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Adventures with Kel in Des Moines

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Adventures with Kel in Des Moines

This Graduate Research Project

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Abstract

There are no picture books about the mandated third grade unit in Des Moines that study the capital city's major historic sites. The purpose of this research is to provide a new age-appropriate illustrated informational book to be used with the Des Moines capital city unit. The format will contain photographs of the historical sights that are studied in third grade as well as multicultural locations and events enriching the city's diversity.

The template for this project will be shared with the original developers of the project, 3 third grade teachers involved in teaching the unit, and five students entering fourth grade this fall will all be polled for their input.

The targeted audience for this project is third grade students, teachers and parents with the hope that students in grade kindergarten through fifth grade will also benefit from this picture book. The book is designed to motivate elementary readers to actively explore their community and feel a connection with the city's cultural history.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

There are conflicting ideas about the correct translation of the name of the city Des Moines. Most would agree that *Des* is French, meaning *of the*. It is the second part of the name that incites discussion. Does *Moines* mean *mounds*, referring to the Native American burial mounds found along the river? Does it mean *monks*, referring to the missionaries who first came to this area? Alternatively, perhaps it comes from the word *Moingona* a word Native Americans gave to the river. *Moines* may also mean *middle* as it sits between the Mississippi and the Missouri. Whatever the meaning, Des Moines is the capital of Iowa and at the center of this project (Rand McNally, 2004, p.46).

The city lies between the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers and has a population of almost 200,000 inhabitants. The 40 elementary schools serve 14,802 students in the Des Moines Independent Community School District. The diversity in the city of Des Moines is apparent with an enrollment of 32.8% of its students from a racial-minority. Students whose native language is other than English make up 3,309 of the total student population. There are over Forty-eight languages represented by students in the Des Moines District (<http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us/facts/schoolfacts.htm#Schools>).

The elementary *Essential Curriculum* requires all third graders to learn about communities and Iowa history in their social studies classes (Des Moines Independent Community School District, 2000, <http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us>). The Social Science Department developed a *Des Moines Unit* in the early 1980s for the unit taught by every third grade teacher in the Des Moines District. “The unit is designed so that each objective is stated then followed immediately by suggested activities” (*Des Moines Unit*, 1983, p. 1) The unit contains short

narratives and information about field trips throughout Des Moines in order to show the students the important historical sites. Third grade teachers in the district have taught this unit for over 20 years. Individual teachers, with different teaching styles, have followed the guidelines with additions and adjustments. Third grade teachers say the *Des Moines Unit* is helpful in their teaching, extensive in the history of Des Moines, and a good opportunity for students to use different skills taught in social studies. Its drawbacks are the lack of new, updated material, hands-on opportunities, and the unit's reliance on a text-heavy format, which is conducive to good readers, but limiting for other learners and teaching methods. Staff is well aware that the unit does not lend itself well to English language learners, special education students, students who do not read at or above the third grade reading level, and students with disabilities. The classroom has changed since the early 1980s in ways that many of us could not predict and it is vital that teaching method and materials change along with the student population.

History is part of social studies in elementary schools, but how important is this part of the curriculum? Why is it important for students to know about the history of their community? "...we study history for a variety of reasons—to understand people who thought and acted differently than we do in our own time, to seek self knowledge, to make sense of a time radically different from our own time, to find a sense of distance from the present to aid us in placing our own times in perspective, to help us understand how we got to where we are now, and a whole host of other reasons" (Tennessee Tech 2004, <http://www.tntech.edu/history/whystudy.html>).

The state of Iowa has standards and benchmarks that comply and enhance the standards set forth nationally. A web site such as Iowa History Online aids in providing said standards, benchmarks, curriculum connections and additional resources. Resources that connect

educators with the diverse information that they need to connect students with history. (Iowa History Online 2003, <http://fp.uni.edu/iowaonline/main.htm>).

The connections students have with the history of their local community provides meaning to their lives. “Learning that one’s street was once an Indian trail, that a neighbor’s ancestor died in a Civil War battle, or that a local mill was the site of a violent labor dispute is a powerful experience that arguably will help cement in a learner’s memory the significance of the event on both a local and national scale” (Danker, 2003, p. 3).

A curriculum that includes history also can aid in the standardized tests that have become more challenging and important in our schools. “Local history can help prepare students for standardized tests in a number of ways. For students to do well on content-based tests that require familiarity with a broad range of topics learned over a long period of time, they must stretch their memories and possess solid understanding of the concepts that are fundamental to a particular discipline or field of study” (p. 2).

The study of local history and diversity of our schools share a connection. Danker illustrates how the history of our communities has been based on the social and cultural developments of its people. This would naturally present multicultural perspectives of the many different folks that helped to build it. The inclusion of local history studies in elementary curriculum provides educators the opportunity in working with students to foster an appreciation for the diversity of the major events and people in that history (p.3).

Background

Objectives.

The *Des Moines Unit* has eleven objectives in all, complete with additional information and resources for the teaching staff. Included in the eleven unit objectives are the backgrounds of historically relevant people, locations of historic sites,

and an understanding of their importance. Additional activities such as worksheets, crossword puzzles and newspapers articles are included for the teacher's use. This unit is mandatory under the *National Standards for History in the Schools* (National Center for History in the Schools, 2004).

One standard centers on *Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago*. Another standard under that topic centers on the history of the students' local community and how it has changed over time. These issues are addressed in the current textbook adapted for third grade, *The World Around Us: Communities Near and Far* (1993) by Macmillan/McGraw Publishing.

This textbook relies on information of the local community and encourages students to explore their own community and compare and contrast it with communities discussed in the textbook.

Challenges.

Classrooms face more challenges today. They contain more diversity than in the early 1980s. "The instructional range within which the majority of students perform in any one classroom has expanded considerably over the years. Cultural, socioeconomic, academic, and linguistic diversity have become the norm" (Fuller & Stone, 1998). English language learners are found in many classrooms and though they add cultural enrichment as never before, they also add challenges to staff members who teach them. The cultural diversity in the U.S. is ever growing with 38.8 percent of public school students listed as minorities in 2000, and the number of students who spoke a language other than English at home listed as 13.7 million in 1999 according to the U.S. Department of Education (2004, <http://nces.ed.gov>

/programs/coe/2003/section1/indicator04.asp). “These demographic trends present new challenges for schools. Eighty percent of the teachers surveyed by Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden (2003) felt unprepared to teach a diverse student population.”

