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INTERNATIONAL PEN PALS ENGAGING IN A TRANSFORMATIONAL EARLY
CHILDHOOD PROJECT

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Birmingham, Alabama

2012

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2012

INTERNATIONAL PEN PALS ENGAGING IN A TRANSFORMATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

MARCIE H. HILL

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to utilize an international pen pal project to enact transformation education by enabling students to gain a stronger respect for cultural diversity and changing students' perceptions of a diverse culture. A total of 39 sixth grade students, 16 second grade students, and two teachers participated in this study. One sixth grade teacher in Jakarta, Indonesia and one second grade teacher in north Alabama were participants and served as collaborative member checkers.

Limited literature exists on the topic of pen pal writing between children who live in different nations with the goal of transformation. Most of the current studies that existed focused on improving literacy. Through this study, I sought to fill a gap in the literature to provide information on a transformational pen pal project between children living in different countries.

Data collection began in October, 2012 and ended in May, 2012 during which letters were exchanged eleven times through email. Pen pal letters, journal entries, interviews, and email messages were collected. The entire data was read and reread multiple times. Themes and subthemes were identified for each case and reported to answer the research questions. A cross-case analysis and discussion were also provided.

Findings revealed that transformation education was enacted through engaging in the collaborative cross-cultural pen pal project. Implications for educators and recommendations for further research were also discussed.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my two children who live at home, Kailee and Kyeler. They have sacrificed much time away from me so that I could complete my work and fulfill my dream.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to many people who have participated in some way to help me complete this research project. First, I would like to especially recognize the chair of my committee, Dr. Lois Christensen, who has encouraged me and led me throughout this process and to her I am eternally grateful. I also want to extend a special appreciation to my graduate study committee members, Dr. Lynn Kirkland, Dr. Michele J. Sims, Dr. Kay Emfinger, and Dr. Grace Jepkemboi, for their service and unwavering advice and support throughout the process.

I also would like to offer special appreciation to the teacher in Jakarta, Indonesia and the second grade teacher in Alabama who have collaborated with me throughout the project. Their dedication to students has been helpful to me in the completion of this research study. I appreciate all the time and effort they have sacrificed so that our students could have international pen pals and participate in such a transformational project.

In addition, I would like to recognize Dr. Jerry Aldridge. He initially encouraged me to pursue this dissertation topic and helped me learn how to help make the world be a better place through his own dedication to transformational teaching. He enabled me to contact and gain colleagues in Indonesia and continues to be supportive. He has had a

lasting effect on my life and I am eternally grateful for what he has taught me over the years. His unwavering support and dedication will never be forgotten.

I would like to thank my children for their support and understanding throughout the many hours of my work. I appreciate the sacrifice they have made in order for me to finish my project.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank God for providing me with this opportunity. He has supplied my needs for funding and gave me the strength, perseverance, and knowledge to complete this endeavor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our society is becoming more culturally diverse than ever before (Eberly, Joshi, Konzal, & Galen, 2010; Smith, 2004). An increased number of people from different ethnicities are included in the American population each year (United States Census Bureau, 2010). For example, there has been a 43.3 percent increase in people from Asia coming to the United States in the last ten years (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Within the last twenty years, the percentage of public school students who were Caucasian decreased from 67 to 54 percent (NCES, 2012). By 2050, there will be a 44 percent increase in the number of children from minority ethnic groups in the United States (Brand, Harper, & Picciotti, 2011).

Alabama, where this study took place, is populated by 68.5 % Caucasians, 26.2% African Americans and 3.9 % Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, 95.6% of the people living in the county in which this research study was conducted are Caucasian which leaves only 4.4% of people from other ethnicities (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Children who live in areas with little cultural diversity such as these are more likely to have very limited opportunities to interact with people of other ethnicities.

Many children have limited knowledge about the geography of the world. The results from the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that fewer than 30 percent of students have reached a proficient level of knowledge about geography (NCES, 2010). In fact, among fourth graders, the youngest children tested, only 21 percent scored at a proficient level on the 2010 NAEP assessment in geography (NCES, 2010). Ineffective practice among educators is one of the causes that limit students' understanding of the world (Holloway, 2002).

Wink (2011) stated that many people see culture as only "my" culture (p. 62). This could likely cause personal biases and misconceptions of other people who are different. Porter (2006) noted that "the problems of today's world stem from an inability to trust, an unwillingness to bend, and a lack of understanding of one another" (p. 33). Through speaking with others who are different and getting to know people from other ethnicities and cultures, we may better trust and understand one another, and our world could be a better place.

This study described a multiple case study of the implementation of a pen pal project between sixth grade students and a class of second graders in a school in a rural area of north Alabama working together to write pen pal letters to sixth graders in an elementary school in Jakarta, Indonesia. The goal of the researcher was to explore the implementation of a pen pal project in her classroom in order to better understand how transformation education was enacted by second and sixth grade students. This chapter provides an introduction to this study and describes relevant background information. It provides a statement of the problem, the purpose, and the guiding questions. A

description of the organization of the study and a summary are also provided at the end of this chapter.

Background Information

Writing as pen pals. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), reading and writing test scores have become more important than ever before.

Administrators want their schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and this has caused some teachers to lose focus to try and meet that expectation. “Instructional time is spent practicing for the test while important and challenging topics and activities are dropped from the curriculum” (Higgins, Miller, & Wesmann, 2006, p. 310). Teachers sometimes struggle to improve instruction in reading and writing in order to meet AYP and escape repercussions at the expense of non-core subjects such as science and social studies. The majority of instructional time in the elementary years is spent on reading and writing but social studies is often overlooked.

With our society becoming increasingly more culturally diverse, the ability to understand, respect and interact with all people is necessary in order for our children to grow up to be culturally literate citizens. Teachers have to include social studies in their curriculum. Students have to have social studies experiences as our world is a global society and pen pal writing is a way to integrate social studies and effectively implement transformation into the curriculum.

While teachers have taught writing lessons in classrooms for many years, few have employed pen pal projects as a means to make a positive change in their students’ lives. Pen pal letter writing and projects are an effective means of enabling children to

write to others for a variety of purposes including literacy, writing development, character education, cultural understanding, and a deeper respect for diversity but it can be much more. Through dialogue (discourse) within letter writing, students communicate which "...creates and recreates multiple understandings....it can transform relations; it can change things" (Wink, 2011, p. 65).

Giroux (1997) explains that discourse is connected to a struggle among groups over what will count as meaningful. "Discourse produces and legitimates configurations of time, space, and narrative, placing particular renderings of ideology, behavior, and the representation of everyday life in a privileged perspective" (Giroux, 1997, p. 121). Since "discourses are never neutral, but shape and constrain what we might know and how we might know it" (Novinger & Smith, 2003, p. 425), children can become more culturally sensitive and gain a deeper respect for the diversity of society through discourse. Moreover, pen pal letter writing and projects can be a vehicle for teachers to make a difference in the lives of others and teach children to care about the world and strive to transform lives.

Transformation education. A pen pal project can enable children to better understand diversity and gain a stronger respect for differences. Striving to make a difference in the lives of others and teaching children to care about the world is the mission of transformation education (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). "In transformational classrooms, the curriculum is designed to study how people or other living creatures make a difference in the world" (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007, p. 78). Aldridge and Goldman (2007) described transformation education as when others care about the world

and strive to make a difference in the lives of others. Transformational education “...starts in the classroom but goes out into the community to make life a little better” (Wink, 2011, p. 24).

Transformation education, also known as critical pedagogy (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Wink, 2011), has roots in the works and lives of Socrates and Plato. Socrates believed that conversations should be grounded in respect for the other’s point of view and he taught others how to think critically through his questioning and develop understanding of truth and justice. Plato, his pupil, recorded the teachings of Socrates and challenged others to advance democracy for all, which is the goal of critical pedagogy.

Many other theorists have added to the early philosophers’ ideas. Vygotsky (1986) added to the work of Socrates and Plato by teaching about the influence of the sociocultural context, collaborative groups, and writing to make meaning. According to Vygotsky (1986), the social context of one’s culture generates and influences thought. In addition, Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1934) and John Dewey (1916) envisioned schools as democratic societies, agencies of social reform.

More recently, Freire (1998), Giroux (1997), and McLaren (2003) have added to our understanding of transformation education. Freire (1998) taught that education was not neutral but rooted in the power structures of the dominant society. He explained that transformation of the world implies juxtaposing, “denouncing the process of dehumanization and announcing the dream of a new society” (Freire, 1998, p. 74). Giroux (1997), like Freire, believed educators should carefully teach children to

recognize the factors that shape students' choices and beliefs and make them aware of any social, cultural, or political influences in their lives. Giroux (1997) stated that "teachers at all levels of schooling represent a potentially powerful force for social change" (p. 28). McLaren (2003), too, stressed that educators need to understand how knowledge, experience, language, and power are central to our classrooms and added that caring was central to critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, which reflects the interaction between teaching and learning, focuses on seeing more clearly the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of society through viewing history (Giroux, 1997; Wink, 2011).

Other authors have also written about the importance of embracing critical pedagogy in practice in classrooms. For instance, McLaren (2003) shared his vision of how schools could be "recast in ways that focus teaching on the development of a moral project(s) for education as social transformation" (as cited by Breunig, 2003, p. 109). Bruenig (2003) agreed that the connection between theory and practice is one of the key issues still facing the practice of critical pedagogy today. According to Giroux (1997) and McLaren (2003), teachers do more than just provide instruction, but they also practice the "norms and principles most often associated with the dominant race, gender, religion, and culture of the social class, or group of people that is in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society" (as cited by Bruenig, 2005, p. 112). Critical pedagogy practices can uncover these dominant practices and create a more equalized curriculum. A key issue for critical pedagogy is its implementation (Breunig, 2005).

Teachers can make efforts for implementation by putting it in action through literature and writing through critical literacy.

Critical literacy. One tenet of transformation education or critical pedagogy is critical literacy. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004a) explained that “critical literacy is a way of thinking—a way of being that challenges texts and life as we know it” (p. 29). It focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action (Freire, 1970). “Critical literacy involves a process of questioning, disrupting, and deconstructing the common – something we are used to seeing, hearing, believing, thinking or doing” (Xu, 2007, p. 16). Lenski (2008) defines critical literacy as developing a set of beliefs about reading that focuses on examining and questioning a text’s social and cultural implications. Implementing critical literacy is a way of being and should not be something added on but a frame through which teachers should operate (Vasquez, 2010). “When teaching for critical literacy, teachers can pull critical elements out of books and have the students debate and write about them and connect them to their lives” (Wolk, 2003, p. 105).

Within this research study, critical literacy was embedded through weekly stories the sixth graders shared with their second grade pen pals. Students read books and sought to interpret them through the eyes of their pen pals. Nancy Shanklin (2009) suggested in order for critical literacy to be implemented, students need to “step into others’ shoes and to consider other perspectives” (p. 45). She further believed that all texts ought to be read and comprehended from multiple perspectives and questions of

power, equity, and fairness should be considered (Shanklin, 2009). McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004a) said that the teacher's role in helping students become critically aware was to personally understand and engage children in critical literacy.

Through critical literacy, students can be empowered by considering multiple perspectives and questioning habits of mind (Wolk, 2003). They are encouraged to think and take action so they can help make a better world (Wolk, 2003). Writing is a way to create new meaning and understanding and to establish a personal viewpoint (Wolk, 2003).

Issues of race, class, gender and power are embedded in our daily lives and affect how we choose our friends, how we choose political candidates, how we treat the environment, and our experiences with intolerance and prejudice (Wolk, 2003). Teachers can use children's literature for teaching critical literacy by pointing out some critical elements out of the books of how people of different cultures or genders are portrayed and having children discuss them and connect them to their own lives (Wolk, 2003). "Reading and discussing multiple texts allows students to experience and appreciate other perspectives" (Xu, 2007, p. 18). All texts should be read in a way that enables the reader to comprehend them from a multitude of perspectives (Shankin, 2009). Knoebel (2007) added that critical literacy involves critiquing relationships mediated by one's worldview drawing attention to inequalities and rethinking ideas. This new outlook on diversity could transform students' lives and enable them and others to build a deeper and stronger respect for our multicultural society while, on some small scale, making the world a better place.

Critical literacy, service-learning projects, and other activities can play a part in lessening negative ethnocentrism where it exists. The idea of ethnocentrism, which was introduced in 1906 by Sumner in his book *Folkways*, is a belief that your own group, country or culture, is the center of everything and everything else is in relation to it (Borden, 2007). Stull and Till (1994) described ethnocentrism as the “tendency to view our own culture’s ways as the right ways and then judging all other cultures in relation to our own” (p.1). When people see the “other” group, “outgroup” or culture as weaker or inferior to their own group or “ingroup” negative ethnocentrism occurs (Levine and Campbell, 1972). This negative ethnocentrism can be lessened through activities that serve to increase awareness of, tolerance of, and empathy toward other cultural groups (Taylor & Jaggi, 1974; Borden, 2007).

According to Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) and Stull and Till (1994), all groups have acquired some level of ethnocentrism through the process of socialization. Service-learning projects can be effective in lessening negative ethnocentrism. In fact, Borden (2007) conducted a study to determine if ethnocentrism declined after participants engaged in a service-learning project over the course of one semester at a private university in the Southeastern United States. Forty college students enrolled in an intercultural communication class completed the Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) scale as a pretest at the beginning of the semester. As part of the course throughout the semester, students volunteered to tutor, work in programs such as Bible study, recovery groups or meal service, and interact in other ways with people from different cultures at two local churches or the campus International Club. They also completed the GENE at

the end of the course to determine if there was a decline in ethnocentrism. The results showed a significant decrease in ethnocentrism at the close of the project at the end of the semester. Service-learning projects such as this, as well as critical literacy, can connect students with others from a diverse culture, and can have positive results for educators and students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the implementation of a pen pal project in the researcher's classroom in order to better understand how transformation education was enacted and described by second and sixth grade students. Through this interaction, it was the researcher's goal for students to gain a stronger respect for cultural diversity and to change any perceived misconceptions while enacting transformation education.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap in the literature in the area of pen pal projects between children in two different nations, especially whose authors have the aim to enact transformation education. Existing studies address assessing and strengthening writing skills and other academic goals, but a limited number of studies describe interaction between children across continents for a transformational purpose.

Teachers can make a difference in the world through their students. In the researcher's school and community where the population is predominantly Caucasian, students do not have first-hand interactions with peoples of different cultures or

ethnicities and lack knowledge and understanding of cultural differences. The researcher chose a multiple case study in order to investigate and address this deficiency for both second and sixth graders, to explore how we can make a global difference and enact transformation education.

Research Questions

Four overarching questions were the focus for this study. They included:

1. How do sixth grade students in north Alabama and Jakarta, Indonesia enact transformation education through a pen pal project?
2. How do sixth graders in north Alabama describe transformational experiences as a result of being pen pals with second graders in north Alabama and sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia?
3. What does transformation education look like for second graders in an international pen pal project?
4. How do second grade students in north Alabama describe their interactions with sixth graders at their school who are interacting with sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia?

