Why can't we just take care of our own people?

Liam: How can you say that Brendan? This is what war is about. Everyone fighting everyone.

Brendan: I understand your point Liam. But why does everyone else's problems become our problems? I feel bad for these people, especially when they hurt the women, but I just don't get how we can stop the Taliban and terrorists. They will always be everywhere.

During this conversation, it is indicative that students' interest about the war and how it relates to our lives and the Middle East, had been heightened through the use of authentic literacy texts and discussion. While certain viewpoints may be deemed controversial or argumentative, it is representative of authentic literacy learning characteristics and student motivation and interest increasing. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) reiterate a key component of authentic literacy (which was ever present during the research process) that, "people act together...to challenge established social practices [i.e.: taxes, education, war, government involvement] and relations that systematically benefit some individuals and groups at the expense of others-including themselves...[with the intention] to stimulate action for change" (p. 12).

Politically charged conversations that are centered around war, government action, education and equal rights for men and women, are social issues students will be forming further judgments and beliefs on as they continue their education. *Three Cups of Tea* and other authentic texts that were aspects of this research project, have fueled these discussions and added more information to students' background knowledge, so they may make a better-informed and substantial opinion about hot political topics.

Balanced awareness of American and Middle Eastern connections

After reading the first several chapters in *Three Cups of Tea*, all eleven students asked if they could write to Greg Mortenson and ask him to take the statement/response questionnaire. Mrs. A and I used this opportunity to reiterate the reading strategy of “Finding the Author’s Purpose”- or, what is the overall message Greg Mortenson wants the reader to gain from his book? This question was brought up throughout the course of reading the book (one month)- and students quickly grasped the concept of using the book to support their opinions. For example, one week after completing the questionnaire and reading Chapters 1-3 in the book, Raquel stated that, “I think that Greg wants us to realize that not all Middle Eastern people are bad- I mean, look at how innocent the children are! All they have are sticks and dirt to write in- but we never hear about that in the news. I did not realize there were that many children living in Afghanistan. Are they still safe?” Chalyn responded, “I thought that all the Muslim people were terrorists. I can’t believe that they don’t talk about this in the news”.

In addition to teacher observations, the student interviews [Appendix B] provided a wealth of feedback in how students’ viewpoints and beliefs had shifted towards a more balanced view of Muslim and American religions and cultures, and how labels and stereotypes against Middle Eastern people have skewed the way we view them. Several students began to recognize not only the stereotype, but how they were beginning to change their opinion and form an ‘open-mind’ (a concept frequently mentioned throughout the course of this project). The following interview excerpts contain insight into certain students understanding the connection between all people having hardships and trials- but also becoming successful and well-rounded members of society;

“We have family members serving in the military and we have access to food. Middle East: They are war torn and they ALSO have family members serving in the military.”

“We are pretty pampered in the United States; we waste a lot of time and materials on dumb stuff that I’m sure they Middle East kids would really appreciate. Middle East: The Middle East values education more than we do, because they don’t have as many rights to learn what they want”.

“We have the fear of being killed by other war and stuff. But they also have that fear since there are people fighting the war for them over there.”

“[An education] can help both of us- they could lead a worse life if they joined the terrorists, and we can help them realize that a democracy and other political things are better choices.”

“They want the same opportunities that United States kids get- an education gives them lots of advantages.”

“They are not all bombers and there beliefs are different- but OK, sometimes we are asking for them to bomb us because we barely provide them the support they need! One of their Islamic pillars [reference to Islam religion lesson referenced after the interview excerpts] is to give to the less fortunate, but they need help to!”

If we help them, then maybe they will help us when necessary. Plus, we are ALL human and all the same!

“If there is something going on in the world, why should we just stand back and watch? Everyone can have a relationship with someone in the world- we’re all connected in some way.”

In these interview excerpts, it is apparent that more than half of the students in the class grasped the understanding that education and societal government involvement should be privileges for everyone. Theo stated that, “I never realized how many different ways we are similar! We are worried about our families coming home safe, imagine what they feel over there. No one is communicating to them or telling them that their families are going to be OK”. This empathy and personal connection to the Middle Eastern culture had not evolved and developed until the authentic literacy learning and literature became part of our instruction.

Students had naturally developed stereotypes and biases based on what they heard from family members or news outlets. One full lesson was devoted to what stereotypes

are, and how they can affect someone's life long-term. Students were asked to come up with frequently held prejudices against Islam and Muslim religions, students with disabilities, and senior citizens. Once students made a thought provoking, albeit, controversial list of stereotypes, they were challenged to find an example that went AGAINST this stereotype. Students were eager to hear about senior citizens who were still active members in the community, creating inventions, and running marathons.