Students in the classroom today are much more visually oriented. Teachers have found that “Using illustrated reading books that address content in a fun and exciting way helps to capture the students’ interest” (Roberts, 2003, p. 1). Students with learning disabilities and physical disabilities are now mainstreamed into classrooms, learning along with their peers, yet student and teacher are challenged with accommodating these student’s needs. One aid to these challenges could be a picture book, especially in the social studies area. Literature has been tied to other curricular areas; it could be a boost to the social studies curriculum. “Visual literacy, the ability to comprehend meaning in images, requires critical viewing skills. Unlike moving images, images in picture books allow the sustained viewing time necessary for developing critical viewing skills through exploration, critique and reflection. Although commonly considered part of the literary arts, picture books are useful tools for teaching many abstract and complex concepts of the social studies at the elementary level” (Manifold, 2000 p. 29).

Budget constraints.

School budgets can be cut, raising issues of adequate support staff to aid with accommodations for students with special needs as those described above. Inadequate out of date printed materials and textbooks may still be used. District money for field trips may be diminished which would limit the possibility of third graders seeing the architectural and historic sites of Des Moines. Education in the state of Iowa is facing many shortfalls. “It’s going to be grim,” said Troyce Fisher, executive director of School Administrators of Iowa.

“I don’t know how we can continue to improve student achievement with fewer resources and fewer people to work with kids who are struggling” (Bolten, 2003, <http://www.dmregister.com/news/stories/c4780927/20564982.html>).

These issues are just a few of many that today’s teachers are dealing with in accommodating their teaching to meet the needs of their students’ learning. Additional resources for teachers, students and parents to use in understanding, exploring and learning the curriculum being taught in our schools are vital. The third grade unit on Des Moines could benefit from resources that help to deal with some of the accommodations needed.

Problem Statement

There are no illustrated informational picture books about the mandated third grade unit in Des Moines that studies the capital city’s major historic sites.

Research Questions

1. Has the city of Des Moines changed since the 1980s development of the *Des Moines Unit* curriculum?
2. What is the content of current books about Des Moines and how can that information be adapted for this project?
3. What historic sites should be added and what are the criteria such sites should meet?
4. Would a picture book format be an appropriate resource?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to provide an age-appropriate illustrated informational picture book to enhance the Des Moines capital city unit.

Assumptions

A picture book of the historical highpoints of the city of Des Moines would be an asset to third grade staff teaching about the city. It would enrich and expand student's knowledge of their city, community and heritage. The illustrated nonfiction book will not be able to capture all of the cultural diversity that Des Moines contains, but will be representative of the pride and interest in the ethnic make-up of the community.

Limitations

The proposed project of a picture book will develop from the current third grade curriculum formed in the early 1980s by the Social Science Department of the Des Moines Independent Community School District. This work will be age-appropriate for the elementary level, third grade in particular, limited in text and rich in photographs. The project is not designed to replace the *Des Moines Unit*, but to enhance it. The information and photographs of historic sites will be limited because of the appropriate length of a picture book. The sites chosen to be covered will be a subjective choice by the researcher. The researcher will also attempt to broaden the scope of the original curriculum by including new sites in the picture book that will help portray the multicultural background of the city, bringing in the interest of a larger scope of peoples. The book will become outdated in time as the major sites of the capital city change.

Definitions

Curriculum - the courses offered by an educational institution Merriam Webster (2004) *Merriam Webster Online*. February 27, 2004. Retrieved from <http://webster.com/>.

English language learners – learners whose first and primary language is not English Merriam Webster (2004) *Merriam Webster Online*. February 27, 2004. Retrieved from <http://webster.com/>.

Learning Disabilities - any of various conditions (as dyslexia) that interfere with an individual's ability to learn and so result in impaired functioning in language, reasoning, or academic skills and that are thought to be caused by difficulties in processing and integrating information Merriam Webster (2004) *Merriam Webster Online*. February 27, 2004. Retrieved from <http://webster.com/>.

Mainstreamed – to place (as a handicapped child) in regular school classes Merriam Webster (2004) *Merriam Webster Online*. February 27, 2004. Retrieved from <http://webster.com/>.

Visual Learners – learners who gain knowledge or understanding better through visual information Merriam Webster (2004) *Merriam Webster Online*. February 27, 2004. Retrieved from <http://webster.com/>.

Significance

There is currently a void for elementary students looking for an illustrated informational book about Des Moines, Iowa. There are titles about the city for adults, but they are generally very comprehensive and the language is too complex for third grade students. They also tend to be large, heavy volumes with extensive information about the city. A picture book geared toward the elementary student would contain photographs of the important sites covered in the *Des Moines Unit* with limited text written at an age appropriate level and a physical text size conducive to elementary reader's comfort level. It would give students more than dates and general information that the unit relies heavily on. A picture book of Des Moines would be a vital resource for students, teachers and parents, a visual tour of the main historic sites. Students with disabilities and English language learners might find a picture book easier to understand than the unit's reliance on text. A lack of funding for

field trips would find the visual material an additional resource to teaching the unit at a third grade student's level.

Having access to a highly visual, low text resource would enable teachers to acquaint all students with the sites they will visit on a future field trip, to enhance the historical information about the sites visually throughout the unit in lieu of a field trip, and stimulate memories of the sites of the field trip after the event. This resource would enhance and enrich the *Des Moines Unit* as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Currently there is no illustrated informational book about the mandated third grade unit of the Des Moines Independent Community School District in Iowa that studies the capital city's major historic sites. The purpose of this research is to provide an age-appropriate picture book to enhance the Des Moines capital city unit. Research related to this problem falls into three categories. The importance of teaching history in the elementary classroom; diversity in the classroom; and the power of picture books and visual learning.

The Importance of Teaching History in the Elementary Classroom

History is important.