Significance of the Study

Interactions between children from different cultures and backgrounds are essential to break down barriers to understanding each other and to heighten awareness of any existing misconceptions that may exist in classrooms. This study will provide

information about pen pal project correspondences that were transformational in nature between children in two diverse countries and continents to fill a deficiency in the existing literature. More pen pal projects that address transformation as an aim for correspondence are needed to build a sense of community and make the world a better place to live. While this study targets teachers in elementary school, it can be applied to people of any ages in or out of classroom environments.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter one includes background information about pen pal projects and transformation education. It also describes the problem being addressed in the study. In addition, chapter one explains the study's purpose, the study's significance, and outlines the questions that guide the study. Definitions of terms are explained. Chapter two provides a review of literature for the reader. It begins with the history of pen pal writing, discusses writing and education, and finally outlines existing studies of pen pal project between pre-service teachers and children, between adults and children and between children and children. Chapter three describes the study's research methodology including the design, participants, setting, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and research bias. The assumptions and limitations of the study are also included. Chapter four discusses the findings including the themes and subthemes that were identified from the analysis, as well as, a cross-case analysis of the two cases. Finally, chapter five discusses the major findings and addresses the answers to the research questions. Implications for educators are included, as well as, recommendations for future research.

Definition of Terms

This section will be used to define terms found within the study.

AMSTI- Alabama Math Science and Technology Initiative

Cultural diversity- the inclusion of diverse people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed, 2008)

Diverse- differing from one another (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed, 2008)

Discourse- verbal exchange of ideas (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed, 2008)

GENE - Generalized Ethnocentrism scale

International- active, known, or reaching beyond national boundaries (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed, 2008)

NAEP- National Assessment of Educational Progress

Pre-service educator- One who has declared an education major but has not yet completed preparation to be a teacher
(<http://www.education.com/definition/pre-service-teacher/>)

SACS- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Transformation education- teaching children to care and make a difference in the world while simultaneously trying to make a difference in the world (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007, p.78)

Summary

The first chapter of this dissertation included background information relating to pen pal projects and transformation education. The statement of the problem, the purpose and the significance of the study were described. The overall research questions were provided. A section including the definitions of related terms was included. The assumptions, limitations, and how the overall study was organized were also addressed in chapter one. The next chapter will provide a review of literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter typically discusses the related literature on a topic. Very few studies address international pen pal projects or transformational education. Currently, a very limited number of studies exist that describe international pen pal projects which have a transformational goal. In this chapter, I address the history of writing pen pal letters, writing and education, and describe four basic styles of teaching which includes transformational education. Then, I discuss how culture relates to transformation education. I also explore the goals of researchers in existing literature of pen pal projects between students within the United States, projects within other nations, and projects between American students and children in other countries. Any facets of transformational teaching within the existing literature will be addressed throughout the chapter. Finally, I provide a summary of the existing literature and how it relates to my study.

History of Letter Writing

People have been writing letters to others for centuries and the processes in which were available to send letters have greatly changed. The art of letter writing has evolved from using quill pens from bird feathers in the seventh century (Curtiss, 2011) to instant communication through email, text, and instant messaging. Some educators over the last

few decades have used pen pal letter writing as a way for students to connect with the world. In addition, very few educators teach children to care about others and reach out to do their part to make a difference in the world. Pen pal projects may have twofold benefits. They can be an effective way to communicate while learning about others and to contribute in a positive way to the world.

Letter writing has been a way of life for people for centuries. The United States Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin as the first Postmaster General in 1775 (United States Postal Service, 2012). From 1777 until their deaths, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson corresponded through personal letters (Pavellas, 2010). A few years earlier in 1774, letters from Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield, to his illegitimate son were published which contained ways in which to use manners and etiquette, "...to impress and influence" (Battistella, 2009, p. 363) to get ahead. In 1860, the Pony Express was the method used to send letters by horse riders who traveled a 2000 mile trail carrying mail until the Pacific Telegraph was completed at the end of 1861 when the Pony Express was no longer needed (The Pony Express National Museum, 2012). Today, with the advent of new technologies, there are many options to send letters to pen pals around the world through methods other than paper such as emails, tweets, text messages, chats or blog posts.

Pen pal writing. Programs for pen pal writing began by the 1920s (International Pen Friends, 2008; McMillion, 2009). The International Pen Friends Program is believed to have begun in Sweden around 1920 (International Pen Friends, 2008). The program operated to enable cultural clubs to write to people overseas. The 1933 World's Fair

promoted the program but was not successful. However, it resurfaced at the 1962 Seattle World's Fair where the program had its first contact with Parker Pens. The Parker Pen pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in New York was the first place computers were used to connect pen pals around the world. The fair attendee would give his or her name, address, language, and interests; then the computer would print out a suitable pen pal match from around the world.

Another noteworthy program was the Student Letter Exchange. The Student Letter Exchange, the world's largest pen pal organization, was an international matchmaker. It linked over 500,000 students in over 100 countries throughout the world each year (Student Letter Exchange, 2010). The program was founded in 1936 when a teacher, the founder, wanted to add interest and spark to his classroom while stimulating learning and increasing understanding between cultures (Student Letter Exchange, 2010).

Computer Pals Across the World Project was another program in which pen pal letter writing was promoted. It was established in 1983 for students to improve writing skills, exchange cultural information, develop keyboard skills, and familiarize them with the use of international telecommunications (Beazley, 1989). Students would be matched one-to-one through the Computer Pals system based on age and special interests. Through the program, students engaged in the following: letter writing, report writing, poetry exchange, writing newspaper articles, debating social issues, and writing scripts on myths and legends (Beazley, 1989).

Another program designed to motivate elementary aged students to read, write, and think is In2Books. This program matched children with adult pen pals who are

taught how to discuss books through thought provoking letters (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). The program was founded by Nina Zolt in 1997 in the District of Columbia Public Schools (In2Books, 2011). Students and adults submitted letters electronically through the Pen Pal Place at <http://penpals.in2books.org>. Teale and Gambrell (2007) examined the program's effect on overall reading achievement for students in grades two through four in the District of Columbia Public Schools. The findings showed that classrooms that used In2Books outperformed comparison classrooms in reading achievement (Teale & Gambrell, 2007).

Writing and Education

Reading and writing are core components in today's classrooms in every grade level. The Alabama Course of Study, provided to all teachers by the Alabama State Department of Education, includes some form of writing as a content standard for every grade level. Specifically, friendly letter writing is included as a minimum content learning standard for students beginning in the second grade (Alabama State Department of Education, 2010).

Booth (2001) explained that the simplest thing for youngsters to write that is motivating for others to read is a letter. Teachers have a wide range of methods in which to teach the process of writing and to improve students' writing skills. Chohan (2011) stated that teachers play a crucial role in the development of children's writing and can inspire children by utilizing authentic literacy experiences. Teachers can use many ideas for encouraging children to generate and strengthen writing skills. Some activities

include journal writing, writer's notebook (Booth, 2001), writer's workshop (Calkins, 1986), and quick writes through daily writing prompts.

Writing letters is a major genre of writing for the early elementary years which has a tremendous intrinsic value for conveying thoughts that should not be underestimated (Chohan, 2011). Chohan (2011) conducted a study to explore the relationship between a mailing program and children's attitudes toward writing letters at a suburban outer-city public elementary school located in Ontario, Canada. One hundred twenty-two students in grades one through five (one class per grade level) participated in an interactive letter writing and mailing program in the school. English was a second language for most of the participants. Students and teachers completed surveys at the onset and conclusion of the program, in addition to, exchanging letters with buddy pairs via life-sized mailboxes located in the hall during an eight month period. The researcher discovered a positive correlation between the mailing program and children's attitudes about writing. By the end of the program, the number of children who believed they should write letters almost doubled. Teachers who participated reported that the children were excited about writing the letters and the writing skills of the children who participated increased.

Teachers can also use pen pal letter writing as a means of teaching the process of writing and significantly support and improve the development of writing skills. Letter writing "builds upon many language skills that children will use throughout their lives" (Chohan, 2011). Teachers have to spend more time developing children's writing skills. Graves (1983) noted that writing has been given too little time in the United States and

that teachers should spend at least four periods of forty-five minutes on writing each week. In addition to a daily writing block of time, Calkins (1986) recommended that teachers schedule time to write regularly so that children can anticipate that time and become ready for it. Through a pen pal connection, students can increase time in writing and have the potential to increase the motivation to write through having an authentic audience.

Styles of Teaching

There are many ways to teach writing which can be divided into four basic styles. The four basic models of teaching that are in existence in schools today are transmission, transaction, inquiry, and transformation (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). Aldridge and Goldman (2007) noted that in light of standardized testing today, transmission is currently the prevailing practice in today's classrooms. "High-stakes standardized testing can greatly influence...teaching" (Higgins et al., 2006). With the pressure on academics and not on the discovery of the world, students may be missing out on crucial opportunities to construct meaning and engage in social, emotional, and cognitive experiences (Christensen, Aldridge, Megawangi, & Hill, 2009). Hopefully, practices will be shifting away from transmission toward transformation in years to come.

Transmission. Traditionally, teachers act as the experts and impart knowledge onto children through drill and practice and memorization of facts (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). In this type of classroom, students work individually and are unaware of the world around them. The goal of transmission is to transmit knowledge from a more knowledgeable person to a less knowledgeable person. Teachers pour prescribed knowledge into the students or "objects" (Giroux, 1997). Freire (1970) also referred to

this type of teaching as a “banking model” where the teacher simply “deposits” into students the knowledge the teacher wishes them to learn that day. This style of teaching is uncritical and antidemocratic because “it does not question or assess the knowledge being taught” (Wolk, 2003, p. 102). The curriculum, prescribed by experts (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007), is usually sequential in that it is expected that one masters a topic before moving onto a new one. This model is rooted in behaviorism. For example, a teacher lectures, students take notes, and the teachers gives a multiple choice test based on what was said. In this way, the teacher is in control, and the students have no power to make decisions.

Transaction. In classrooms where transaction takes place, teachers have the most power to make decisions, but students’ ideas are solicited by teachers. Students may work in collaborative groups, but are limited since the teacher chooses most of the activities they do. This style is based on John Dewey’s (1916) educational philosophy. John Dewey (1916) is associated with active learning. He believed that learning was acquired through multisensory interaction (Dewey, 1916). He taught that language instruction should be based on a real desire to communicate and he encouraged educators to include letter writing in their curricula (Dewey, 1916). For example, in transaction classrooms, students may be assigned to study a type of animal, but they can decide for themselves how they would like to share what they learned.

Inquiry. Inquiry models of teaching provide much more decisive power for students. Teachers encourage students to explore and interact with each other. Student interests are supported as they are empowered to decide what to study. Students play an active role in deciding what the class will study (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). In this

model, teachers understand that they do not possess all the knowledge, but knowledge is constructed by the learner. Students may, for example, choose to learn more about a certain kind of animal and design their own study.

Transformation. “Teaching is not about transferring knowledge or contents... there is in fact, no teaching without learning” (Freire, 1998). Teaching as transformation is a much more powerful model of teaching that encourages children to live in a global society without being trapped in their box of existence. Transformational teachers use strategies to advocate social change and strive to teach their students to care about others.

Transformational teaching can be described as “teaching children to care and make a difference in the world while simultaneously trying to make a difference in the world” (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007, p.78). Teachers and students can work together for good for their school or community. In this way, transformational teachers “purposefully plan to raise the level of consciousness in children and adults to make our world a better place to live” (Strevy & Kirkland, 2010, p.5). “Teaching to transform the world involves more than the students we teach- it also includes their parents and guardians” (Aldridge, 2004, p. 53). It is a joint effort. “It is not enough for students to have a voice. They must be encouraged to use that voice to make a positive difference that goes beyond their own lives and immediate concerns” (Aldridge, 2004, p. 54). Wink (2011) believes that teaching and learning must be connected with communities and the objective in teaching should be “...so that students lives can be improved, or so self-and social transformational occurs” (p. 29).

Christensen et al. (2009) explained a collaborative project between students in a graduate course at The University of Alabama partnered with the Indonesia Heritage Foundation in which the students sought to help the victims in Banda Aceh after the tsunami of 2004 devastated the region and killed thousands of people. The university students reached out in an effort to help the teachers and children in some way who were victimized by the storm and lost family members, spouses, children, and classmates in the tragedy. After inquiring how the students could best help in some way, the director of the Indonesia Heritage Foundation suggested finding online resources to help the teachers and students through the ordeal. Many teachers and students were suffering from post-traumatic stress and desired assistance. Through sharing websites and other online resources for the teachers to use related to post-traumatic stress in children, the university students enacted transformation education and made a difference in the lives of many of the victims and families. As a result of the project, many university students who were also elementary school teachers, enacted similar projects with their students.

Critical Pedagogy

Another term used for transformation is critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2003; Giroux, 1997; Wink, 2011). According to Braa and Callero (2006) to apply critical pedagogy, there must be four common principles present in teaching: dialogue, critique, counter hegemony, and praxis. The first is facilitation to increase dialogue between teachers and students which in turn leads to discussion and analysis. Second, there must be critique, an examination of “both self and society with a focus on inequality, exploitation, oppression, and domination” (Braa, & Callero, 2006, p. 359). “Exposing

class contradictions in student lives, showing how dominant ideologies may work against their own material interests” (Braa & Callero, 2006, p. 359) make up the third principle. Last, praxis, refers to action in the community for the transformation of society.

Paolo Freire (1998), Peter McLaren (2003), and Henry Giroux (1997) were influential to our understanding of transformation education or critical pedagogy. Elmborg (2006), too, subscribed to this notion. Freire (1998) was a Brazilian philosopher, activist, and educator who taught peasants to read the word and the world by understanding the reasons they were in an oppressed condition. He was eventually jailed and exiled because of his actions, but he became a giant in multicultural critical pedagogy. He taught that no education is neutral and challenged others to question their assumptions and critically examine the world. Freire (1998) said that no one can be in the world, with the world, and with others and maintain neutrality. We come to understand our position in the world and become aware of our context of decision and choice (Freire, 1998). Freire (1998) has greatly influenced critical literacy through his work that focused educators’ attention on the importance of identifying authentic social problems and ways of addressing these problems through language and action. Darder et al. (2003) recognized McLaren to be “a former Canadian schoolteacher and a recognized leader in the critical educational movement” (p.25). McLaren (2003) wanted teachers to help students question the structures and powers that limit their lives. For critical pedagogy to be ensued, curriculum is creatively based on student interests and jointly shared. Implementation of transformation education ensures that children’s unique cultures are recognized and respected. There are many benefits to transformational

education. One beneficial transformational project can be utilizing pen pals. “A productive method for assisting students in developing personal understandings of other peoples is through pen pal friendships” (Barksdale, Watson, & Park, 2007).

Culture

One aspect of the implementation of transformation education consisted of the understanding and respect of culture. Merriam-Webster (2008) defined culture as “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practice that characterizes an institution or organization” (p. 304) or “the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic” (p. 304). Children come into classrooms, not as empty vessels, but with preset ideas and knowledge about a culture. They have experienced contexts specific to their own gender, social class, ethnicity, and culture. They hold their own hopes and dreams (Breunig, 2005). Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) ensures respect for a child’s cultural identity, language, values, and their natural environment.