In addition, Mrs. A and I organized a "Mecca Pilgrimage" which had students travelling around the classroom to different areas in the Middle East. Students were given 'passports' and at each country stop, they had to write down information (provided at country stations) about the Islam culture. Students were highly engaged and motivated to travel with a passport (an authentic and real-life form a travelling internationally) and enjoyed learning about a new religion. The objective of the lesson, besides having students gain an awareness of the Muslim religion, was to make comparisons between our beliefs and Islamic religious beliefs. The conversations were beyond what Mrs. A and I could have expected. The following is an excerpt of a class discussion after the "Mecca Pilgrimage":

Anthony: I can't believe they have a Bible like us! The Koran is considered their bible stories. Wouldn't it be neat if they had bible study lessons like us?

Teachers: It is very common practice for students to have lessons on different parts of their religion, like Muhammad, and studying the Five Pillars of Islam.

Cameron: Yeah! It was so neat to learn about the Pillars because we are expected to give at our church- every Sunday we pass around a collection plate! I can't believe that they give so much of their money [10%] to help the poor- when they are the ones considered poor.

Teachers: We are going to learn about many Afghan and Pakistan families who are not poor, but actually very educated and live in nice homes with gardens, bedroom furniture and televisions- just like us. Lots of these families are against the Taliban and their beliefs and are desperately trying to change their country's ways of life.

Theo: I just can't believe how much we have in common. I mean, we really have no idea what life is like over there, but they just want to be happy and safe like we do. It makes me feel really sad that so many people think they are evil terrorists.

Paul: Most of them are! Well...not all of them...but it's really hard to see past all of that when everyday you hear about US soldiers getting killed for fighting a war that isn't ours. I guess that goes along with the, what's it called?

Teachers: Biases?

Paul: Yeah, the biases. The news making it seem like all people who wear those things around their heads and are Muslim are bad people.

Cameron: They have people getting killed too! And that is what we are talking about with stereotypes; it's not always how you think it is.

Many students in the class not only changed their beliefs on Middle Eastern culture, but also recognized that it can be unfairly portrayed in the media and from other family members. As their teachers, it was important for Mrs. A and I to not dissuade or inhibit their thinking, but allow them to freely express their opinions, while gently guiding them towards using politically correct language and expressions, and consider other ideas as well. All of our eleven students, were open-minded and engaged throughout the research process, despite naturally, having some firm beliefs and personal connections to such a personal topic.

Implications

Often times teachers do not know how to handle students debating concepts being taught or subject matter that teachers introduce, especially if it is controversial, for fear of not knowing what to say so feathers will not be ruffled, or because they have a lack of knowledge on the topic (Ableser, 2008). However, do we not want students that ask questions? Pose challenges? Ruffle feathers? These children in our classrooms today are the future of our nation, and should have confidence to argue difficult subjects, rather than passively agreeing with what the 'higher-ups' tell them is true. They will learn these

concepts and gain the confidence to ask questions from their teachers, home life, and through authentic literacy learning. Looking at the bigger picture, Campbell-Stephans (2009) states that, “schools and the process of ‘schooling’ are among the most powerful we have to socialize communities. They have the capacity to empower, nurture potential, release genius, or conversely to contain, control, and arrest development” (p. 325).

Research has indicated that diverse learners need to be engaged in bone fide, authentic literacy activities because, “they construct meaning in their own natural way in transition to acquiring the fullest range of literate discourse that English or any language has to offer.

This research project was driven by students’ questions and responses during class instruction and discussions. Topics such as Islam religion, equality between men and women, and families of soldiers, were huge components of our discussion time that students all had a vested interest and connection to. When students are engaged in authentic dialogue pertaining to current events topics, the research indicates that that, “there is a potential to take a particular position or talk about new ways of being in this world...thinking about social issues, to take action, and consider how their behaviors could make a difference” (Silvers et. al, 2010, p. 402). This was indicative in all the data collected, and the nature of student responses and their ability to be open-minded to not only other cultures and religions, but also each other’s viewpoints as well!