The focus of the Bradley Commission (1987) since its inception, and subsequent updates, has been the condition of the history curriculum taught in our schools. The commission was comprised of seventeen teachers and scholars from elementary, secondary and higher education fields. All fifty states were examined in the original study and fifteen percent had no requirement that American history be taught in their schools (p.7). The Bradley Commission brought the blight of education in the history field to the forefront of educator's minds and concluded that history curriculum was vital to all students, starting in kindergarten.

Elementary students are capable of learning history.

Keller (2002) studied the teaching of history in the early elementary grades in order to determine the different models of teaching used at this level (p. 4). Although children may be surrounded by history in the form of traditions, stories and visual clues of their own and classmate's backgrounds, historical content is not presented well in elementary school (p. 4).

Keller conducted an inquiry study into the substance and instruction of history taught in the early elementary grades, her purpose being to study the different models of teaching history at this level (p. 6). Using a collective case study the researcher chose three primary elementary classes in three elementary schools (one Christian, one Montessori and one a public school) in Bloomington, Indiana. She gathered information on the factors that support or obstruct teaching history to younger elementary students, approaches to teaching the subject and which ones worked best. Data were also gathered to guide teachers and administrators in how to develop a history curriculum that would best support the early elementary grades.

Her findings included the examination of the different models of instruction, pedagogical strategies and collecting data from the educators. She concluded that children of this age were certainly capable of learning and benefiting from history lessons. She also found through observations and interviews, that being exposed to history aided students in their sense of judgment, tolerance and empathy (p. 6). History enabled students to gain a better understanding of their being and the identity that others possess (p. 12).

Keller's recommendation was to develop history curriculum and plans for how it should be implemented for the early elementary grades, while allowing educators to tailor the content and delivery for their students and teaching styles.

The importance of learning about your community.

Parker (1964) deemed the need for a structured study of local communities as part of the social studies curriculum several decades ago. His research included a formula for the organization of what should be taught in elementary schools within the social studies curriculum. The plan involved these three phases; phase one that centered on the social studies knowledge within the area or community, phase two was seen as the structure and

sequence on the knowledge into a teachable format, and phase three as the direct application of the curriculum into the classroom (p. 6). His strong belief in the study of local community in school was reinforced in his research. “Historically, the city has constituted a basic public school unit and therefore has played a major role in the provision of education” (p. 119). Connecting that with the development of curriculum for study in the elementary schools, Parker stated, “The social studies curriculum committee of a city school district could use the scope as a guide to the study of the city community. Such a study should bring to light key elements of the city community in each of the categories of the scope” (p. 171).

Using conceptual research with a critical interpretive design, Parker carried out his plans for a structure and evaluation of choosing, developing and implementing a community component in the elementary social studies curriculum. His research developed a scaffolding of information and connections with students and the community to create a better understanding of how a city and community is created, develops, and is linked to each of its members. This hierarchy of development within a community was possible and would continue to thrive with active citizens involved in the decision making process. Research like Parker’s helps to link and activate elementary learners with the connection and stake they have in their community.

The connection between history and literature.

Claunch Lebsack (2002) conducted a study on how elementary students, nine and ten-year-olds specifically, understood the concept of historical time through the reading and comprehension of children’s literature. She reiterated the sentiment of many educators, that the study of the past is the least loved subject of students and teachers in an elementary school setting (p. 7).

Elementary teachers were encouraged to focus on math and science, subjects deemed more developmentally appropriate for elementary aged children. These were at least concrete subjects with clear right and wrong answers.

Claunch Lebsack's study used practitioner research in a team teaching environment, in an elementary classroom of 42 students in the southwest. History was combined with language arts and taught in 90-minute blocks daily. The data included 80 hours of videotape, 12 open-ended interviews with the group, 36 individual interviews, 260 written responses and 92 drawing responses to the children's literature (47-53).

The findings fell into four areas. The first was the importance of students comparing and contrasting the past to the present. The second finding was that building the historical curriculum from the present to the past allowed students something to relate to and build on from their experience. The third finding was that words have historical contexts and can evoke different meanings when used during different periods. The final finding was the importance of a text having illustrations of abstract concepts to increase the understanding of historical time (114-116). Claunch Lebsack reaffirmed that elementary students can indeed learn history, and relating information through their present experiences to understand their past puts historical content into perspective. This allows them a greater understanding of themselves, their social responsibilities, and how they fit into history in general.

Children are ready to explore history.

Piaget believed that there was a certain order to when and how children might assimilate or accommodate information to use in their life. This is known as his theory of the stages of intellectual development. He defined children from ages seven through eleven in the concrete operations stage. At this stage children cannot be taught concepts verbally or those that they

have not already obtained through their spontaneous development (Hall, 1970). When asked about history in the elementary school Piaget answered that educators should reduce the amount of time making students disgusted with history and concentrate on giving them a taste for reading history (pg. 29). With that in mind he also stated that, "All intelligence is an adaptive process; all adaptation entails an assimilation of things into the mind, just as does the complementary process of accommodation. Thus all work on the part of the intelligence rests on an interest" (Piaget, 1970, p. 158) Creating an interest in history for elementary students through a picture book of historical and culturally diverse sights in their community sets the stage for their readiness to learn the facts and concepts of history at a later date.

Teaching beyond the textbook.

Research that reaffirms the need for teaching history in the elementary classroom can also be seen in research by Erickson (1996). She centered her research on what the relationship was between a teacher's concept of teaching social studies and the choice of using a literature-based instructional approach (p. 7).

Erickson conducted a qualitative case study in order to obtain and better understand literature-based social studies teaching. Data were gathered from one teacher through interviews, observations, journal entries and document reviews. A qualitative research interpretive process was used to analyze the data to provide evidence of effectiveness of using literature to teach social studies (p.8)

Erickson's findings were that the use of literature, in conjunction with the textbook aided students in finding connections with themselves and the past. She concluded that students need to actively strive to understand their present and possible future personal connection to history (pp. 107-108).

Diversity in the Classroom

Diversity creates the need to alter teaching methods.

Devlin (1996) analyzed how second language learners may need different instruction to promote their learning. These diverse learners rely on the help of others, including educators, in modeling and providing examples of language. This practice aids the students in the language learning stages that they experience as well as giving them opportunities to use their second language. These stages become more complex as the language is used and the usage continues to grow (p. 8).