Teaching children about the importance and respect of one’s unique culture is key to transformation education. Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force (1989) warned against using a tourist curriculum. Teaching as though students are touring a culture exclusively through celebrations or stereotypical artifacts are not effective in teaching about one’s culture but just perpetuates the adult’s oversimplified stereotyped ideas (Meece & Wingate, 2009). Making Chinese New Year dragons in January or coloring pilgrim hats or Indian feathers at Thanksgiving are ineffective means of teaching about cultures (Meece & Wingate, 2009). Instead, students should be submerged in ongoing

discussion and interactions about a specific culture to learn multiple facets of it.

Connecting with a friend in another culture through a pen pal relationship is an effective way to teach children about cultural differences while not perpetuating stereotypes.

It was unknown if this large disparity of cultures and beliefs had created any assumptions, misconceptions, or stereotypical ideas between the groups of children. I hoped that the interactions through pen pal letter writing would reveal any preconceptions held by the participants. Socialization creates and amplifies any stereotypes or misconceptions learned by children (Tan, Tan, Avdeyeva, Crandall, Fukushi, Nyandwi, Chin, & Wu, 2001).

Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1947) conducted a study to determine the racial attitudes and preferences of African American children. The study consisted of 253 African American participants ranging in age from three to seven years located in Hot Springs, Pine Bluff, and Little Rock Arkansas and Springfield, Massachusetts. The researchers used four dolls that varied only in ethnicity for the children to choose for a variety of situations. For instance, the researcher asked the children which doll they most would like to play with, which doll is nice, which one looks bad, and which doll looks like you among others. Overwhelmingly, the results indicated that 67 percent of the children showed that they would choose the Caucasian doll to play with and 59 percent indicated that the African American doll “looked bad”. The study showed that at a very young age, the children already had developed a preference for the Caucasian doll and a negative attitude toward the African American doll, their ethnicity.

Interestingly, the doll study completed by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1947) has been replicated several times over the years with the same results. In fact, a replicated study was conducted in 2010 by CNN. Researchers affiliated with CNN conducted the doll study with 133 African American and Caucasian children in the Northeastern and Southeastern regions of the United States. They found similar findings in which positive traits were associated with Caucasian dolls while negative traits were associated with African American dolls (CNN, 2010).

Tan et al. (2001) said that changing stereotypes (positive or negative) is difficult, if possible, and requires disconfirming information, motivation, and social support. Tan et al. (2001) conducted a study to determine if newspaper reports about peer groups could change racial attitudes. Immediate effects were reported among a class of Caucasian college students from a public speaking class at a large university in the Northwest. Experimental manipulation of a fictional news story was conducted to test the attitudes about African Americans of the participants. Interviews about their assumptions about the ethnicity of the people included in the news stories were conducted. They found immediate results of a positive correlation between reports of positive information leading to positive attitudes. This study led to more questions concerning how the media influences stereotypical ideas about racial groups.

There have been studies to determine factors that influence people's beliefs about others. Hunt (2002) conducted a study to compare the beliefs of African Americans, Latinos, and Caucasians about the relationship between poverty and religious beliefs. Generally, Caucasians and people from higher socioeconomic conditions tended to

explain poverty as individualistic, or lack of work ethic, ability or other personal defect. On the other hand, persons from low socioeconomic conditions tended to blame poverty on structural causes such as discrimination or lack of jobs (Hunt, 2002). After a survey was conducted in southern California with 2,854 people of varied ethnicities and the data was analyzed, Hunt found that Protestants and Catholics endorsed the individualistic interpretation of people in poverty while Jews and other followers of different religions supported structural reasons. Caucasian Protestants endorsed structuralists' beliefs less than African American or Latino Protestants (Hunt, 2002). Caucasian Catholics were similar to Caucasian Protestants (Hunt, 2002). Hunt (2002) also found that African Americans and Latinos who were Catholic were more likely to blame luck, chance or sickness for poverty.

A longitudinal study by Graham, Cohen, Zbikowski, and Secrist (1998) was conducted among 255 children in grades one through three and grades four through six in a public elementary school to determine the association of ethnicity and gender to children's choice of friends. Children completed a friendship nomination questionnaire by circling the names of all of their friends on a copy of the class roster over a three year period. Mutual friendship choices were determined for each child and analyzed over time. Results indicated that as children got older, they accrued more friends of the same gender. This was especially true for boys regardless of ethnicity. "Boys and girls of both races [African American and European American] had more mutual friends of their same sex and race when they were older (Grades 4 to 6) than when they were younger (Grades

1 to 3)” (Graham et al., 1998, paragraph 27). These similarities of ethnicity and gender contributed to the children’s friendships.

Knowledge of culture can contribute to a better understanding of diversity and lead to less cultural dissonance among students and between teachers and students. In order for students to learn about other cultures and gain a respect for differences, cultural stereotypes and misconceptions need to be dismantled. Pen pal projects between children in two diverse countries may dismantle any mistaken assumptions and bridge cultures to offer an opportunity for transformation.

Pen Pal Projects

People of all ages have been able to write pen pal letters and to write them in different ways for many different purposes. Some students drafted letters by hand and sent them through a postal service or hand delivered the letters to their pen pals. Other students exchanged letters through Internet websites or through email. Some researchers have conducted studies to investigate the outcomes of pen pal projects between children and children with adults (see Table 1).

Table 1

Pen Pal Studies

Pen Pal Participants	Aim Associated with Improving Writing Skills	Aim Associated with Literacy	Aim Associated with Cultural Diversity
Pre-service Teachers, Educators, and Children	Ceprano & Garan (1998)	Gambrell, Hughes, et al. (2011)	McMillon (2009) Walker-Dalhousie, Sanders, & Dallhouse (2009)
	Moore (2000)	Groenke (2008)	
	Moore & Seeger (2009)		
Children and Children	Barksdale, Watson & Park (2007)		

Table 2 indicates separated research articles that are not studies of projects but rather, are descriptions of pen pal projects that were conducted. Most literature about pen pal projects have been descriptions of pen pal projects instead of studies (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptions of Pen Pal Projects

Pen Pal Participants	Aim Associated with Improving Literacy or Writing Skills	Other Aims
Pre-service Teachers, Educators and Children	Arquette (2004) Austin (2000) Brand, Harper, Picciotti (2011) Crowhurst (1991) Curtiss & Curtiss (1995) Flickinger (1991) Marshall & Davis (1999) McMillon (2009) Moore & Ritter (2008) Novinger & Smith (2003) Rankin (1992) Smith-D'Arnezzo & Kennedy, (2004) Stanford & Siders (2001)	Campbell-Rush (2001)
Other Adults and Children	Bryant (1989) Ceprano & Garan, (1998) Hopkins (2000) Kiernan & Mosher-Ashley (2002)	Dallman & Power (1996)
Children and Children	Lemkuhl (2002) Charron (2007) Harmston, Strong, & Evans (2001)	Liu (2002)* Marion, Rousseau, & Gollin (2009)* Shandomo (2009)

**denotes transformational project*

Most pen pal projects have been described through articles whose authors or educators involved have had objectives to promote literacy or sharpen writing skills. Other authors have described projects between children and adults or other children for other purposes such as forming friendships, understanding the perspectives of others or

gaining cultural awareness. A summary of related existing articles found in literature is included.

Research studies of pen pal projects. There have been a limited number of pen pal projects conducted for study purposes. As can be seen in Table 1, there were less studies conducted than published descriptions of pen pal projects. Most of the studies conducted were between pre-service teachers and children. Only one study was noted between two groups of children.

Writing skills as an aim. Researchers have conducted studies of pen pal relationships for a variety of purposes (McMillon, 2009; Moore, 2000). However, overall most studies that were conducted of pen pal interactions were related to literacy or writing.

Studies between children and pre-service teachers in the U.S. Moore (2000) described a study of a pen pal project between 44 pre-service teachers at a mid-sized university with two classes of first and second graders at their local elementary school. The pre-service teachers completed training in using the six-trait writing assessment prior to beginning the project. Over ten weeks, letters were exchanged weekly for the aim of exploring the influence of the children's writing on the pre-service teachers' conceptions of writing as a complex growth process (Moore, 2000). Other data sources included teacher journal entries, informal surveys administered to the teachers at the beginning, middle and end of the project, and researcher field notes. A constant-comparative method was used to analyze the data to reveal two major themes. One theme was the teachers' conception of the role of phonetic spelling in language development and the

other theme related to how to teach writing. These themes occurred at least ten times in data sources (Moore, 2000). Teachers changed conceptions about children using phonetic spelling to understanding that writing evolved most effectively through linguistic trial and error. At the beginning of the project, none of the teachers were confident in their abilities to teach writing in authentic ways. In contrast, one hundred percent of the 44 teachers stated at the end of the project that they were more confident in teaching writing using authentic instructional approaches.

In a similar study, Moore and Seeger (2009) investigated how the negotiation of meaning was supported during letter writing and what the pre-service teachers learned about how to teach writing. Thirty-eight pre-service teachers in their junior year in a small university in Montana engaged in pen pal letter writing with 14 children in fourth grade at a school in a mid-sized city in Kansas. After the first semester, the fourth graders looped to fifth grade with the same teacher. Each semester different pre-service teachers wrote to the same children. The pre-service teachers were trained in using the 6 + 1 Trait writing assessment prior to the project to prepare them to analyze patterns of development in the children's writing. The project lasted ten weeks during which each of the two semesters with weekly letters being exchanged. The researchers identified two themes to determine how the negotiation of meaning was supported during letter writing including establishing trust and the role of questioning. Building and maintaining trust were essential to effective letter writing with children. Questions should be thoughtfully constructed with children in mind (Moore & Seeger, 2009). It was also important to answer the children's questions. Four themes were identified as emergent from what the

pre-service teachers learned and included the following: learning from constructive feedback, the power of examining writing strengths over weaknesses, the reciprocal nature of the language learning process and the responsibilities associated with being a role model for written communication with children.

One study involved 18 graduate students enrolled in a language arts class in a private college in New York and 18 first graders at a local elementary school nearby (Ceprano & Garan, 1998). The weekly letter exchanges lasted for nine weeks during one 14 week semester. The graduate students' goal was studying children's emergent writing skills and literacy. In the end, children were beginning to express themselves as they modeled the letters they received in both form and style. The college students better understood the emergent writing development process and discovered that modeling alone was not sufficient for some acquisition of skills.

Studies between two groups of children in U.S. and other countries. In one study funded through a grant, students in third and fourth grade in Virginia exchanged hard copy letters with students of similar ages in Malawi, Africa over a period of three years (Barksdale et al., 2007). The researcher's primary goal was to provide more opportunities for the children to practice written language, but it became a rich experience in developing cultural understanding (Barksdale et al., 2007). The children engaged in exchanging information to better understand and compare daily life between cultures, language, and the connections they made together. The students wrote about families, pets, food, favorites, religion, physical features of the countries, and language. As a result, the Malawian students were highly motivated to read the letters and gained an

appreciation for the English language. Likewise, the students from the United States enjoyed literacy growth and learned about the lives of their new pals. Through making connections with pen pals, students gained unique understandings that could not have been explicitly taught (Barksdale et al., 2007).

Other aims between children and pre-service teachers in the U.S. While most researchers of pen pal projects included goals that involved literacy and writing skills, a few included other purposes. All of these studies were between children and pre-service teachers or educators in the U.S. Some researchers included goals to improve motivation, promote critical understanding of literature, gain pre-service teachers' experience in working with culturally diverse students, and develop pre-service teachers' sensitivity to cultural awareness.

Literacy motivation. Seven elementary teachers and 219 elementary students in grades three through five at four schools from a southeastern state participated in a pen pal project (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011). The researchers' objectives were to discover if a pen pal intervention that focused on reading and discussing books would influence literary motivation and create a context for critical thinking. Final data analysis was conducted on 180 students who signed consent and remained in the study for the duration of the data collection period of seven months. The Literacy Motivation Survey (LMS) was administered before and after the pen pal intervention. In addition to the surveys, transcripts of 15 peer-led discussions and 28 key informant interviews were analyzed. Results of the LMS indicated a statistically significant difference between the pre and post scores after a series of paired-samples t

tests were conducted. Careful examination of transcripts for small group discussions of text revealed accountability to community, content, and critical thinking. Overall, all participants indicated positive perceptions of their participation in the pen pal endeavor.

Promote literature understanding. In another study, middle school students wrote to pre-service English teachers during a 15-week semester through a Web Pen Pals project (Groenke, 2008) sponsored by a university in Tennessee. The researchers' overall goal was for beginning teachers to use computer mediated communication to practice asking questions to promote critical understandings of literature. Through this project, teachers and students entered a chat room for one hour each week to discuss Avi's *Nothing But the Truth* novel. This study was a case analysis of one of the teachers. The study revealed that the teacher did not ask particularly critical questions but learned through analyzing her missed opportunities.

Increase experience with culturally diverse students. Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, and Dalhouse (2009) described a study of a similar pen pal project in the Midwest between sophomore level pre-service teachers and middle school refugee English Language Learners. The teachers and students exchanged hard copy letters throughout one semester for ten weeks. The instructor's goal was to increase the pre-service teachers' experience level in working with culturally diverse students and improve their overall disposition toward diversity and social justice. Findings revealed that "85 percent of them believed that the pen pal project helped them to develop empathy for the refugees.." (Dalhouse, Walker, & Dalhouse, 2009, p. 343). The project also increased

participants' understanding of diversity and second language learning (Dalhouse et. al, 2009).

McMillon (2009) described a study of a ten week pen pal project between pre-service teachers at a predominantly university with Caucasian students who wrote through email to at-risk inner city fourth grade students at a nearby impoverished neighborhood in the Midwest. The researcher's goal was to provide the pre-service teachers opportunities to become familiar with various cultures of possible future students and develop cultural awareness and sensitivity that fosters culturally responsive practice (McMillon, 2009). Findings revealed that students' academic achievement improved and as teachers' biases and assumptions about other cultures were challenged, they were encouraged to self reflect and gain a better understanding of cultural differences.

Descriptions of pen pal projects. Most publications related to pen pal projects are not actual research studies. Most publications about pen pal projects are descriptions of the interactions and outcomes. Table 2 shows that most descriptions of pen pal projects that have been published show researcher aims associated with improving literacy or writing and were conducted between pre-service teachers and children.

Writing skills as an aim. Very few studies have been published regarding pen pal studies between children. Most articles and studies that have been published or reported about pen pal projects have been completed among pre-service teachers and elementary students within the United States. The researchers and educators involved with these projects had the purpose of improving knowledge about teaching literacy or improving

the writing skills of children. While these were not research studies, descriptions of the pen pal projects were provided.

Projects between children and pre-service teachers in the U.S. Undergraduate students in a teacher education reading class at a university in the Midwest exchanged hard copy letters with struggling readers in special education programs in second through sixth grade as part of their class requirement (Rankin, 1992). The instructor's goal was to "familiarize students with various types of reading and writing problems, possible causes, assessment procedures, and appropriate materials, methods, and intervention strategies for nonconventional readers and writers..." (Rankin, 1992, p. 205). Motivation was encouraged for the young students and they improved their letter writing skills. The students also benefited from the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with a positive adult (Rankin, 1992). Undergraduates were able to see the writing difficulties of the students and were challenged to engage the students in writing and the project also pushed them to "think like teachers" (Rankin, 1992, p. 210).