One primary goal for this authentic literacy experience was to encourage students to explore their differences of opinions, and gain an awareness of their ‘place’ in the world- and how they view other cultures and people, particularly those in need or those much different from us from a cultural standpoint. This kind of conversation can manifest itself into students taken action for social causes, attracting awareness for families outside

of Watersgate, and encouraging their classmates to have an open-mind and get involved and informed about topics that will most indeed, affect their futures and lives. Authentic literacy activities are such an essential part of instruction because they naturally differentiate and adapts themselves to students as they make their own interpretations from the activity. Their background knowledge and life outside of the classroom comes into play as they are conducting an experiment, writing a reflection, or composing a procedural text. (Barnitz, 1994; Duke et al, 2007). My sixth grade students all came into the classroom with different perspectives about the Middle East, and came out of the classroom, better informed, feeling valued for their opinions, and with a sense of appreciation for lessons (and literature) that allowed them to become more well-rounded, knowledge citizens of society. Many students shared with Mrs. A and I that they have started some thought-provoking conversations around the dinner table at home about media biases and the depictions of Middle Eastern people to Americans.

Teachers must recognize human differences as manifestations of cultural discourse which can be expanded rather than interrupted or suppressed” (Barnitz 1994, p. 587). Our classrooms today are filled with students from various backgrounds and lifestyles. As teachers, it is expected of us to recognize these differences, differentiate and modify our instruction to meet all learners’ needs, and understand the purpose of doing so. So often, teachers talk about differentiating instruction, but may not perhaps fully comprehend the reason why doing so it vitally important to student success. In relating this to our lessons in Enrichment reading, my co-teacher and I were made aware that in future lessons and authentic literacy projects, students will benefit from more research and exposure to general information about the Middle East, and seeking out a wider variety of authentic texts prior to reading *Three Cups of Tea* (Barnitz, 1994; Purcell-

Gates et.all; 2007). In addition, follow-up lessons can include opportunities to meet men and women from the Middle East where students can pose questions about their culture and religion, and truly experience a real-life, authentic and personal interaction.

Our responsibility as educators for our youth and the future of the world is to have a generation that is tolerant, inquisitive, open-minded, and conscious of diversity. The majority of our country's problems and tragedies stem from people not accepting others and having the need to dominate and control people they view as beneath or different from them. Schmoker (2007) recommends that teachers consistently provide in-class experiences that have students reading, "interesting and provocative texts purposefully, always guided by good questions that stimulate discussions, debate, and effective writing" (VanDeWeghe, 2008, p. 108). Wilson (2008) believes that when students see examples of people they respect sharing their viewpoints on education, the benefits of school and results it has brought to their lives, they "...witness a myriad of authentic purposes, contexts, genres, and audiences that inhere in a wide world of texts (p. 486). When my sixth grade students gained a true sense of ownership in their learning, they became more invested and intrigued by the topic being introduced and implemented in the classroom.

Through research, observations, and data collection with Watergates' sixth grade reading students, their viewpoints towards other cultures and religions have evolved. Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson has been a vessel and tool in fostering discussions about Middle Eastern culture, current news events, and previously held biases against Muslim civilians.

Conclusion

Ultimately as teachers, we need to identify our student's needs, abilities, and passions in order to guide our instruction where it is effective and meaningful for them. It should include opportunities where technology is implemented, students are actively participating in the learning process, and the lessons are relevant and appropriate to their lives. Continuous support and assessment, along with professional development and staying current with the trends in literacy, allows teachers to be more well-rounded as professionals. By being compassionate to student's needs, and supporting them where they have opportunities for questions and higher level thinking, can hopefully fulfill the wide range of literacies we want students to become proficient in.

Authentic Literacy is moving past just being a 'buzz' word in the educational community, but a practical, successful, and essential method of teaching that prepares our youth to be open-minded, investigative, questioning citizens who see relevance in their schooling. There are so many positive effects that result from teaching with real life purpose and principle- ultimately having students that love learning and applying in their lives to make a difference their communities and world.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Statement/Response Questionnaires

<i>The government should be responsible for running schools. Agree or Disagree?</i>	
<p>Seven students agreed.</p> <p><i>Because they should be concerned about education.</i></p> <p><i>So you pay the taxes out of the government for school.</i></p> <p><i>They should because they built it so they are responsible.</i></p> <p><i>I agree that the government should because they run everything else!</i></p> <p><i>They should because they could decide what we learn.</i></p>	<p>Four students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Because government takes too much money as it is.</i></p> <p><i>It depends on how the government is.</i></p> <p><i>The principal should run the school, not the government.</i></p>
<i>When Americans become involved in helping people in other countries, it is always a good thing. Agree or Disagree?</i>	
<p>Five students agreed.</p> <p><i>Americans are helping other students for good things.</i></p> <p><i>It depends. Americans can help but it could make an outcome of war.</i></p> <p><i>Even if it's a small thing, it can make a difference.</i></p>	<p>Six students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Disagree. Operation Iraqi Freedom.</i></p> <p><i>It only makes the country more confused.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes we bond with country, but then they can get mad at us.</i></p> <p><i>Wrong. It may result in WAR.</i></p>
<i>It is more important for boys to be educated than girls. Agree or Disagree?</i>	
<p>One student agreed.</p> <p><i>Because girls don't have jobs in Afghanistan. All men are terrorists there anyway.</i></p>	<p>Ten students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Girls need to learn to make money and help family.</i></p> <p><i>I think boys and girls should be thought of</i></p>