Young children acquire their primary language through a series of stages and follow many of the same steps when acquiring a second language. The oral language development begins with children building rules to follow in their continued development of that language (p. 7).

Devlin's research centered on oral book discussions that primary students conducted with their teacher in an elementary school in Nevada. Her method of study was collected transcribed audiotapes of the book discussions, interviews with the class and the journal entries of the teacher throughout the school year. After analyzing the transcripts, she detailed the types of conversation that students had with their teacher. Her findings showed that students became more confident and talked more enabling the teacher to do more of the listening.

Devlin's conclusion was that there is a direct benefit in discussing picture books when read aloud to students of different English proficiency levels. Children's literature provides 'real language' which enables the student to see, hear and use English in an authentic way, and the opportunity to ask questions and give opinions. Oral literature provides correct grammatical form and a shared experience for second language learners to discuss and compare. She

stated that “Children’s literature provides a common subject which all participants can relate to, therefore providing the framework for language acquisition to occur in a natural, context embedded situation” (p. 11). Language development benefited and was reinforced with the exposure to English in a contextual and authentic setting.

Sensitivity to ethnicity in our teaching.

Another study discussed the ever-growing role of the ESL (English as a second language) student in the classroom and the need for the educator to learn how to educate that child “Linguistic and cultural minority children are among the fastest growing student populations in the public schools” (p. 1). Leva-Lopes’s (1999) purpose in her research was to evaluate what linguistic and cultural minority students needed from education and what the schools actually offered (pp. 3-4).

Leva-Lopes conducted a study of 169 ESL students in a small New York district’s four elementary schools. Her research also gathered information from the 120 classroom and special education teachers in first through fifth grades. The data gathered were designed to aid researchers, local administrators and educators to gain knowledge into what linguistic and cultural minority students bring to school in their different abilities and motivation, and consequently, what they need from public education in return. Data gathered from educators aided the researcher in evaluating whether teachers empower or disable students through their teaching and interactions with children in the classroom.

Leva-Lopes’s method of research collected and detailed school and district interactions, observations and personal interviews with this small number of linguistic and cultural minority children of the district. The findings indicated that ESL students’ backgrounds and personal history played a large role in their school experiences and that educators’ failure in

trying to educate these students was due to the lack of training in teaching students from differing cultures and general exposure to other cultures and customs (pp. 224-226).

Leva-Lopes pointed out that public education has a legal obligation to provide equal opportunities for a quality education to all students, which in turn may require schools to approach learning in different ways. The need to incorporate the linguistic and cultural diversity of students is instrumental in developing and supporting a minority student's cultural identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging, thus empowering the student (p. 210). The cost in time, money and poorer testing/measuring may have negative effects that in this age of federal education standards can mean lower funding for districts and a stigma for individual schools.

Teachers need training.

Trujillo's (1999) research study centered on the need to describe and interpret the conversations and activities that educational staff conducted with students in order to assess the accommodations that would be necessary to meet the needs of a student population that was becoming increasingly diverse.

She pointed to the dominant culture of the average teacher of a European-American middle class background, who is not educated in how to reach and teach the more diverse population found in classrooms today (p. 1).

Trujillo's method was to study how a collaborative group of teachers, support staff and administrators interacted and taught students of diversity in an elementary school in the heart of the Midwest. Through observation and specific interview questions, data were collected from the adults and students. The composite framework to guide the study centered on the school culture, intercultural interactions and changes to the school population (p. 12).

The study had limitations in the demeanor of the students. Inhibited by outsiders, the students could not always be counted on for accurate or complete feedback. Webbing activities were conducted at the end of each group session and collected by the researcher. The hope was to gain more insights into the reaction and comprehension of the students to the activities (p. 9).

Trujillo found a definitive need for educators to purposefully obtain greater knowledge on the process and needs of teaching multicultural learners. A climate of teamwork and quality working relationships is a prerequisite for educators to begin to work together to meet the accommodations needed to teach the diverse learners in classrooms today (p. 4).

The Power of Picture Books and Visual Learning

Illustrations tell a story.

Walworth (1991) conducted a study whose purpose was to examine second graders to see how they use text and illustrations to follow storylines in picture books. The study was conducted with 33 classroom teachers and 594 second graders in Georgia. The teachers were chosen through the consideration of their number of years teaching, background in children's literature, and the number of picture books they used in the classroom. The students were identified by their reading ability and gender.

Through survey and interview results, teachers did agree that second grade students find illustrations important to understanding the story. Students are very familiar with illustrations, understand how to use illustrations, and follow the story line through the illustrations (p. 88). Some of the findings of this study included that the success or ease that students have at using the illustrations to tell the story depended on their reading ability and the picture book used (pp. 70-72). Less able readers depend on the illustrations in picture

books to aid them in following the story line, better readers used the illustrations and text as sources of information, not relying solely on one or the other. However, observations of children with picture books resulted in the students attempting to use the text when initially finding the source of the story information.

Illustrations and text complement each other.

Kiefer's (1982) research detailed student's response to illustrated picture books through the study of the pictures and words interdependently. She discussed earlier research that evaluated the illustrations and texts independently, but did not look at the picture book as "...an art form..." (p. 170) unique to itself and dependent on both values to convey information to readers.

The researcher portrayed the role of a participant observer for a ten-week and follow-up twelve week visit the following year, in two combination classrooms of first and second grade. These were both located in an upper middle-class school district in Ohio. Kiefer studied students from each grade, (18 first graders and 26 second graders) in their classrooms where the curriculum was organized incorporating picture books in a major role. Picture books were also used in the reading instruction with no textbook support.

Kiefer used this method to gather data and formulate the findings into three main themes; the variation of the children's response to the picture books, the changes in the responses over time, and the context of the responses (p. 171).

In addition to these data, the researcher carefully measured the uniqueness of each of the educator's teaching styles. One teacher played the traditional role as an imparter of knowledge. The other teacher played the role of a leader, but more interested in learning from the children than regurgitating specific information (p. 189).