Flickinger (1991) described a pen pal project between students in a language arts class at Illinois State University with first and third graders. They exchanged letters and, ultimately, worked collaboratively on producing stories that were finally bound into a book. Another pen pal project was between early childhood major university students and first graders in which they exchanged weekly letters for 14 weeks (Marshall & Davis, 1999). The objective for the instructor was to help enable university students to study the process of emergent writing skills. As a result, the instructor's objective was realized.

The university students “experienced the continuum of a young child’s writing process and applied theory to practice” (Marshall & Davis, 1999, p. 56).

Similarly, (Novinger & Smith, 2003) described a project between 102 first graders in New York and 120 pre-service teachers in another literacy course at the State University of New York- Brockport. While the instructors wanted to give the children opportunities to write for authentic purposes and to help the pre-service teachers better understand emergent literacy, the primary goal was to examine the ways the pre-service teachers positioned themselves and children within power-knowledge relationships in the context of the pen pal writing. The author found two basic types of discourse which were discourse of adult authority and discourse of shared authority. About half of the letters were found to be of each sort. The author also found that about half of the pre-service teachers failed to answer some of the children’s questions and only briefly commented on what the children had previously written.

In another study, nineteen second graders wrote pen pal letters during a semester to 27 nearby college students in a children’s literature course in Iowa (Curtiss & Curtiss, 1995). The course objective for the second graders was to have them engaged in reading workshop to discuss books through the use of computers giving them an audience for their work. The college instructor’s course objective for the project was to incorporate more technology into the course while also engaging the college students in reading workshop. The project was a success with everyone using the Internet to communicate about books they had read together.

In a different project, nine undergraduate education students and two faculty members at a large university, and ten second graders from an inner-city, urban charter school nearby participated in a Peaceful Pen Pal Program (Brand et al., 2011). Since the project extended from April until September, the instructor's purpose was to primarily promote literacy over the school's summer vacation. Secondary goals for this instructor were promoting peace, establishing friendships, fostering connections between the university and families of children, and employing high quality literature. In addition to the letters, the university students sent book bags containing books about peace and collaborated with families to create greeting cards for shut-ins, paint scenery, take photographs of nature and make a peace book. The pen pal groups met at the children's schools during a week in September to celebrate and share their projects with others. The project was expanded to additional second grade classes at the same school. Results indicated all goals were met and everyone expressed interest in extending their friendships beyond the project.

Pre-service, undergraduate, college students enrolled in a different children's literature class and a multi-age elementary class of third and fourth graders also exchanged weekly letters for one semester (Austin, 2000). The aims of the researchers were to engage students in critical thinking about what they had read and to involve students in authentic literary activities. The college students were to provide a model of writing for the younger students and to better link theory with practice. Both groups of participants benefited from the letter exchange, but the project turned out to be a learning experiment. Although the initial aims were not met entirely, both groups were able to

learn more about each other and were able to write and think deeply about books.

Several ways to improve the project included providing better access to books, lessening lag time, providing a greater degree of intervention, and enhancing awareness and responsiveness in their letters.

In addition, 24 pre-service teachers in Montana wrote to 23 third graders in an inner city, low socio economic neighborhood school in Kansas. The instructor's mission was to acquaint the teachers and students with a writing audience different from their own setting and environment (Moore & Ritter, 2008). The partners exchanged letters for ten weeks. Through the project, the teachers learned to look closely at the content instead of writing conventions and helped them to see children differently. The teachers recognized the children had personal history, knowledge, and interests (Moore & Ritter, 2008).

In another pen pal project study between undergraduate pre-service teachers and middle school students in the mid-South, Stanford and Siders (2001) examined the effect on the writing skills of students with and without disabilities after an eight week period. Their study formed three groups for analysis. Some pre-service teachers and students exchanged letters through handwritten hard copy letters, and some used the Internet through E-Pal to exchange correspondences. A control group was established by students writing to imaginary correspondents and received no feedback during the first two weeks of the study. Results revealed that students who exchanged letters with teachers through email realized the greatest improvement in writing including more words per writing sample (Stanford & Siders, 2001).

Likewise, Smith-D'Arezzo and Kennedy (2004) described a three year pen pal project between pre-service teachers and sixth graders in Wyoming. The researchers' aims were to enable the teachers to better understand the elements of writing workshop and to improve the children's writing skills including being able to critique the writing of others. After letter exchanges and meetings face to face, anecdotal evidence showed improvements. Students were empowered to critique others' writing and writing skills were improved. Teachers also gained a better understanding about the process of writing workshops.

Arquette (2004) completed a pen pal project between a group of university students in a teacher education literacy class at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley Campus and nearby junior high and fourth grade students. The exchanges lasted for three semesters and occurred on a weekly basis. The goal of the researcher was to connect the university pre-service educators with children in local classroom while linking literacy with the use of technology. Due to problems with access to technology at the elementary school, letters from the fourth graders were hand written and dropped off by their teacher. The junior high students used the computer in the classroom to send letters via email. The project resulted in knowledge gained about what worked well and not so well in planning and conducting a pen pal project. Some of the lessons learned included setting up the program, working with low access to technology and solving management issues such as keeping students interested, keeping track of who is writing, and including a face-to-face meeting.

Projects between children and other adults in the U.S. While most of the projects were between pre-service educators and children, some pen pal projects within the United States have occurred between children and adults volunteers or senior citizens. For example, in “Writing Across the Generations”, Bryant (1989) described a pen pal experience between third and fourth graders and senior citizen volunteers. The mission for the director of the Activities Director for the senior citizen facility was to provide the senior citizens with something challenging and interesting for them to do. In writing with the young students, the seniors’ lives were enriched as they shared stories of days gone by and how life was back in their days. Students were motivated to write and enjoyed the attention from the much older generation.

Kiernan and Mosher-Ashley (2002) also described a pen pal experience between senior citizens at a senior center and first graders in Massachusetts. They exchanged letters monthly and included personal visits by the senior citizens into the classroom and the students visiting the center. The senior citizens and the children experienced positive benefits of the letter exchange. Interestingly, unlike the other projects mentioned so far, these pen pal projects between children and senior citizens do include a transformational flare in that the goal was to improve the quality of life for senior citizens, to help make a difference. Children were reaching out to help make life for the seniors better.

Hopkins (2000) explained the Senior Pen Pal program developed by the Community Agency for Senior Citizens on Staten Island, New York. In this project, students in a third grade class wrote letters to senior citizens. The mission of the Community Agency for Senior Citizens was to encourage communication between the

generations and develop the writing skills of both parties. The project resulted in that and much more. The participants learned a great deal about one another and corrected some misconceptions some may have had such as learning that senior citizens are not “mysterious” and strange. Hopkins (2000) noted that intergenerational programs can bring generations back together as they once were decades ago.

Projects between two groups of children in the U.S. Most pen pal projects within the United States involved adults writing to children. There were a few projects described, though, between two groups of children. One project was between second graders in Ohio and bilingual first graders in Arizona (Lemkuhl, 2002). The participating teachers were cousins who wanted to provide lessons for students in reading and writing through their correspondences. Their successful project sparked the children’s curiosity and motivation to read and write, as well as, improved their overall writing skills.

Projects between two groups of children in other countries. Only two pen pal projects occurred between children who lived within other countries. In a project between fourth graders in schools in New England and Australia, students exchanged pen pal letters for four months. At the end, the perceptions of fourth grade students and teachers were examined (Charron, 2007). Participants noted increased motivation to write through the use of the Internet and authentic tasks. Participants also gained increased knowledge of the computer functions and a deeper understanding of cultural differences.

A 10-week pen pal project was conducted between six American sixth grade children with language-learning disabilities and South African seven graders for the

benefit of writing instruction for the American children. After seven letter exchanges, one student's experience was reported. The project increased the student's motivation to write and use an increased number of words in the content of her letters, but little improvement in writing skills was noted (Harmston, Strong, & Evans, 2001).

Projects between children and pre-service teachers in other countries. There have been a limited number of pen pal projects between children and adults that live in other countries. Pre-service teachers at the University of British Columbia in Canada exchanged weekly letters with sixth grade students in a nearby school. The professor's goal was to give pre-service teachers a firsthand experience of students' writing skills while providing the sixth graders a real purpose for writing (Crowhurst, 1991). After the project, the pre-service teachers analyzed the exchanges and diagnosed the sixth graders' strengths and weaknesses in writing abilities. As a result of the project, sixth graders' letters became longer in length and syntactically more interesting. They began to indent paragraphs, use better opening and closings, and wrote on a variety of topics. Many students' writing features mimicked that of their older pen pal (Crowhurst, 1991).

Other aims between children and adults in the U.S. Few projects included goals other than ones related to writing or literacy. There were a few with goals such as forming friendships, sharing experiences, and gaining cultural awareness.

Classroom enhancement. For instance, Campbell-Rush (2001) described a pen pal project involving her kindergarteners in a school in Pittsburgh through a program at the University of Pittsburgh called Vicarious Voyagers sponsored by Semester at Sea. The reason for participation in the program was to enhance the classroom by sailing

around the world. Through the program, university students traveled around the world for four months taking classes aboard the ship and visiting ports. The kindergarteners wrote letters and mailed them to the ports at which the university students would be stopping that semester. A university class adopted them and replied including items such as bracelets, fabrics, and postcards from each stop. The kindergarteners gained much knowledge, not only about the aspects of letter writing, but also learned much about mapping skills and about many diverse places. Campbell-Rush (2001) stated “as a result of reading about and looking at pictures of children in other lands, my students had a better understanding of cultural and individual differences and commonalities” (p. 55).

Form Friendships. Dallman and Power (1996) shared information about another pen pal project between one class of second graders and 25 elderly residents at an independent living retirement facility in Wisconsin. The project was called Forever Friends. At the time of the article publication, the project had existed for nine years. The goal of the teachers and faculty at the independent living retirement facility was to help children and the elderly form friendships to help children understand that elderly people do not all live in nursing homes, unable to care for themselves. The pen pals met once a month and exchanged letters in-between visits. The project successfully resulted in both partners learning a great deal about each other and building friendships that lasted a long time.

Other aims between two groups of children in U.S. and other countries. Only a small number of publications about pen pal projects between two groups of children in the United States and in other countries were not associated with improving literacy. A

few researchers sought to increase the social and cultural awareness of its participants or enact transformational education.

Increase social and cultural awareness. Second graders in Buffalo, New York exchanged pen pal letters with students in second through sixth grade in Lusaka in Zambia, Africa (Shandomo, 2009). The teachers involved had multiple goals for the project including to provide students a broader view of the world and to increase their social and cultural awareness. Letters were exchanged via an international transport company since the African students did not have Internet access. In addition to letters, the American students participated in research assignments about the country of Africa, its customs, and current events. Students also wrote reflective journals about their experience. Students were enabled to learn about the similarities and differences in culture, languages, and dress between Buffalo and Lusaka. The American children were inspired with the hope to someday travel to Zambia.

Transformation. According to existing literature, two descriptions of pen pal projects were transformational in nature, although it was not the researcher's initial, intentional aim or outcome. A pen pal project between second graders in Illinois and Shandong, China was initiated to help students learn about the similarities and differences between the two cultures and groups of children (Liu, 2002). The project resulted in students learning a lot more. The second grade American children involved fourth grade students to help them as they dictated letters. The pen pals in Shandong involved the entire school and community as "...hundreds of students at the school were involved in reading and writing the messages" (Liu, 2002, p. 85). The project evolved

into one with a transformational outcome. In discussing swimming in Lake Michigan, the children in Shandong shared about their experience being unable to swim in the nearby Yellow River due to its unsuitability for swimming. This spawned a large effort of all the students to explore what they could do to better protect their environment. This project was even broadcast on Chinese radio and television stations. Students were socially engaged to learn about themselves and the lives of others as they reached out to make a difference in their world. After exchanging information about the rivers in each country, children wanted to make a difference and learn more about protecting the environment so the world could be a better place. This is one great example of a pen pal project which encompassed a transformation.

Another pen pal project involving entire school communities illuminated a transformational outcome. Marion, Rousseau, and Gollin (2009) described a project that involved entire school communities in North Carolina and Afghanistan. The researchers' goal was "...to educate students about cultural differences underlying conflict in the world and to see a more peaceful world through building relationships among the sister-school students" (Marion et al., 2009). It was a long endured peace education project facilitated by the American Friends Service Committee through its School to School program. In addition to letter writing between schools, the project provided funding to Afghanistan for a variety of purposes such as material improvements and teacher training. Marion et al. (2009) described the goal as to "try to help make the lives of Afghan children a little easier..." (p. 551) and the American children would "...understand that through their efforts, however small, they could make a real

difference in the lives of children in a faraway country with a different culture and religion” (p. 551).

There is very little literature which include studies of international pen pal projects between elementary aged children in which whose researchers had a transformational purpose. This study sought to fill the gap in the existing literature.

Summary

The ways in which people have transmitted letters over the past few centuries has changed remarkably from utilizing the Pony Express to instant communication through email messages and text messaging. Letters have been exchanged for centuries. Teachers have valued letter writing as a means of developing their students’ writing skills. Teachers can utilize transformation education to make a change in students’ lives through pen pal letter exchanges. There have been numerous publications of descriptions of pen pal projects within the United States, mainly between pre-service educators and children with the aim of improving writing skills. However, few research studies have been focused on pen pal writing (Barksdale, et al., 2007) and even fewer with transformational aims. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter describes the methods used to conduct this research. First, this chapter explains the purpose of the study and describes the qualitative design and tradition used. A complete description of the participants and the setting are included. The data collection methods, as well as detailed explanations of how the data was analyzed are included within this chapter. Methods to achieve trustworthiness are then explained and the role of the researcher is reviewed. Ethical considerations, assumptions, and limitations of the study are also included. A summary of the chapter follows at the end.

Purpose

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the implementation of a pen pal project in the researcher's classroom in order to better understand how transformation education was enacted by second and sixth grade students. Since I teach in a rural elementary school where 99% of students in the school community (at the time of the study) are Caucasians and practice varied forms of Christianity, the students are not likely to have daily opportunities at school to interact with people of different ethnicities or religious affiliations. This lack of experience in diversity of people may have caused my students to possess a lack of understanding about people of different ethnicity which can fuel unfair and incorrect stereotypes. My goal was to immerse my

students in an international pen pal project to empower them to see the world through different eyes and to gain a new perspective on diversity while enacting transformational education.

Design of the Study

This study was designed in the tradition of qualitative research as a multiple case study. Merriam (2009) noted five characteristics of qualitative research. First, qualitative researchers seek to understand participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Second, they usually elect to gather and analyze data using themselves as data-gathering instruments (Lichtman, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Third, qualitative research usually involves fieldwork. Researchers physically go to the participants, setting, site, or the field to observe behavior in its natural setting (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers, too, employ an inductive research strategy (Lichtman, 2013). Lichtman (2013) explains the process "as one thing leads to another, like scaffolding" (p. 19). In addition, qualitative researchers use thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973) to share what the researcher has learned about experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that providing thick, rich description gives the reader a vicarious experience. They continued to explain that the aim of providing such description is to orient readers so that they can be magically transported to the inquiry site and experience a sense of having been there before (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative researchers engaged in firsthand research for an extended period of time. The researcher used his or her own eyes to gather, organize, and interpret information (Lichtman, 2013). In this way, the researcher sought to become more of an

insider where an insider's perspective, as a participant rather than a researcher, instead of an outsider's perspective was sought to be understood (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). In this qualitative research study, I sought to understand how students in sixth and second grade in north Alabama utilized an international pen pal project with students in Jakarta, Indonesia to enact transformational education by gathering, organizing and analyzing data from my firsthand experiences as a participant observer.