	<p><i>as the same.</i></p> <p><i>We should be treated the same. Being educated means you can think more clearly.</i></p>
<p><i>Islamic families do not want girls to be educated. Agree or disagree?</i></p> <p>[Researcher's note: The phrasing of this question posed some confusion to students. Several students considered it a yes or no question, while others did not differentiate the difference between this question and the previously asked boy and girl education question. Responses will vary.]</p>	
<p>Three students agreed.</p> <p><i>They don't go to school anyway.</i></p> <p><i>Girls only should do chores.</i></p> <p><i>Islamic families do not want girls to be educated even though they should.</i></p>	<p>Eight students disagreed.</p> <p><i>Why would they not want the girls to be educated?</i></p> <p><i>They want girls to be educated to stop the terrorists.</i></p> <p><i>Girls should be educated so they can learn how to read and write.</i></p>
<p><i>A person is obligated to help someone in need. Agree or disagree?</i></p>	
<p>Seven people agreed.</p> <p><i>You should be glad to help someone instead of watching it go down.</i></p> <p><i>You should always help someone in need.</i></p> <p><i>Because you can make a difference.</i></p> <p><i>Agree, someone needs to be in charge.</i></p> <p><i>It's the right thing to do.</i></p>	<p>Four people disagreed.</p> <p><i>People make choices for themselves.</i></p> <p><i>You don't have to help someone in need but it would be nice.</i></p>

Appendix B- Informal interview questions

Interview Question # 1:

What kinds of problems do children in America face versus children in the Middle East?

U.S.: We have family members serving in the military and we have access to food.

Middle East: They are war torn and they ALSO have family members serving in the military.

U.S.: We are pretty pampered in the United States; we waste a lot of time and materials on dumb stuff that I'm sure they Middle East kids would really appreciate.

Middle East: The Middle East values education more than we do, because they don't have as many rights to learn what they want.

We have the fear of being killed by other war and stuff. But they also have that fear since there are people fighting the war for them over there!

We deal with economic and money stuff and taxes, and they deal with food and survival and stuff.

U.S.: Economy and trouble with homework.

Middle East: Starvation, poverty, no homework and no schools

U.S.: Losing our parents, fear of intruders and burglars

Middle East: No education, very poor, homeless, illiterate

U.S.: We have to face lack of presidential control, the Oil Spill, disasters in other parts of the world that require our help and money. Also, the government and teachers do not give us enough time to do our homework and learn.

Middle East: In the Middle East, they barely have any education, but they value it 100%, lack of sanitation and disease control over there, plus they don't have much clothing or materials!

Interview Question # 2:

How would an education be essential to a Middle Eastern child?

Where they live, there are not many people who have a great education because of their religion. Their religion is their top priority, so they don't know a lot about math and reading.

It can help them with family and earn more money.

They would be able to read which is very important and they can also get the necessities-like going to college for example.

It will also help them make the 'right choices' and not get sucked into terrorism.

They don't have the skills to do anything except for hunting, building, and capturing other bad people.

They need an education to get a great job, and more money to pay for food and other survival stuff.

It can help both of us- they could lead a worse life if they joined the terrorists, and we can help them realize that a democracy and other political things are better choices.

They want the same opportunities that United States kids get- an education gives them lots of advantages.

Interview Question # 3:

Why should WE care about what is happening overseas in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern cultures?

They are poor. They really need help. They don't get how luxurious we have it. The need more and better food and water.

Unlike us, they don't have much stuff- they might have different religious beliefs and people don't like them. It's like us treating people with mental disabilities different because of how they look or act.

We're more fortunate than they are- because they are worse off. They are very, very in need. They're suffering.

They are not all bombers and there beliefs are different- but OK, sometimes we are asking for them to bomb us because we barely provide them the support they need! One of their Islamic pillars [reference to Islam religion lesson referenced after the interview excerpts] is to give to the less fortunate, but they need help to!

If we help them, then maybe they will help us when necessary. Plus, we are ALL human and all the same!

If there is something going on in the world, why should we just stand back and watch? Everyone can have a relationship with someone in the world- we're all connected in some way.

So they don't attack us in the future, or if the Middle Eastern president doesn't have an education, he can't make the right choices.