She found that there were a variety of responses to picture books and how they are chosen by the children. There are factors that influence children when choosing a picture book and the recommendation of a book by a teacher, librarian or peer was very powerful. Without input, children are drawn to books that are well laid out and have illustrations that catch their eye. The illustrations not only aid the students in leading them into the story, but invite interest in the subject of the material. Students investigate illustrations in picture books to aid in predicting the story, they 'read' the pictures to initially define the story and they identify with an aspect of the book that is personally pleasing to them (p. 175).

The researcher's findings pointed to the need for students to have time to form a reaction and connection to a book, and the differences in their reaction to books over time. This deeper connection with a story cannot be timed or limited but can be reinforced and encouraged for a better understanding and relationship. This is aided by a teacher who rereads a book, revisits a book after a period away from that subject, who has that book available for the students to refer to if they wish, who shares many titles from the same author (p. 185). Changes in student's reactions or deeper connections with a book can take place if the student is nurtured in his or her connection.

Finally, the researcher developed her findings on the context of responses the students shared to the 300 to 500 picture books available in their classroom. "The curriculum in both rooms centered on literature, and instruction in subject areas was integrated into themes – allowing children to be active constructors of their own learning" (p. 186). The classrooms were arranged so that the children were free to move about and free to use art materials, the puppet theatre or the writing tables in response to books.

The conclusions of the study were that the students in the educator's classroom whose role was to guide and compliment the students' learning developed a closer understanding and

connection with the picture books that were introduced. The students were more active participants in their learning. Given time, students were able to develop an interest in a book, both illustrations and text, and the book could provide a lasting and personal connection with the child. Providing an atmosphere and setting where the book, theme or subject is dealt with in some depth can deepen and solidify the child's connection with the book. Providing a classroom where a picture book, a story, can have interdisciplinary connections with various activities the student is welcome to take part in deepens the child's connection with the material (p. 173).

Picture books fulfill a need.

Gensicke (1993) studied the need for a picture book to teach six to ten year old children about the history of the state of Iowa in an alphabet book format. She discovered a need for this type of format for younger elementary aged children as there was currently nothing available.

The researcher used began with a comprehensive list of 350 books that were a cross-section of the types of alphabet books currently available. She then gathered historical facts from area libraries that could be used with the twenty- six letters of the alphabet beginning with a letter of the alphabet (p. 22). Pictures and photographs were then chosen to relate to each letter of the alphabet and text added for each illustration.

Gensicke's conclusions included the challenge of devising a historical picture book of the state of Iowa, limiting the amount of information keeping in mind the focus of her audience, and planning the use of text to be factual and understandable to young children (p. 29).

The *I is for Iowa* book was published under Gensicke's name in 1995 and has been an asset for educators, libraries and students since then (p 7). In 2002, the First Lady of Iowa, Christi Vilsack chose this book for her Iowa Stories 2000 program where a book is given to each

kindergarten child in the state of Iowa for a total of approximately 38,000 books (Iowa Department of Education).

Iossi (2001) also studied the need for a picture book, this time within her community. The National Standards for History (National Center for History in the Schools, 2004, <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/standardsk-4.html>) include standards that include the History of Students' Local Community and How Communities in North America Varied Long Ago.

Bettendorf, Iowa, the community in which Iossi taught, included these requirements in their curriculum (http://bettendorf.k12.ia.us/curriculum/social_studies_3.html).

Iossi found through research that children are able to learn history and understand the concept of historical time. (p. 13) One successful method was the teaching of history through nonfiction books. Consequently, the method the researcher used to go about this task was to investigate the history of the Quad Cities area. She chose to use historical information from the pre-Civil War and Civil War period. After deciding on a guidebook format for her picture book, she searched for prototypes through union catalogs and Amazon.com (p. 14). Local information for the guidebook was formed from persons, places and print resources that she found in the Quad Cities area. The parameters for the study was that each site: have historical significance, be of interest to children in the seven-to-ten year old framework, and that the site must be more than just a monument (p.14).

From this information, the researcher developed a guidebook for children in the seven to ten year old age range. This guidebook complemented the social studies unit on local history that was a requirement of the curriculum for that area.

Summary

The researcher has found evidence of the importance of teaching history to elementary students, the diversity of the classroom today and its needs, and the power of picture books. The researcher points to the following supportive books, journals and dissertations on the subject to support the research.

The early information on the need to explore history with students, beginning in elementary school, was provided by the Bradley Commission (1987). Keller's (2002) research continued to support this with her finding that not only is history an important curricular area for elementary students but that elementary students had the ability to learn history. Benefits of students being taught history were a sense of judgment, tolerance and empathy as well as a greater understanding of their own identity and how they fit into their world. Parker (1964) researched the importance of studying our local communities as a part of the history curriculum taught in schools, a vital subject, even in the early 1960s. Claunch Lebsack's (2002) findings included the connection students make with the past when starting at their present and the importance of illustrations with text to aid in understanding concepts. Erickson (1996) studied the connection of literature-based social studies teaching beyond the textbook and its successes. Piaget (1970) supported them all in his early work that pinpointed the capability of children by the third grade to learn and understand this piece of educational curriculum.

Research supports the diversity of today's average elementary classroom and the additional needs of the linguistic and culturally diverse population of students. The importance of Devlin's (1996) study of the different needs of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners concluded that there were indeed differences that could be aided with more oral teaching methods and illustrated literature. Leva-Lopes (1999) highlighted what diversity can bring to

an educational system and the different needs that these linguistic and cultural minority students need, while Trujillo's (1999) findings detailed that our teachers need to be educated to enable them to adequately teach the diversity found in the classroom today.

Research also supports the use of illustrated informational books when teaching elementary students. Literature, such as a picture book, is a powerful tool when used with textbooks in an elementary setting. Walworth's (1991) research demonstrated the importance of picture books and visual learning. Her findings with second graders found that students had a familiarity with illustrations and used them for sources of information in the storyline and contextual clues when examining the text. Kiefer's (1982) research had many similarities, with her findings supporting the use of picture books over a period, reinforcing or rereading books to enable students the opportunity to explore the book in depth and learn from it. The power of picture books as an educational connection was very clear. Gensicke (1993) researched the need of historical data for young elementary students and designed an alphabet book that complemented the learning of the alphabet with basic historical facts that students of Iowa should know, and Iossi's (2001) research centered on a specific historical time and place to enable students, educators and the public to explore local history through her guidebook.