One qualitative approach to research is case study (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Case study approaches have been popular in the field of sociology for years and have recently gained interest in the field of education (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Case study research approaches, along with others, came to education in the 1980s.

Many researchers have defined case study research (Hatch, 2002; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Most recently, Lichtman (2013) defined case study as "an in-depth examination of a particular case or several cases" (p. 90). Similarly, Yin (2009) identified case study research as "...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). In addition, other variations of definitions can be found such as the description by Stake (1995). He wrote that a case study was "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances." (p. xi).

Case study research was most appropriate for this study because the interest of case studies is in process rather than outcomes, in discovery rather than confirmation, and the insights can sometimes influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 2009), case study research was most appropriate for this study. Specifying the unit of analysis or the boundaries of the study is the key decision in case study designs (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). For this study, there are two units of analysis, the sixth graders interactions during a pen pal project and the second graders' interactions within the project. First, I decided to explore the discourse between the sixth grade pen pals and the enactment of transformation throughout the data set. The second unit of analysis was the second graders' descriptions of their experiences and reactions to the pen pal project with the older sixth graders and how they enacted transformational education through their participation.

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen through purposeful sampling. The participants were specifically chosen from my own sixth grade classroom, a second grade class at the school where I teach, and established pen pal sixth grade students currently living in Jakarta, Indonesia. All participants in Alabama live within a low socioeconomic area in the northwestern corner of the state.

Sixth grade. There were 22 participants in sixth grade in Alabama (see Table 3). All the sixth grade participants in Alabama were Caucasian. They ranged in age from 11 through 14 years of age. Twenty of the students live at home with one or both parents and two live with grandparents. The class generally behaves well, loves each other, and

shares many friendships. They lost two classmates due to a house fire when they were in second grade and this caused them to become closer and more loving toward their peers and others. There were ten students in the group who qualified for and received gifted services. In addition, there were two students with learning disabilities and another student who had a speech impediment.

Second grade. Seventeen second grade students in Alabama participated in the study. They attended the same school as the sixth graders in Alabama. They were between the ages of seven and nine (see Table 3). There were 16 Caucasians at the beginning of the study. One student of Hispanic descent from Mexico moved to our school during the month of February, the fifth month of data collection. Most of the second graders lived with their mother and father. One student lived with his grandparents and three lived with only one parent. A table including demographic information for the participants can be found in Table 3. The second grade class was generally a lively group. They were energetic and enjoy playing outdoors. No students have qualified to receive gifted services, but three have been identified and were undergoing assessments for services at the time of the study. Two students were receiving services for learning disabilities.

Table 3

Description of Participants, Alabama

Student Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Ethnicity
Belinda	11	6	Caucasian
Ray	14	6	Caucasian
Caleb	11	6	Caucasian
Tammy	11	6	Caucasian
Emily	11	6	Caucasian
Billy	12	6	Caucasian
Bob	14	6	Caucasian
Cameron	12	6	Caucasian
Jill	12	6	Caucasian
Kaley	12	6	Caucasian
Flora	12	6	Caucasian
Ralph	12	6	Caucasian
Gill	12	6	Caucasian
Kelly	12	6	Caucasian
Kathy	12	6	Caucasian
Kyle	13	6	Caucasian
Job	12	6	Caucasian
Ken	11	6	Caucasian
Josh	12	6	Caucasian
Jennifer	12	6	Caucasian
Walker	7	2	Caucasian
Ronald	7	2	Caucasian
Emily	7	2	Caucasian
Matt	9	2	Caucasian
Nathan	7	2	Caucasian
Belinda	7	2	Caucasian
Jade	7	2	Caucasian
Jake	7	2	Caucasian
Devin	7	2	Caucasian
Bob	7	2	Caucasian
Kiley	7	2	Caucasian
Malcolm	8	2	Caucasian
Bill	8	2	Caucasian
Sam	8	2	Caucasian
Jade	8	2	Caucasian
Jo	8	2	Caucasian
Xu	8	2	Hispanic

Sixteen elementary school students in sixth grade who lived in Jakarta, Indonesia were participants for the study. The collaborative educator, Mrs. Jessie, taught multiage classes in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her students ranged from age 11 through 13 years of age. She had 16 students in her classroom. None of the students in Jakarta were Caucasian, but their ethnicities included Malayan Mongoloid, (see Table 4) Malay and Chinese with roots from Mongolia.

Table 4

Description of Participants, Indonesia

Student Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Ethnicity
Abe	12	6	Sundanese
Anna	12	6	Javanese
Anne	12	6	Javanese
Ben	12	6	Javanese
Ezekiel	12	6	Kalimantan
Farrell	12	6	Javanese
Fidel	11	6	Javanese
Faith	12	6	Kalimantan
Ian	12	6	Padangnese
Kate	11	6	Javanese
Kane	11	6	Javanese
Miles	12	6	Sundanese
Niles	12	6	Ambonese
Ricky	12	6	Javanese
Toby	11	6	Javanese
Zana	12	6	Padangnese

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A), I contacted the superintendent of the school system for approval (see Appendix B), as well as, the local school principal (see Appendix C). I also contacted the director of the school in Jakarta, Indonesia to gain permission to conduct the study (see

Appendix D). In addition, a local context was provided in Jakarta as a contact through which all correspondence would be screened for security and protection of participants. Approved informed consent forms were copied and sent to the second grade students and their parents (see Appendix E), as well as, the second grade teacher (see Appendix F). Informed consent forms were also scanned and sent to the sixth grade teacher in Jakarta and the local context in order to gain consent of the participants in Jakarta (see Appendix G). In addition, sixth graders' and their parents in Alabama also received approved assent forms (see Appendix H). An interview protocol for sixth graders in Alabama and the second grade teacher in Alabama were approved (see Appendices I and J). A waiver of consent documentation was approved due to the location of the participants in Indonesia.

Setting

The two settings for this study were in north Alabama which I will name, Ruralville, Alabama and Jakarta, Indonesia. The two research sites were seemingly disparate with very diverse cultures. At the time of this study, Ruralville was a small, rural, low socioeconomic area. Neighbors were very friendly and almost everyone knew each other. A major industry for the area was the mobile home industry and farming. Many residents were farmers or commute to a larger city for employment. The neighborhood to the research site was small with limited merchants in the area. In fact, the nearest modest shopping district was about thirty miles away. There was one traffic light in the center of the town, one grocery store, a video store, an auto supply store, a handful of home-owned restaurants, and one dollar store. Children typically played

outside in their yards and leisurely rode four wheelers around their neighborhood after school for fun. The large majority of residents was Caucasian and practice some form of Christianity. There was a variety of Baptist and Methodist churches in the area.

On the other hand, Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, was a large metropolitan area located on the island of Java, the most populous island in Indonesia and in the world. (U.S. Department of State, 2012). The neighborhood where the school was located was in a suburb of Jakarta and consisted of people of middle to upper class socioeconomic levels. There were multiple merchants in many shopping districts located in the area. Children lived in suburban housing where outdoor space was limited. The majority ethnic groups were Javanese, Sundanese and Madurese (U.S. Department of State, 2012); there were almost no people who were Caucasian. In addition, over 86 percent of the people were Muslim (U.S. Department of State, 2012). The two cultures in Ruralville and urban Jakarta could not be more diverse.

This study was accomplished in an elementary school in a small rural town in the northwest corner of Alabama. The small K-6 school was an Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) school, an Alabama, Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) site, and was accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). At the time of this research project 376 students were enrolled at the school. There were currently two sixth grade classrooms with a total number of 49 sixth graders. The school campus consisted of multiple buildings which were built beginning in the late 1960s. The sixth grade classrooms were located in the building which housed the school library. The sixth grade classroom where the research took place included two windows covered by dated

blinds and bright blue valances hung from tension rods. The classroom was painted bright yellow and six blue rectangle tables filled the room. There were computers lining one wall while bookcases and cubbies filled with student materials lined the opposing wall. The teacher's desk was tucked away in the back of the room surrounded by resource books. Drawings, photos, and notes from the students covered the wall behind the desk.

At the same school on the opposing side of campus at the end of a long hallway, there were three second grade classrooms with a total of 44 students. In the participants' classroom, student work was neatly displayed around the room. Cubbies were filled with papers, crayon boxes, and lunch boxes, and jackets were hung below on individual pegs. Student desks were slid next to one another and a kidney shaped reading table filled one corner of the room. Bookcases lined the walls with children's books and teaching resources.

All meetings between sixth graders and second graders occurred within the classroom of the sixth grade teacher or the classroom of the second grade teacher in Alabama. Pen pal letters were written within the sixth grade classroom and while in the elementary school library's computer lab, which was housed in the library building. The interviews with the second grade teacher took place through password protected email messaging at the interviewee's request. The focus group interview took place in the sixth grade classroom while the other students were absent or working on computers. This privacy ensured confidentiality and encouraged open communication without fear of being overheard.

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data collection are recommended for case study research including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). Multiple sources of data were used for analysis for this study for both research settings. Data collection sources from both settings include student journal writings, student pen pal letters, email messages, and a student created book. Interviews with my sixth grade students and the second grade cooperating teacher were also conducted and transcribed verbatim.

Five student journal entries were collected from sixth graders in Alabama at the beginning of the study in order to understand students' assumptions of a diverse culture of people who lived in Jakarta, Indonesia. Students were asked to write about what they knew about Indonesia's economy, food and toys, climate and weather, transportation, and schools. The second graders also wrote things they knew about Jakarta at three intervals during the study. In addition, sixth graders regularly recorded information about the second graders after meetings.

Throughout the data collection period there were 207 letters exchanged through email messaging between the cooperating teacher in Indonesia and me. Students' pen pal letters were sent through the teacher's email accounts as attachments to the teachers' messages. The local context, the person in Jakarta that was established to help screen and translate all correspondence, and I screened the letters before dispersing them to ensure they were appropriate for the children.

The second grade teacher in Alabama and I collaborated every other week during the first semester and every week the second semester in order for our students to meet. During each session, information about Indonesia and its culture was shared with second graders by the sixth grade students and me through various websites, videos from YouTube, children's literature, and pen pal letters. I shared children's literature such as *The Colors of Us* and *A Circle of Friends*, in order to enact critical literacy and highlight the similarities in the two cultures. Then, five, small groups of second and sixth grade pen pals were formed and sixth grade students shared a variety of other children's books with the younger students such as books from Ann Morris' series including *Shoes, Shoes, Shoes* and *Bread, Bread, Bread*. Each week, groups revolved, read, and discussed a different book. When new letters arrived, the sixth graders excitedly read their letter aloud in front of the class if they wished to share it. This was a special treat as they sat eagerly listening to each other's new letters. They seemed to really want to hear what the other students wrote and this sometimes gave them new inspiration for the next letter they would write. The sixth graders also each shared their newest pen pal letter from Jakarta with the second graders and solicited from the second graders what questions they wanted to ask and what information they wanted to include in their next letter. Sixth graders typed their new letters and shared them with the second graders for editing, revision, and approval before they were sent.

When the pen pals mentioned unfamiliar games such as Death Match and Mancala, we researched them and played them too. I went to the local dollar store and purchased eight sets of Mancala for my students to enjoy. Mancala is a game of strategy

in which players move stones from pits and capture opponent's stones. The sixth graders learned to play after my instruction then taught the second graders. The game was a sensation. Each week, the students could choose to play the game after their meeting and many played each week. At the end of the pen pal project, the students who chose to took the games home with them. We also played Death Match after learning about it through our pen pal letters. They especially enjoyed playing it. It is a game played outdoors where children run through a grid drawn on a court trying to remain untagged. The opponents try to tag the runner who is trying to get through the grid while they must remain on the grid. We drew two grids, in two sizes to make the game on two levels of play in which one was easier and one was more difficult, so that all students would have a chance to play. All students wanted to play and had opportunities to get into a game. For several weeks, the students would beg me to go out and play Death Match again.

At the end of the project, sixth graders in Alabama decided to collaborate with their second grade partners to create two books about their experiences. They worked together to decide what the books would include. The first book was a comparison of the similarities and differences they had learned about throughout the letter exchanges. They decided to title the book, *Friends in Indonesia*. Each pen pal completed at least one page in the book. The sixth graders and second graders decided who would write the text and who would illustrate each page. The second book was a book titled *How to Make the World a Better Place*. Each pen pal partner collaborated to list ways they could make the world better. They decided to type their ideas for this book. The sixth grader typed the text while the second grader agreed to be the illustrator. When the books were

completed, compiled, and bound, a color copy was provided to the second grade teacher who shared it with her class and other second grade classes. Interviews were held with the second grade teacher to find out the students' reactions and responses to the project and resulting book. Also, a focus group of four sixth grade students was formed at the end of the project and interviewed about their reaction to the project and what they have learned through meeting with second grade and about having international pen pals.

None of the documents associated with the research study were assigned any grades in the teachers' grade book. All student participation was voluntary without fear of getting a low grade. A focus group of four sixth grade students from my classroom was gathered and interviewed at the conclusion of the pen pal project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis has been defined by many authors and researchers. It can be defined as a process for making sense of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (2009) explained data analysis as a complex process that involves going back and forth between concrete and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation. Throughout the data analysis period, I searched for meaning to understand the cases. The reason case studies are studied is to understand them (Stake, 1995). During the study, I sought to explore and understand the interactions between pen pals and how the participants were enacting transformational education. Throughout the data collection period, a total of 207 letters were exchanged between the participants. Two interviews were held with the second grade teacher and a focus group interview was held with sixth graders.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The letters and transcripts were read and reread a series of times in order to fully understand the content. The entire set of data was read and reread multiple times in order to become more familiar with the data as a whole and better understand the cases.

Lichtman (2013) identified three steps to data analysis or content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These included coding, categorizing, and identifying concepts, or themes. Krippendorff (1980) explained that coding, or unitizing as he named it, was a systematic process of defining units and separating them into single pieces of information that could stand alone. These units, then, are organized into categories that provide descriptive or inferential information about the contexts from which they came. The categories, then, would be organized into themes. This context analysis, according to Krippendorff (1980) is often guided by an interest in the symbolic meaning.

After rereading the data multiple times while searching for meaning, I began to notice phrases that reoccurred in the data that answered the research questions. I listed codes along the margins on each of the letters. I created a grid to record codes found in each of the students' letters. Copies of the letters were made and the coded phrases were highlighted and recorded onto file folders organized by code. I then rearranged and grouped the coded file folders into categories and then reorganized them into overarching themes. I repeated this until all of the data was exhausted and no new codes or themes could be identified. This process was repeated for each student journal entry, letter, and interview transcript. Five themes were noted for the first case and four themes were

recorded for the second case. A cross-case analysis also revealed five themes. Sub themes were recorded for each theme.