This researcher intends to develop an illustrated informational picture book of the historical sites in Des Moines that are part of the third grade curriculum for all Des Moines Independent Community School District students in Iowa. The preceding research demonstrates the usefulness of this type of resource.

CHAPTER 3

Procedures

Currently there is no illustrated informational book about the mandated third grade unit in Des Moines that studies the capital city's major historic sites. The purpose of this research is to provide an age-appropriate picture book with an emphasis on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the city, to enhance the Des Moines capital city unit.

Research Design

The researcher is planning to write an illustrated informational book in a picture book format that will be designed to aid teachers and students with the third grade social studies requirement called the *Des Moines Unit* (Des Moines Public Schools, Social Science Department, Grade 3). This unit is used every year and the material has extensive information on Des Moines history in a text format. There are few illustrations and those are in black and white. There is a need for less text-oriented material for teachers and students to use when studying Des Moines. The option of this informational book will aid teachers who wish to use other resources in addition to the third grade social studies text and the current printed material. It will aid teachers who wish to introduce literature when teaching social studies. It will aid classrooms where students speak English as a second language, have a shorter attention span and/or need the visual cues that a picture book can give.

The informational book will also complement the section of the unit that covers the field trip. If a trip is in the future, the book will be a wonderful resource to remind students what they might see on that trip. If the trip is not a viable part of the unit, the book aids students with visual evidence of the historical sights of Des Moines. If a field trip is taken as part of the unit, this book will be a wonderful way to remember and

review the field trip of Des Moines.

Currently there are several factual books about Des Moines. The researcher has examined many of these and all are comprehensive in their coverage of the major historic sights in Des Moines. None of these is written with the elementary reader in mind. The researcher believes that an illustrated informational picture book will be the best way to complement the Des Moines unit, aiding teachers and students with a tangible option to see the sights.

Research has shown that there are many classroom issues that this book will address. Students with a limited exposure to the historical sights in Des Moines will now have colorful photographs to view and age-appropriate text to read. Teaching history to students at the elementary level is important and a picture book will be an excellent tool for teachers to use to connect students of the present with the past. Since the combination of social studies and literature has been advocated as a good match, a picture book will work nicely. This book will fuel students' imagination and motivate them to explore their community. Through reading the picture book, their oral language and comprehension can be improved.

Literature has been "recognized by advocates in the field as a potentially effective method of conveying social studies content" (Lynnette Bloom Erickson, 1996, p. 6) and also "...another educational strength of literature-as-content is its ability to develop children's concept of story, thus aiding comprehension of narrative" (p. 3). Elementary readers, and older students for that matter, may appreciate the format of a picture book as a way to learn about their community when their attention, reading ability or comprehension of material with extensive text, might overwhelm them. A lack of funding for the field trip portion of the unit or as a preview or refresher of the field trip would find a picture book a viable aid for educators.

Mary Ann Gensicke, (*I is for Iowa*, 1993) in her master's project wrote of her work, "It was created for young, elementary students with the intent that it would increase their knowledge about the state, and incite inquiries about topics presented or stimulate interest in further research." The researcher applauds Ms. Gensicke's desire to involve the students of Iowa in the search for their history and connection to their state.

Christine Gordon Iossi (*Step Back in Time, A Children's Historical Guidebook to the Quad Cities*, 2001) also used her master's project to complete a historical guidebook of The Quad Cities area for children. This reference is also a notable addition to information that students might need. The author's intent was to motivate students to explore their community. Her guidelines included that, "Decisions were made by the researcher on which historic sites to include in the guidebook using the parameters of being of interest to children, being historically significant, being interactive, and fitting the period during or before the Civil War."

Both of these researchers found the need to improve on what was available for elementary students in their communities. Both desired to involve students in learning about their community and actively engage themselves in exploring this area of social studies and local history.

Parameter of Project

The researcher is planning to develop a book of approximately 20-30 pages in length.. This informational book will focus on an overall look at the historical sights of Des Moines studied throughout this third grade unit. The criteria the researcher will use in choosing which sites to include in the book will be based on a Des Moines Bus Tour format developed in 1994 to aid educators during the field trip portion of the unit. The historic sites of Des Moines are divided into four field trip loops, east side, west side, south side and

downtown loops. The researcher will choose sites to include in the picture book from this resource that are; important sites included in all of the loops, sites most often mentioned in the *Des Moines Unit* (Des Moines Public Schools, Social Science Department, Grade 3) itself, and sites the researcher deems most notable for the third grade age group. There will be a limited number of historic sites not be included in the picture book because they do not meet the criteria.

The picture book will have information that the current unit does not have with the addition of sights that have multicultural significance. The researcher is concerned that ethnic and cultural diversity is limited in the *Des Moines Unit* information. The diversity of the Des Moines area has continued to grow and gain more recognition since the early 1980s when the unit was developed. This resource will include many of the numerous ways that the city celebrates its diversity now. The criteria for this information will be; the site or festival will have a website, established address or contact person, have been in existence for at least a year, be recognized by the city of Des Moines and be representative of at least one of the different cultures represented in Des Moines, Iowa.

The picture book will rely heavily on quality color photographs of the Des Moines area formatted in a varied layout. A digital camera will be used for the photographs. The size of the photographs will be visually appropriate for students kindergarten through fifth grade as the researcher would hope that this book might be of interest to all elementary students living in the Des Moines area and in Iowa, as well as any students studying state capitals or living in other capital cities. To keep the reader's attention and provide continuity throughout the book, the structure will be built around a cartoon character, 'Kel'. The researcher's son, a high school senior who will be attending the Commercial Art program at DMAACC in the fall, will draw this cartoon character.

Kel will be portrayed as an elementary student exploring Des Moines on a third grade field trip and will be seen in different positions throughout each of the photographs. The tone will be one of Kel feeling a bit dubious about the field trip and becoming more interested and excited about his city as the story progresses. The intent of the picture book is to give students a clear, colorful and accurate view of major historical sights in Des Moines and the history behind them.

Storyboard

This research project will contain one or more photographs of a historical sight in Des Moines on each page. There may be an additional page that contains another photograph or two of a different angle on the site, an interior shot of the site or some other significant shot that might help the student to better understand the purpose or significance of the photograph. Factual information will accompany each photograph. The photographs will be organized as though the reader is on a field trip. Information concerning festivals and celebrations that have developed over the last ten years to promote and acknowledge the various ethnic contingencies in our city will also be included at the end of the book.

The text will be formatted for ease in reading and the context will be formatted for the vocabulary of a third grade student. The character in the story, Kel, will narrate the book as he travels throughout Des Moines exploring historic sights that are explored throughout the unit. He will also share information and photographs of how cultural and ethnic diversity has strengthened our city and how we can celebrate that diversity. The storyboard is Appendix A.

The project works well in an informational illustrated book format. The actual size of a picture book enables several students to view the information at a time if needed, in a class setting. The size and format is also helpful to the lower elementary students as they are already familiar with picture books. A tangible book allows students, staff, and parents alike

to explore the resource at their leisure without the use of technology and outside the school setting if desired. A picture book format allows readers to enjoy the photos and printed information in the best overall resource.

Procedures

The researcher will evaluate and prioritize the area's historic sites that are covered in the *Des Moines Unit* (Des Moines Public Schools, Social Science Department, Grade 3) that are sites most often visited on the field trip. The researcher will then analyze how the cultural and ethnic diversity has played an important part in the make-up of the Des Moines community. A suggested list of the locations is Appendix B.

Digital photographs will be taken of the selected sites. The photographs will then be organized in a logical fashion for use on a field trip. The importance of the event or site will justify if a full-page photograph will be used, or if a smaller, or set of smaller photographs will suffice.

Text will be created and evaluated, numerous times, to best fit the photographs, the narration of the main character and the difficulty for the student reader, keeping in mind the parameters that the researcher has set. Three readability tests will be used to maintain text at an appropriate level for the early elementary grades. The readability tests are located in Appendix C. The photographs will be the basis of the book and story, following the format of a picture book.

When the storyboard is assembled, it will be presented to Carol S. Brown. Carol Brown was the supervisor of the Social Science Department of the Des Moines Independent Community Schools during the time of the development of the *Des Moines Unit* (Des Moines Public Schools, Social Science Department, Grade 3). She and the two other elementary staff members in the district who designed the original unit have

been supportive and interested in the researcher's desire to develop a complementary picture book. Ms. Brown will be an excellent resource in gauging the appropriateness and priority of what is included in the storyboard sequence.

Three staff members from the Des Moines district will evaluate the layout. The third grade teachers will be familiar with the original unit and will have taught it for several years.

Five students from Monroe Elementary School who will be entering fifth grade this fall will also examine the layout. I have chosen students of this grade opposed to new fourth grade students because third graders this last school year, 2003-2004 did not experience the field trip portion of the unit. These students will have a good knowledge of the unit and the field trip experience. The information from these resources will be very beneficial in aiding the researcher in fine-tuning the project.

Project Format

The format of this research project will be an illustrated informational book in the form of a picture book. The project will be organized and bound in a vertical format for the ease of the reader.

The project will cover many of the historical sights to complement the third grade social studies unit on communities outlined in the *Des Moines Unit* (Des Moines Public Schools, Social Science Department, Grade 3) that is currently used. It will also include the strengths that ethnic and cultural diversity have brought to our community. Though the informational book will not be all-inclusive or up-to-date as our community grows and changes, it will be a tremendous asset that is needed to supplement the information highlighted in the 20-year-old Des Moines unit.

Chapter Four

The Project

See accompanying book

Adventures with Kel in Des Moines

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this project was to research and develop an illustrated informational book about the mandated third grade unit in Des Moines that studies the capital city's major historic sites. The criteria the researcher used to choose which site to include in the book was based on the Des Moines Bus Tour format developed in 1994 to aid third grade educators during the field trip portion of the *Des Moines Unit*. The sites chosen were ones that were most often mentioned in the unit itself. The organization of the field trip in the book was conducive to an actual field trip.

The photos and text were chosen carefully by the researcher. The desire to complement some of the photographs of Des Moines with the presence of Kel, a third grader in cartoon format, taking the field trip was consciously done to grab the attention and interest of the reader

Conclusion

The researcher was able to include the majority of sites students would see in a field trip in *Adventures with Kel in Des Moines*. The photographs are of good quality and appropriate size for an illustrated informational book. The finished product follows the *Des Moines Unit* curriculum so that it may be of the most help to third grade staff when teaching this part of the communities unit. Unfortunately, that also means that new material with multicultural significance is limited. The researcher has added this information at the back of the book. The basic information and web sites for these events are listed. The researcher feels this is a limitation, but intends to keep the book as true to the current unit as possible, thus limiting the more ethnic and cultural diversity of the community to information found in the

appendix. (This is Appendix D). The inclusion of the multicultural characters does address the imbalance somewhat. The Des Moines Public School District is a very diverse district. The characters chosen for *Adventures with Kel in Des Moines* reflect that diversity.

The text also became longer and more complicated than the researcher originally intended. The blend of short, factual information and a personal narrative by the main character deemed it necessary. The need to identify all the sites visited on the field trip and to include a small amount of factual information about each site prevented the researcher from keeping the reading level to an average third grader's capabilities. Highlighting words that might be unfamiliar or too complex to the reader and adding a glossary in the back of the book would be helpful. The researcher does not believe that this detracts from the book being an age-appropriate or complementary resource for the *Des Moines Unit*.

The researcher would like to see the *Des Moines Unit* updated in the curriculum and the addition of more ethnic and culturally diverse sites and events in the community added. That, complemented with the book, *Adventures with Kel in Des Moines*, could enhance and update the current unit.

The researcher can envision the illustrated informational book being used in two different ways. One option is to have the book published. Not only would the book enhance the third grade unit with a copy in every third grade classroom and elementary library, but would also enable staff and students to refer to the book prior to the field trip, a refresher after the field trip, or in lieu of a field trip. The presence of a book such as this in every elementary library would also be advantageous for the general knowledge and curiosity of all Des Moines children. The book would also be interesting to Iowa students outside the immediate community as they learn about their state capitol.