Trustworthiness

Researchers have an ethical obligation to minimize misrepresentations and misunderstandings in their findings (Stake, 1995). Trustworthiness involves the researcher being able to persuade his or her audiences that a study's findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers who exhibit trustworthiness have established confidence in the truth of their findings, have determined the extent of how their findings can be applied to other settings or contexts, have determined the consistency of their findings, and established that their findings are neutral and stem from the participants and the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Certain criteria should be met for research to be deemed trustworthy. Trustworthiness refers to the believability of researchers' findings which differs somewhat from conventional or quantitative research. In conventional research, terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity were used. For qualitative research, these conventional terms were replaced with new terms that include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarized several techniques for establishing trustworthiness that included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. How each technique was used for this research study is described in detail below.

Credibility. To ensure credibility, I practiced prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and clarifying researcher's biases (Merriam, 2009).

Prolonged engagement. One method I used to establish credibility was prolonged engagement. Rapport had already been established prior to the study as I had already been engaged in a friendly relationship with the participating teachers in Alabama and Jakarta, Indonesia for three years prior to the research study and considered them colleagues. In addition, after the research study concluded, the participating teachers and I remained friends and colleagues and continued to exchange emails as colleagues and friends.

Triangulation. Another method I used to establish credibility was triangulation of sources. Triangulation involves the collection of information from a variety of sources and being able to corroborate the same fact or phenomenon (Yin, 2009). One of the strengths of case study research is the opportunity to use many different sources of data (Yin, 2009). To establish triangulation and strengthen trustworthiness, multiple methods of data collection were utilized to establish triangulation such as participant journals, interviews, and researcher notes as well as with the literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer debriefing. The third method I used to ensure credibility was peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that a debriefer should be someone who is noninvolved and serve as a professional peer to ask questions, explore next steps, and be a listening ear when needed. Peer debriefing was exercised through having a close colleague not associated with the research to read through rough drafts to check for

accuracy to make sure the information was represented accurately, to listen and to extend advice when needed.

Member checking. The fourth method I used to ensure credibility was member checking. Member checking involves taking the report back to the people involved to obtain corrections, amendments, extensions, or confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified member checking as the most critical technique for establishing credibility which occurs continuously both informally and formally. I employed member checks by the second and sixth grade teacher participating in the study. I shared all interpretations at various points during the data analysis period with the second grade teacher and all interpretations with the sixth grade teacher in Jakarta toward the end of the study and asked them for their feedback welcoming any comments or suggestions of changes. This provided an opportunity for them to participate in assessing the accuracy of the research findings. Neither of the participating teachers offered changes or corrections to my findings.

Clarifying researcher bias. Clarifying researcher bias is another method I employed to ensure credibility. My personal beliefs and worldviews have shaped and molded the way the research has been conducted. I am a Caucasian female and have lived and worked my entire life in Ruralville where the majority of people are Caucasian. I have limited experiences interacting with people of different ethnicities. My personal background has shaped and directed my research to encourage my students to identify and understand their own personal beliefs and possible biases.

Transferability. Transferability involves the extent to which the findings from one study can be applied to other similar situations if the situation is parallel to that of the reader. Merriam (2009) explained that in qualitative research, a single case is selected in order to understand the particular in depth and not to find out what is generally true of many. She further noted that using thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973) aides in establishing transferability by “providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation” (p.211) and to better determine if the findings can be transferred to other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that the qualitative researcher is responsible for “providing the widest possible range of information in the thick description” (p. 316) which is “necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). To establish transferability in this study, thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973) was implemented.

Dependability. Dependability refers to how well the study’s findings are consistent with the data. Due to the nature of qualitative research, such as studies in education which are highly contextual and multifaceted, studies cannot be replicated to produce the exact results (Merriam, 2009) but outsiders can concur that the results make sense in light of the data collected. In other words, if studies are dependable, the results are consistent with the data collected and make sense to outsiders (Merriam, 2009). Dependability can be established and strengthened through the use of triangulation and an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The triangulation methods I employed were previously discussed. In addition, an audit trail has been followed and all documents

associated with this research have been recorded and kept securely in a locked closet.

The computer I used for all email, saving letters, and other work related to the study was encrypted, double password protected and accessed only by me. Pseudonyms for all the participants were utilized to ensure anonymity for participants. I have described in detail how all the data was collected, and how the codes, categories, and themes were derived.

Confirmability. Triangulation and audit trails are also essential in establishing confirmability. Lincoln & Guba (1985) explained that “the auditor’s first concern will be to ascertain whether the findings are grounded in the data” (p. 323). A sample of the findings should be able to be traced back through the audit trail to the raw data such as the researcher’s notes or documents to confirm that they can reach a judgment that the researcher’s inferences that were based on the data are logical and appropriate. I have already described methods used for triangulation and an audit trail in previous sections.

Role of the Researcher

The tragic Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 prompted my interest in this project. The massive devastation from the tsunami and aftermath sparked my interest and compassion for those living in Indonesia especially. Through a contact of my instructor in a graduate course at a university where I was enrolled at the time, I became involved with interacting with the director of the Indonesia Heritage Foundation, Dr. Ratna Megawangi, to inquire about ways to help their community. Our graduate class had chosen to help the victims in some small way as a project for the class. Under our instructor’s direction, we were able to send websites of information about post-traumatic stress as requested by the director. A few years after the tsunami, I established contact

with Dr. Megawangi, the director, again. This time the contact was to inquire about beginning a pen pal project. Dr. Megawangi was instrumental in connecting me with the teacher in Jakarta, Indonesia with whom I began writing regularly as my own pen pal. This partnership grew to include our classrooms. For three years prior to this transformational research project, the teacher in Jakarta and I were friends and had already engaged our students as pen pals.

My past experiences and personal beliefs have shaped the way I have conducted and written this research project (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I am a Caucasian female who has grown up and has lived in a very rural area in which there is little ethnic or cultural diversity. The communities in which I have lived and worked my entire life within the same county have consisted of predominantly people who are Christian and Caucasian who live in lower socio economic conditions. It was not until I attended classes at college as an adult that I even spoke with someone of a different ethnicity. I assume that the situation for my students is probably similar to my background and I want to provide them with opportunities to broaden their experiences and see the richness of diversity that the world has to offer. That is why I became interested in connecting with pen pals from Indonesia, a different continent and culture, and wished to continue to get to know others who are different from myself.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers have ethical issues that need to be addressed when conducting research. Ethical conduct can be defined as a set of rules or standards that govern a person in order to do no harm (Lichtman, 2013). While conducting research for this

study, I followed the guidelines for ethical conduct or practices as described by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carefully protect the well-being and interests of all the participants. The practices I followed included, but were not limited to, the following: gaining permissions, obtaining informed consent, assuring confidentiality, and respecting the rights of participants.

Permission to complete research and approval of protocols were obtained through IRB prior to beginning the study (see Appendix A). The principal and superintendent of the school in Alabama, as well as, the director of the school in Jakarta issued permission for me to conduct the study (see Appendices B through D).

Before beginning research, I successfully completed a training course on informed consent. All participants were provided an approved Informed Consent Form (see Appendices E, F, and G). In addition, sixth grade participants in Alabama were provided an approved Assent Form (see Appendix H). Informed consent forms and assent forms were signed by all participants and/or their parents and returned promptly.

Interview protocols for the second grade teacher and the sixth graders in Alabama were approved (see Appendices I and J) before beginning research. Furthermore, to assure confidentiality, all research documents were stored securely in a locked cabinet and not shared with others. In addition, emails, pen pal letters and other documents associated with the research were saved on an encrypted, double password protected computer. Anonymity of participants was protected by using pseudonyms. In addition, participants were assured of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the

study at any time without any adverse consequence or penalty. Grades were not issued for the students' participation or for any part of the research study. Students could participate or not without fear of being reprimanded by a poor grade.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this research study included:

1. The participants would agree to participate and continue writing each other throughout the duration of data collection.
2. The teachers chosen for this study would volunteer to participate in the pen pal project.
3. The teachers would continue interaction throughout the duration of the study.
4. Interviews would be conducted in my classroom or the second grade teacher's classroom.
5. Correspondence between pen pals would be securely conducted through the Internet by email messages and attachments.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations for this study are noted.

1. This study focused on the interaction between children in second and sixth grade in north Alabama and children in the sixth grade in Jakarta, Indonesia. Other global locations or ages were not included and thus, results may not be able to be applied to another setting or another group of participants.

2. All of the participants except one (Hispanic) in this study in Alabama are Caucasian and the participants in Jakarta, Indonesia are Malayan Mongoloid.

Participants of other races or ethnicities may have resulted in different findings.

3. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. A different set of participants could reveal different findings. Findings could be interpreted differently in other situations.

4. All participants in Alabama live in a low socioeconomic area and all participants in Jakarta live in middle to upper socioeconomic areas. These differences are specific to this study and participants from other socioeconomic areas could reveal differing findings.

5. In addition, the data was collected within a limited time frame of seven months. Since students in Jakarta were English Language Learners and required longer reply times, there was a time lapse between each letter which could have had an impact on the findings. Extending the data collection period could also reveal alternate findings.

6. The students' own ideas and comments were the sole origin of the data. Sixth graders and second graders are limited in experiences and write based on their own desires and interests. The researcher had no control over the contents of the written or verbal exchanges between the students.

Philosophical Assumptions

Lichtman (2013) stated that case study research is an approach without philosophical underpinnings. However, researchers' paradigms or worldviews shape

how they conduct research, organize and analyze data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that actions of an inquirer cannot occur without reference to a paradigm. These paradigms generally fall into prepositivist, positivist, and postpositivist paradigms. Postpositivists assume the interactive, social nature of the research process (Denzin, 1989). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained some of the principles that separate positivists from postpositivists. They explained that the relationships between the knower and the known are interactive and inseparable, the nature of reality is holistic, all entities shape each other mutually, and inquiry is value-bound.

Qualitative research generally falls into the postpositivist paradigm or constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lichtman, 2013). Lichtman (2013) described constructivism as “a proposed explanation of a phenomenon that says that knowledge is constructed by the researcher and is affected by his or her context” (p. 13). I enacted my research as a constructivist such as I described above. I chose to carry out my qualitative research in the natural setting and elected to use myself as the primary data gathering instrument. I used an emergent design in which the research emerged rather than having been constructed previous to the study.

Summary

Chapter three has described the purpose and the qualitative design of the study. I have described the participants and settings. Data collection and data analysis methods were explicitly stated. Methods to ensure trustworthiness were discussed. My role as a researcher was included, along with the methods I used to follow the guidelines of ethical

conduct in all aspects of my research. The assumptions and limitations of the study were also included. The findings of the study are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This multiple case study (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 2009) was designed to explore how sixth graders in a school in north Alabama, Ruralville, and sixth graders in urban Jakarta, Indonesia benefitted from an international pen pal project to enact transformational education. Both groups described transformational experiences as a result of being pen pals. The sixth graders in Ruralville shared emails with second graders at the same school and with sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia. My goal as the teacher-researcher and guide of the inquiry was to explore how second graders in Alabama enacted and described interactions with sixth graders at their school who were interacting with sixth grader students in Jakarta, Indonesia. In addition, I sought to find out how second graders described the interactions they experienced and what transformation education looked like for second graders at my school in this international pen pal project.

This chapter presents the analysis of the data findings in two cases and a cross-case analysis collected from journal entries, interviews, pen pal letters, and email messages. Within the first case, I describe the interactions of sixth graders in Alabama and Jakarta, Indonesia. Within the second case, I describe the interactions of second graders who were working with the sixth graders in Alabama. The findings from both

cases mentioned above are described and analyzed in a cross-case analysis. A summary follows at the end of this chapter.

Case Study One: Sixth Graders' Interactions

Participants and setting. Twenty-two sixth graders from my classroom and 16 sixth graders who attend an elementary school in Jakarta, Indonesia make up the first case. All of the sixth grade students in Alabama in this study were Caucasian and ranged in age from 11 to 14 (see Table 3). For the most part, as family religion, they practiced varied types of Christianity. They lived in Ruralville which is located in a low socioeconomic, rural area in northwest Alabama. Most students had little experience interacting with people from other ethnicities or socioeconomic levels. Our school consisted of 99 percent Caucasians of which 99 percent speak English as the first language. Our school had only two siblings who are English Language Learners, a fourth grade student and a second grade student, at the time of the study.

All of the sixth grade students in Jakarta, Indonesia lived in a middle to high socioeconomic area of the country. The students spoke Bahasa Indonesia as their first language and all were English Language Learners. They did not speak or write English easily. In terms of religious affiliation, none of the students practiced any type of Christianity. All of the children were from Muslim families. All of the students in this class in Jakarta were Malayan Mongoloid, (see Table 4) Malay and Chinese with roots from Mongolia.

There were more students in the sixth grade class in Alabama than there were in Jakarta. Since the sixth grade class in Alabama had 22 students while the class in Jakarta and the second grade class we worked with had only 16 students each, two students in Alabama partnered with one second grader to write one letter to a student in Jakarta. The students in Alabama were matched at random with the students in Jakarta. Table 5 shows how the students in Alabama were placed with partners and lists the second grader and sixth grader from Jakarta, Indonesia that served as pen pal groups. Pseudonyms were used.

Table 5

Students Divided into Pen Pal Partners

Sixth Grade Student Alabama	Sixth Grade Student Alabama	Second Grade Student Alabama	Sixth Grade Student Jakarta
Alley		Jade	Toby
Belinda		Walker	Kate
Billy		Matt	Fidel
Caleb	Ray	Ronald	Farrell
Cameron	Bob	Nathan	Ian
Emily		Eve	Ricky
Flora		Jade	Miles
Gill		Devin	Abe
Jill	Kaley	Bell	Zana
Job	Kyle	Malcolm	Ben
Josh	Ken	Bill	Ezekiel
Jennifer		Sam	Anne
Kathy		Kiley	Anna
Kelly	Sally	Bobby	Niles
Ralph		Jake	Kane
Tammy		Ned	Faith

The letters exchanged between the students were authentic. The letters were screened in by the local context, a person in Jakarta chosen to make certain that the content was appropriate for the students before the letters, were dispersed. No editing or revision of the writing was done. The letters were received “as is.” Due to the myriad spelling and grammatical errors by both groups of sixth grade students, but most prominently by the Jakarta students because of English as a second or third language, I have chosen to leave the language as written. If I were to use the proper APA format for quotes, the students’ words to each other would be extremely disjointed. To correct the grammar and writing would alter the meaning in some cases. Ultimately, the genuine and authentic nature of the interaction between the students would be chosen.

Throughout the following discussion, I present the authentic conversations between the students to illustrate each theme and subtheme. The pseudonym used and the country in which each student lived can be found in Table 3 and 4, but in order to differentiate each location the student is from, I used the letters (J) and (A) to stand for the students’ respective locality. The (J) stands for Jakarta and (A) stands for Alabama so as not to add to the redundancy of the locations of the students.

Themes and subthemes. After carefully analyzing the data, five major themes and 23 subthemes were identified. The major themes included cultural assumptions, search for personal commonalities, cross-cultural student learning, etiquette, and transformation. Subthemes were identified for each theme and are described in detail (see Table 6).