The second option is to have the book published in a consumable format with a copy available to every third-grade student in the district. In this option, there can be additional pages for journaling or photos. Students could have pages to journal and map out their own community, their neighborhood; their experiences throughout Des Moines; their plans to explore their community in ways they have not so far.

Recommendations

An experiment of using the book in either one of these formats as an addition to the *Des Moines Unit* or teaching the unit as it is currently would be interesting. A survey of staff and students who use the book in conjunction with the unit could be completed in order to determine whether a visual added resource made a difference in student motivation and understanding.

Additional recommendations for further research projects include an electronic version of the book. A website for students about Des Moines, following the format of the *Des Moines Unit* is also a recommendation. A virtual tour of Des Moines or even the state of Iowa on a website would be beneficial. Additional books as Kel discovers the larger community that he lives in, including the suburbs and county surrounding Des Moines is also recommended. A biography of the many historical figures who developed this community and their impact on its history would also be a good research project..

Other communities could benefit from a resource such as this, tailored to their own area. Students could be involved in producing a book or website following the community curriculum in their school district.

It is important that students gain knowledge and understanding of their local community and its history. That connection motivates students to better understand themselves and how they fit into their communities.

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Appendix A

This is a photograph of the front of the State Capitol in Des Moines. Kel will be a small cartoon character that will be in the bottom right hand corner looking at the camera like a cheesy photo you might have taken on a field trip. He will be standing next to the front steps that he tells about in the text.

The first stop on our trip was the State Capitol. The government of our state works here. The governor and all the representatives from around the state meet here every year to vote on bills on their way to becoming laws. My dad and I have driven by this building before but I didn't think it was this big! The gold dome on top is the largest in the United States. There are 210 stairs to the front door. I know, I counted them.

This is the rotunda. It is 250 feet high. There are so many things to see. Murals of settlers traveling west, statues made of marble and Civil War flags carried by Iowa soldiers.

This is a picture taken inside the capitol looking up into the inside of the dome.

Kel is telling the narrative but is not present in this picture.

Appendix B

Suggested list of possible locations for project

- *Des Moines Birthplace Memorial Cabin
- * Iowa State Capitol Building and grounds
- *Terrace Hill, the governor's residence
- *Salisbury House
- *Hoyt Sherman Place
- *The Civic Center and Nollen Plaza
- *Des Moines Botanical Center
- *Des Moines Art Center
- *Des Moines Science Center
- *Blank Park Zoo
- *The Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers and bridges
- *Horse Watering Trough
- *Gray's Lake Park
- *Fort Des Moines
- *Iowa State Historical Museum
- *Iowa State Fairgrounds
- *The Jordan House – Underground Railroad stop
- *Living History Farms
- *Water Works Park and Arboretum
- *801 Grand Ave.
- *Sherman Hill neighborhood
- *Greek Food Fair
- *Jewish Food Fair
- *Bosnian Festival
- *Hispanic Culture Fair
- *Juneteenth
- *Asian Festival
- *Underground Railroad site
- *Night in the Sky
- *East Village
- *Simon Estes Ampitheater
- *Des Moines Events Center
- *new bridges and crosswalks developed from the construction on I235
- *Masonic Temple development with shops and theater
- * the Supreme Court Building
- * the Riverwalk
- *World Food Prize and new location
- *new downtown library

Appendix C Readability Tests

Gunning-Fog Index

The following is the algorithm to determine the Gunning-Fog index.

-
-
- Calculate the average number of words you use per sentence.
 - Calculate the percentage of difficult words in the sample (words with three or more syllables).
 - Add the totals together, and multiply the sum by 0.4.
 - Algorithm: $(\text{average_words_sentence} + \text{number_words_three_syllables_plus}) * 0.4$

The result is your Gunning-Fog index, which is a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content. The lower the number, the more understandable the content will be to your visitors. Results over seventeen are reported as seventeen, where seventeen is considered post-graduate level.

Flesch Reading Ease

The following is the algorithm to determine the Flesch Reading Ease.

-
-
- Calculate the average number of words you use per sentence.
 - Calculate the average number of syllables per word.
 - Multiply the average number of syllables per word multiplied by 84.6 and subtract it from the average number of words multiplied by 1.015.
 - Subtract the result from 206.835.
 - Algorithm: $206.835 - (1.015 * \text{average_words_sentence}) - (84.6 * \text{average_syllables_word})$

The result is an index number that rates the text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. Authors are encouraged to aim for a score of approximately 60 to 70.

Flesch-Kincaid grade level

The following is the algorithm to determine the Flesch-Kincaid grade level.

-
-
- Calculate the average number of words you use per sentence.
 - Calculate the average number of syllables per word.
 - Multiply the average number of words by 0.39 and add it to the average number of syllables per word multiplied by 11.8.
 - Subtract 15.50 from the result.
 - Algorithm: $(0.39 * \text{average_words_sentence}) + (11.8 * \text{average_syllables_word}) - 15.9$

The result is the Flesch-Kincaid grade level. Like the Gunning-Fog index, it is a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content. Negative results are reported as zero, and numbers over twelve are reported as twelve.

(This information is from <http://www.juicystudio.com/fog/index.asp?method=upload>)

Appendix D

Cultural Events

And don't forget the events that happen every year in Des Moines to celebrate all the different cultures that make up the people of our community. The Department of Cultural Events in Des Moines is found at http://www.culturalaffairs.org/events/our_events/

Some of them are;

The Greek Food Fair <http://www.stgeorge.ia.goarch.org/foodfair.htm> A two-day event to celebrate the Greek culture and food. Always the first weekend in June.

Festival Latino, A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage - <http://celebratefestivallatino.org/> A day-long event in downtown Des Moines to celebrate the Latin American countries and their culture, food, music and crafts. Celebrated in June.

Festa Italiana – A four day-festival to celebrate the Italian-American culture, food and fun. Usually the end of July.

Juneteenth -http://www.juneteenth.com/iowa_us.htm – One of three cities in Iowa that celebrate the music, culture and history of African American peoples. Celebrated on at least one date in June.

The Asian Heritage Festival - http://www.celebrasian.org/festival_program.html - An annual event in Des Moines at Water Works Park that celebrates the Asian culture, music, dance and food. Celebrated every May.

There are many additional activities centered around other cultures to enjoy in our community.