Table 6

Themes and Subthemes from Case Study One: Sixth Graders

Cultural Assumptions	Search for Personal Commonalities	Cross-Cultural Student Learning	Etiquette	Transformation
Poverty	Personal/Family Attributes	School	Language differences	Go Green Program
Location		Food		
Weather	Animals/Pets	Weather/Climate	Religious Differences	Other Ideas for Improvement
	Hobbies	Language	Concern of Health Issues	Perceptions Change
	Sports	Holidays	Care of Feelings	
	Favorites	Transportation		
	Music			
	Technology			

Cultural assumptions. The first major theme was students' early cultural assumptions. Prior to the pen pal exchange and during the interaction, students in Alabama revealed a variety of prior assumptions or preconceptions about Indonesia and the people who might live there. The sub themes of poverty, location, and weather were recognized. All student assumptions about the culture of Indonesia are from students in sixth grade in Alabama; therefore, the (A) symbol has been omitted.

Poverty. Every sixth grader assumed people in Indonesia were poor. This assumption of poverty invaded every aspect of what they believed about the country.

These assumptions were illustrated by Ralph as he explained what he thought about the economy of Indonesia. He wrote:

People there are probably poor because they can't make money quickly, and I think nothing costs a lot for the same reason. I think that they use coins for money. I think they have the same access to technology as we have, but can't afford most of it.

Students' assumptions of poverty also affected the perceptions about food and clothes in Indonesia. This assumption was found in many students' journals including Jennifer and Job's. Jennifer wrote that she believed people in Indonesia appeared all "skinny without many clothes". In addition, Job thought, "they [people in Indonesia] eat bread most often because they don't have any money to buy anything else." Kelly also thought they ate food only out of gardens and Bob believed they only wore clothes that "we donate".

The assumption of poverty affected the assumptions about recreation in Indonesia as well. Kelly thought there were no ballgames or video games to play in Indonesia because "they don't have enough money to buy any... They play checkers, maybe." Ralph assumed the most popular toys were only wind-up toys since they were inexpensive and Kody assumed there was no electricity in the country, which greatly affected what they could choose to do for fun. Josh also had similar beliefs about a poverty stricken place. He said, "I don't think they have fancy toys, they probably use wooden trucks and baby dolls. I do think they have video games but not good ones. They probably have cheap toys..." Ray and Tammy, on the other hand envisioned hardly any time for recreation since Ray believed, "they work when they get home," and Tammy added, "They probably do chores..." Belinda, too, thought they did not have time for recreation since

they “are probably bored” and “might even do chores...” Cameron’s thoughts also clearly indicated the consensus of the classes’ assumption of poverty. He said:

I think Indonesia is small and have a lot of people that live there. I think they are poor because all the other foreign countries are. I think things do cost a lot cause it’s hard to get stuff over there. I think they have coins instead of paper money. I don’t think they have the same access to technology cause they don’t have that much stuff. They don’t have stuff like computers, I-Pods, Internet, television, or video game systems like we do. I don’t think the kids have computers at home, or phones of their own. I don’t think they can afford them.

Location. The students also had assumptions about Indonesia’s location and geography. Not one student knew where the country was located prior to the study, but many guessed where it was such as Emily. She imagined, “I think Indonesia is located in North Asia.” Other students had similar conjectures. Kathy thought Indonesia was “north, outside the United States.” Furthermore, Alley believed it was “located in Africa” and Jill guessed that “it was located in India.”

Students also had preconceptions about what the country looked like such as Tammy’s description. Tammy described Indonesia as a:

deserty place, not a lot of trees. Don’t rain a lot, probably a drought. I think they might have cacti, but not a lot of trees. They might have a couple. I imagine the trees without any leaves. I don’t think there are any mountains because I imagine Indonesia flat.

Belinda and Bob also had preconceptions about what Indonesia looked like. Belinda assumed Indonesia was “dry,” “dusty,” and “sandy” while Bob thought there were “a little bit of trees” and “ponds close by”.

Weather. Assumptions about Indonesia’s weather were also varied among the sixth graders. Sarah believed Indonesia’s weather was “probably rainy all the time.” She

also thought they did have earthquakes and tornadoes. She continued, “I think it snows a lot there in Indonesia. I think in the winter it gets really, really cold. And in the summer it gets really, really hot.” Likewise, Kyle conjured that the temperature “gets 0° F cold and 100°F hot.” Cameron also had similar ideas about the temperatures. He thought, “the hottest it gets is probably 125 and the coldest it gets is -10.” Cameron also believed, “it might rain a little but hardly ever.” Kathy did not think that it rained much in Indonesia either because she wrote, “they have land like a desert.” She envisioned “some trees around for shade” and “flat ground.”

Sixth graders held many assumptions about Indonesia and the people who lived there. Most students assumed the people in Indonesia lived in poverty. Most sixth graders had no idea where the country was located. Several students had varied ideas about the weather or climate of Indonesia. Most students just made conjectures based on no factual knowledge about the country.

Search for personal commonalities. The second major theme was the search for personal commonalities. Before friendships could or could not be established, the students in Alabama searched for something they could identify as common between them. Throughout the letters and interview transcripts, the students asked a multitude of questions to their pen pals to learn about their personal and family attributes, animals/pets, hobbies, sports, favorites, music, and technology. These topics were identified as subthemes for the second major theme.

Personal/ family attributes. Right away my students were eager to learn information about each other’s age, families, and interests. In almost every early letter,

students asked each other's age, birthday and where they lived. For example, in Flora's (A) first letter she introduced herself:

Hi! I'm Flora, but all my friends call me Fe-Fe. I live in Houston, Alabama. I have a lot of questions about you. Please answer the ones you can. I look forward to learning more about you this year as we write letters for our pen pal project. Where in Indonesia do you live? I am 12 years old. How old are you?

Miles' (J) reply to Flora (A) read:

I live in Cijantung, Jakarta Timur. I was twelve years old, my birthday's 21 September 1999. I live with my mom, dad, grandmother, grandfather, and big sister. i like internet, play facebook, and play football. i like bruno mars music, my favorite food is fried chicken, i don't have dog or cat and I don't have girlfriend.

Jennifer (A) and Anne (J) had similar introductions in their letters. Jennifer (A) wrote:

I am 11years old. My birthday is Nov. 2. I live in ...Alabama. It is a small town. I live with my me-me, my brothers, my mom, and dad. I have two brothers which are really mean to me. I have no sisters. I am the baby. Do you have a sister or brother? Are they mean to you?

Anne (J) replied:

I am 11 years old. my birthday is 26 october 2000. I live in cimanggis-depok. I don't have brother OR sister. I have two little brother, they are names arjuna and arkana. I'm in sixth grade my teacher is very nice.

In other conversations, Billy (A) seemed happy to find a similarity with his Indonesian friend. He wrote, "In the last letter you said 'I am 11 years old.' I'm 11 too. I thought it was cool that we are both 11." All of the sixth graders asked about each other's personal and family attributes and found much in common.

Animals/pets. Sixth graders in Jakarta and Alabama were equally very curious about each other's animals and pets. This curiosity was illustrated through the conversations between Ian (J), Bob (A) and Cameron (A). Ian (J) asked Bob (A) and

Cameron (A) if they had any cats or dogs? Cameron (A) explained and asked, “I have seven cats, one dog, three ducks and seven cows. Are your surprised I have so many animals? Do you have any animals?” Ian (J) replied that he did not have any pets, “...not at all.” Interestingly, Cameron (A) also asked Ian (J) if he had any cows and Ian (J) explained, “No, because cows are farm animals and I live in the city.”

While many students asked about each others’ pets, some students were more specific in what they wanted to know. For instance, after Ralph (A) and Kane (J) shared what types of pets each other had, Ralph (A) asked Kane (J), “Do you kill animals to eat? And Kane (J) replied, “yes but chicken.”

Some students also shared their fear about animals. Ben (J) shared that he had been chased by a three legged cat before and now was afraid of cats. He asked Job (A) and Kyle (A), “Is Alabama have dangerous animals? Or a rare animal? It doesn’t matter if it’s an insect.” Kyle (A) answered, “Yes, I have seen a dangerous snake, cottonmouth”.

In addition, other students communicated interest in pets and other animals. Kaley (A) shared that she loved her dogs and cats and her pen pal, Zana (J) wondered if they fought all the time. Kate (J) wanted to know if Belinda (A) had ever seen a wild duck. Anne (J) shared with Jennifer (A) many of the types of animals that live in Jakarta.

Hobbies. My students searched for common hobbies with their pen pal in Jakarta. Most of my students used their free time to play outside or engage in playing sports. Their pen pals were eager to find out what they liked to do and they discovered that they

liked to do the same types of things. Ian asked in his first letter, “What do like to do when you have spare time?” Cameron (A) shared:

Well I will tell you some things about me. I like to hunt deer, rabbits, duck, goose, squirrels, hogs and, dove. I like to ride 4 wheelers. I like to fish, and I like to run around cows. I run around cows all the time.

Bob (A) also indicated to Ian (J) what he liked to do in his spare time. He wrote:

I like to hunt deer, rabbits, ducks, coyotes, bob cats, red foxes, squirrels, and lots more. I like to ride dirt bikes. I do dirt bike every time I go to my cousin house through the woods and mud we go mud bogging a bunch.

In a different letter, Cameron (A) wrote that he liked drawing, playing football, and listening to music. They had discovered a common interest when Ian (J) replied to Cameron (A), “You said you like drawing I do to.”

Also, Ezekiel (J) and Ken (A) discovered that they both enjoy the same hobby. Ezekiel (J) commented to Ken (A), “Do you have swimming pool in your home. I don’t have a swimming pool I my home, but I very love swimming.” His reply was, “In summer time I like to go swimming at Smith Lake.”

Tammy (A) and Faith (J) found commonalities in their hobbies as well. Tammy (A) shared, “When I have free time I like playing football with my little brothers, ride my bike, and play the Wii,” and Faith (J) replied, “I like playing football with my brother every afternoon.”

Much of the time students found that they enjoyed doing the same things. Sometimes, though, they found they liked to do different things. This difference was illustrated between Belinda (A) and Kate (J). Belinda (A) wrote, “In my spare time I like

riding 4 wheelers, playing basketball, pitching with a softball, ridding my golf cart, and playing with my 3 cats and 1 dog. My dad and I love playing basketball together...Do you have hobbies?" Kate, her pen pal from Jakarta, replied, "My hobbies is Drawing, Writing, and Traveling." In another letter she stated, "I likes to writing the story and Drawing" but Belinda (A) liked being outdoors more often.

Kathy (A) and Anna (J) realized they liked different things too. Kathy (A) wrote, "What do kids in Indonesia do in their free time?" and Anna (J) replied, "I just play at home with my friend." Kathy (A) added, "Lately I have been really busy, next week I have to go to a Festival. This is a thing in piano you have to memorize 2 songs and play them for judges!" She goes on to tell how much she likes music, but Anna (J) never mentioned music in any of her letters. Obviously, there were no common interests in playing piano or enjoying music. While searching for commonalities, there were not always any at close examination of the letters in the discussion of their hobbies, but it was a beginning step toward getting to know one another.

Sports. Playing sports was important for many students at my school in Alabama. Volleyball and football teams at our school are known for their dedication to the game. My students weren't sure if their pen pals in Jakarta shared the same enthusiasm for the game. The enthusiasm for sports can be found in Farrell's (J) letter. Farrell's (J) reply from Jakarta to Caleb (A) summed up his experience with sports. He wrote, "In my class all men love to play ball..." The enthusiasm was evident also between Toby (J) and Alley (A) when he asked her, "Do you love to play football?" Alley (A) replied, "I like to play football but I don't love it. I just play with my sister at home. My hobby is

playing sports like softball, basketball, and volleyball.... Do you like to play sports?"

Toby (J) told her, "I so love sports like basketball, football, run, surfing, and all sports."

In a conversation between Ian (J) and Bob (A), sports were also discussed. Ian (J) asked Bob (A), "Do you like football? I like football." Bob (A) responded, "We don't like football we love it." In other correspondences between students, Caleb (A) showed great interest in sports too, as he wrote Farrell (J), "Do yall play basketball? Do you know what baseball is?" Promptly, Farrell (J), answered, "Yes I know...Me and my friends often play football, play football our school has become a habit..." Caleb (A) continued on in his next letter to share that he is starting baseball and may even make it to All-Stars and that his friend was playing ping pong. In Farrell's (J) next response he said, "at my school there are indoor soccer tournament so I had preparing it. PLEASE pray for me WIN." He also answered that they rarely play basketball in Jakarta and that he does not know what football is in America. This could be that in many countries football is actually soccer.

The love of sports was also a similarity for Flora (A) and Miles (J). Flora (A) asked her pen pal if he played and liked sports. Miles (J) responded, "yes I play sports because it makes us healthier and of course I like sports especially football." In turn he asked her if she liked sports. Flora (A) replied:

I love to go mud riding on four wheelers, play with frogs, hunting, and fishing...I like sports such as hunting, blue gill fishing. I like to hunt because it's fun to do. I like to go blue gill fishing because it's a fun sport. Especially when you catch one.

She added in a later letter:

I played baseball on Monday the 20th. It was fun too...My baseball team was me and... [Shannon], my brother, and my mom was on the other team. My team lost the game by 2 points can you believe that we lost just by 2 points!!!! They had 8 points we had 6 points.

In response, Miles (J) said, "I made preparations futsal tournament at my school, I hope my team can win match". She wished him good luck on winning. Like many others, Flora (A) and Miles (J) found that they both enjoyed playing sports.

Sometimes, students did not find shared commonalities in the enjoyment of sports. Caleb (A) and Ray (A) discovered that Farrell (J) knew what American football was, but he did not like the game. Likewise, Kane (J) asked Ralph (A) who his favorite football player was but Ralph (A) answered, "I'm sorry, but I don't watch soccer/football." Ralph (A) shared that his favorite sport was playing football. He said, "I play football, I join futsal club here. Futsal is a sport like soccer that the players only 5". Ralph (A) shared that he will get to play football this year, but is "the weakling of the team." Although he will play football, he communicated that his favorite hobby was playing video games. From his email it sounded as if he was more of an indoor person unlike his pen pal.

Favorites. Sixth graders asked a plethora of questions about what one another's favorite things were as they searched for similarities with their pen pal. For instance, Tammy (A) and Faith (J) asked each other about their favorite colors, foods, pets, and sports. Kathy (A) and Anna (J) realized that they were similar in having the same favorite food. Kathy (A) explained, "Well I live down in the south. Alabama is a

southern state! We like fried chicken and homemade cooking! I also saw in your letter you like fried chicken. Well its my favorite food to!"

Many sixth graders discussed a variety of their favorite things. For instance, Kaley (A) and Zana (J) discussed some of their favorite things. Kaley (A) and Zana (J) entered into a dialogue about their favorite television shows and books. To give an example, Kaley (A) corresponded, "My favorite television show is "The Amazing World of Gumball". My favorite book is "Hatchet". My favorite website is "Facebook." In reply, Zana (J) responded, "Oh, is good. My favorite television show is "Junior Master Chef Austrailia". My favorite book is "WHY?" My favorite comics are "Hi Miiko" and "Doraemon." Similar conversations existed between Ralph (A) and Kane (J). Ralph (A) and Kane's letters (J) included discussions about their favorite artists, sports, movies and hobbies.

Sometimes when students related information about their favorite things, it enabled the students to learn much more about each other's area and country. For instance, when Emily (A) and Ricky (J) discovered what their pen pal said about their favorite books, songs, and seasons, it opened up a new line of communication. In this case, the difference in seasons was mentioned. Ricky (J) asked, "What is your favorite seasons??" Emily (A) replied, "I love summer because I can swim, ride bikes, and play outside... What is your favorite season?" Ricky's email (J) returned with some surprising information for the Alabama student:

About season, in Indonesia we only have 2 (two) season that are a. Dry Season (We can call Summer Season (starting from March until August)) and b. Rainy Season (starting from September until February). Indonesia is located near

equator. I love the summer season, because I can play outside such as foot-ball with my friends.

Learning about the difference in seasons between Alabama and Jakarta intrigued several students and sparked interest in learning more about why this occurs. Several students used the Internet to find out more about Jakarta's climate. One student found a weather website that displayed the current conditions in Jakarta.

Music. Generally, music was important to sixth graders and was reflected in the pen pal letters. Many students discussed favorite music and many asked their pen pals what types of music or artists they liked to listen to such as this interaction between Faith (J) and Tammy (A). Faith (J) wrote, "What artist do you like? What song? Do you know Green Day?" In Tammy's next email (A) response, she replied, "I like the artist Adele. My favorite song by her is Some One Like You. I know who Green Day is, but I don't listen to their music. What are your favorite song/songs?" The conversation continued, "I do not have a favorite band haha.. now I'll ask one thing. What do you like Katy perry? Katty perry concert yesterday in Indonesia hahaha?" Tammy (A) said, "Yes, I love Katy Perry, I think it is awesome that you went to her concert, but my favorite singer is Carrie Underwood. What is your favorite song by Katy Perry? Mine is, I kissed a girl." In other email, Kathy (A) was delighted to find that her pen pal in Jakarta had the same taste in music. She replied with this statement, "You told me you like Bruno Mars, so do I! He is a popular singer here."

Alley (A) and Toby (J) had similar conversations in their letters. Toby (J) wrote: Do you know the pitbull song "give me everything"? in indonesia there is 1 TV show, in there are many songs are edited "give me everything" be like " yuk kita makan somay bakmi keriting...hahaha it's so funny if you be Indonesian people.

Alley (A) replied, “Do you like to listen to music? If so, what type of music? His response was, “yes, I am very like music. Pop, and jazz.” Almost every sixth grader mentioned music in at least one of their email letters.

Technology. Some type of technology was discussed in most correspondence between sixth graders. The sixth graders seemed to be very interested in comparing their access to technology. As an example, Bob (A), Cameron (A), and Ian (J) related information to each other about the types of cell phones they each owned. Most students, though, engaged in conversation about Facebook and email account access such as the interaction between Emily (A) and Ricky (J), “Do have have an e-mail? Do you have facebook in Indonesia? If you do, do you have one? In response to Emily (A), Ricky (J) replied, “Unluckily, I don’t have email address and face book. I only send this email through my teacher. Even though I know how to create email dan facebook, because my father already trained me to do that.” Emily (A) continued, “Do you have a X-Box Kinect? (This weekend I went to my other friend’s house and we played Kinect! It is so much fun!) Ricky (J) responded with, “IN INDONESIAN OF COURSE WE HAVE A X-box Kinect.” Emily (A) seemed very excited as she replied, “I enjoyed your letter so very much! I didn’t know you had an X-Box! We have x-boxes here too! That is very neat.”

Similarly, Alley (A) asked Toby (J) if he had a computer of his own and he replied, “No, but I have a laptop.” The conversation continued as Toby (J) asked Alley (A) if she had Facebook and she replied, “I don’t have a Facebook, but I might get one soon.” In addition, Faith (J) also asked Tammy (A) if she had Facebook or Twitter. In

response, Tammy (A) explained that she did not have Facebook because her dad won't let her and she was not aware what Twitter was. To further search for commonalities in technology, Faith (J) continued in following email letters asking Tammy (A) if she knew 2NE1 or Skype. Again, Tammy (A) corresponded, "No, I don't know what or who 2NE1 is. No, I don't have Skype I don't know what that is." As Faith (J) explained, "2NE1 is Girlband for Koreaaa!! I think 2NE1 Cool and I very like 2NE1!!!", it seemed that the two girls were not able to establish commonalities between them in the area of technology.

Job (A), Kyle (A) and Ben (J) also corresponded about several forms of technology. Job (A) communicated his search for commonalities, "I have TV and it is fantastic and I watch Sponge Bob. I hope you are like me." In Ben's next email (J) response, he replied, "I have TV but not often use." Job (A) continued the search as he asked Ben (J) about having an X-box but he told him that he did not have one and asked what it was. Ben (J) also wondered, "Do you have computer in your house or school?" In reply, Job (A) answered, "I do not have a computer at home at school we do." In a later email, Ben (J) told Job (A), "Now I like making animations and recorder and upload it to youtube (I just make one video, but later maybe more)." They also discussed video games and websites they enjoyed using such as the website, aq.com. Job (A) told his pen pal, "I do know about the game AQ.com. I have never played it either but it must be really fun." Kyle (A), Job's partner, did tell him that he knew the game and shared his online AQ.com name.

Ken (A) and Ezekiel (J) also engaged in a similar conversation about technology. Ken (A) wrote:

Do you have television? We call television TV Do you watch popular shows? The popular shows in America are things like Spongebob and Family Guy but I like older shows like Roseanne and Saturday night live. I love old shows. My favorite is the Simpsons. What is your favorite television shows?

In response to Ken, Ezekiel (J) replied, “Yes, I have television. I like spongebob squarepants and chalkzone.” The boys then entered into a dialogue about Facebook and email accounts and they shared information.

The discussion between Jill (A), Kaley (A), and Zana (J) also included whether or not each other had Facebook and email accounts. After Zana (J) inquired whether Jill (A) and Kaley (A) had Facebook and email, Jill (A) answered, “...I do not have a Facebook or twitter, but my mom has a Facebook! No. I don’t have an email either sorry. But I do plan on having one when I turn 12. I can’t wait.” After close examination of all email letters, several sixth graders exchanged Facebook or email information.

Cross-cultural student learning. The third major theme was comparing and contrasting facets of living in Jakarta and Alabama. After close examination of the email messages, the sixth graders appeared to be interested in features of what it might be like living in a place that most assumed would be very diverse. Throughout many email letters, numerous students discussed aspects of food, weather, language, holidays, transportation, and schools.

School. In general, standardized tests were an important part of life for many sixth graders in Jakarta. Many students engaged in conversations that included impending standardized testing such as the interaction between Kelly (A) and Niles (J).

Niles, from Jakarta, asked Kelly (A), “Does your school have national examination program?” In response, Kelly (A) explained her experience with standardized tests:

We don’t really know if we have a national examination program. Our exams are in April each year. It is called the SAT which stands for Stanford Achievement Test and the ARMT which stands for the Alabama Reading and Math and technology exam. The scores do not determine if we pass or not.

In his next letter, Niles (J) asked, “What are you doing? What is your subject today? In my school everyday I study four subjects... How many lessons do you study every day?” In response, Kelly (A) explained that she studied six subjects at her school.

In correspondence between Kate (J) and Belinda (A), Kate (J) wondered if Alabama students had to undergo the same kind of testing as students in Jakarta. She asked Belinda (A), “Where at school There is a National Examination Board the junior high level?” but Belinda (A) explained that she did not know about the national examination board.

Many students asked a variety of questions as they compared and contrasted schools. As Faith (J) and Tammy (A) compared schools, Tammy shared about a recent assignment she had forthcoming. Faith (J) began the conversation by asking, “What you like about your school? You like what lessons?” Tammy’s next email (A) response was, “What I like about my school is that it isn’t very big, a lot of people are nice – bout some of them aren’t – and I can have a wonderful pen pal like you.” She also added:

We have a science fair coming up, so I hope it goes well. The science fair is where you do a science project and you will get judged on your presentation and what science project you do. What are y’all doing at your school?

Faith (J) answered her question by saying, “I study And Play with my friend☺”

After close analysis of each letter, many students engaged in similar conversations about school. As students shared letters with the class, other students became interested in different aspects of school and included additional questions. Some students seemed curious about the size of the school or the class. Caleb (A), Ray (A), and Farrell (J) questioned each other about the size of each other's school. The conversation spread to Flora (A) and Miles (J) who also talked about the number of students they each had in class. Kathy (A) and Anna (J) similarly engaged in dialogue about school and classes. Kathy (A) asked, "What is your school like? Does your school have a mascot?" and Anna (J) explained that her school is big and did not have a mascot. Anna (J) continued her inquiry to find out if she liked her class, how many students were there, and who she thought was the smartest person in class. To satisfy Anna's (J) curiosity, Kathy (A) replied, "I like my class very much; I have a great teacher and lots of friends. I have 25 students in my class. We have a lot of smart people in my class, so I wouldn't be able to choose." The girls continued as they discussed which subjects were studied in school.

Two students entered into a dialogue about school and school uniforms. Billy (A) and Fidel (J) discussed the size of the schools and whether each had school uniforms. Fidel (J) explained that they wear uniforms only on Mondays and Billy (A) shared that he never has had to wear them.

Two students engaged in similar dialogue about school but shared more personal information about family. An example of this personal conversation was between Alley (A) and Toby (J). Toby (J) penned:

Hello again, I will share my story about school first. I wanna be a student in junior high school In NF (Nurul Fikri) but my parents force me to school in JIBBS (Jakarta Islamic Boy Boarding School). She ask me 'if you want to school in NF you must wake up in 04.00 to pray and Koran (Al-Quran – the holy book of Moslem) continue to 06.00.

Then later in the same letter, he added, “Please pray for me that I will get good score for try out national examination. Because last week and next week we do try out for national examination...” Alley (A) showed sympathy as she replied, “I think it’s sad that your parents force you to go to JIBBS. I shall pray for you. I know that your national examination is very important to you...”

Food. Many students discussed favorite foods or the difference in the foods they liked to eat. Sometimes, a sense of playfulness was noted such as the interaction between Emily (A) and Ricky (J). In Emily’s letter (A) to Ricky (J), she lightheartedly described food where she lived. She communicated:

I will tell you about Alabama now! I live in north Alabama. It is a southern state. We enjoy eating fried food. Our motto is ‘The greasier the better!!!’ (Not really, but we do enjoy friend food) My favorite food is chicken fingers.

Other students were more serious and questioned for information that helped initiate research. Tammy (A) and Faith’s (J) interaction motivated the entire class to learn the contents of a traditional drink in Indonesia. Tammy (A) asked Faith (J) what types of drinks they had in Indonesia and Faith (J) explained, “Tea, bandrek (ginger), and cendol”. She also sent photos of the drinks she liked for Tammy (A) to see and share with the class. When looking at the photos, the sixth graders asked me as they gasped in horror, “What is that?” and pointed to some green strips in the drink which they thought were “worms”. After looking it up on the Internet, we discovered that the drink was a

traditional dessert popular in Indonesia that contained coconut milk and green food coloring mixed with rice flour and sugar to form worm-like jelly. To our relief, this explained that what we thought were “worms” were not actually worms at all.

Ralph (A) and Kane’s (J) conversation about food also prompted some students to research about the differences in Muslim and Christian practices. Ralph (A) was interested in the types of foods that his pen pal did not or could not eat. In response to Ralph’s (A) inquiry, Kane (J) explained that he does not eat pig, dog, or beer since it is forbidden for Muslims. This promoted some students to research more about the food of Muslims. After Kane (J) shared that his favorite foods were rendang and satay, Ralph (A) asked for the recipes. Other students accessed the Internet to look for recipes of some food dishes that their pen pal had aforementioned.

Interest in comparing food was also evident in letters by Zana (J) and Jill (A). The letters between these girls further sparked curiosity for students to find out more about the diet of the pen pal. Zana (J) asked, “What your food in there? In here I’m eat rice, fishes, chickens, and potato.” In her next email response, Jill (A) explained to Zana (J) that people in Alabama eat pizza, noodles, taco salad and more. She said, “I guess you could say we have an all around the world food.” Students in Alabama took turns taking the classroom camera to lunch for about a week and took photos of several meals. Along with the next letters, some students in Alabama included photos of the food served for lunch at our school. As numerous pen pals in Indonesia mentioned rice as a common food, students in Alabama realized the importance of rice, a staple food, for the people who lived in Jakarta.

Weather/ climate. In addition to discussing the difference in seasons as mentioned earlier, several students conversed about recent weather in each other's respective locations. Dialogue about temperatures was one of the topics which was evident in the letters between Ezekiel (J) and Jennifer (A). Ezekiel (J) asked what temperature it was in Alabama and Jennifer (A) asked her pen pal if it was cold over there. This enabled her to learn how the Equator influences the temperatures and climate of Jakarta.

Soon after tornadoes ravaged much of Alabama in April, 2011, weather and storms seemed to be a popular topic in the email letters. Generally, discussions about recent storms and safety from them ensued. An example of the interest about storms was between Kelly (A) and Niles (J). Kelly (A) asked her pen pal, "What is it like in Indonesia? Do you have bad storms? We are scared of storms. We don't like them. What do you do in Indonesia?" To her relief, Niles (J) explained that Indonesia was "safe from the storm."

After hearing on the news about a recent devastating hurricane near the United States, Anna (J) asked Kathy (A), "Can you tell us a little about hurricanes in Alabama, whether your school affected by the storm?" Kathy (A) replied:

Thanks for your concern but my school didn't get affected by the storms. We live pretty far inland so we don't get affected by hurricanes. If anything, we may get some wind but not much. This is a website about hurricanes:
<http://www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-hurricane.htm>.

After Kathy (A) found this website and shared it among her peers, other students researched and learned more about hurricanes.

Similarly, in dialogue between Fidel (J) and Billy (A), another catastrophic storm, tornado, was an important topic. Fidel (J) asked Billy (A) about tornadoes he had heard about on the news. He asked, “Why frequent tornadoes in Alabama?” In his next email, Billy (A) answered, “the reason we have tornadoes frequently is our weather pattern is always changing.” Some students asked explicit questions about storm damage caused by tornadoes such as the conversation between Ian (J), Cameron (A) and Bob (A). Ian (J) asked, “Are your houses breaking down because of tornado? In response, Bob (A) answered, “The tornado’s are over and my house is fine.”

Earthquakes, another catastrophic event, also were a topic of interest for sixth graders. Anna (J) wrote, “do you know? Lately there is an earthquake in Indonesia but I was lucky because the quake was very far from where I live, and I hope no earthquake at my residence.” Other students wanted to learn more about the origin of earthquakes and find out when and where the most devastating ones in history occurred.

Language. From many email letters, sixth graders in Alabama seemed enthusiastic to learn about Bahasa Indonesia, the first language of most students in Jakarta. Students in Jakarta seemed equally excited to share some words and phrases in their native tongue. Several students in Jakarta challenged sixth graders in Alabama to use Indonesian language and some encouraged the student in Alabama to try to use “Google Translate” so that the letter could be, in part, written in their native tongue. For example, Ricky, an Indonesian student, told Emily (A), “My Language is bahasa Indonesia, but I can speak, write in English because in my school we learn English.”

Emily (A) replied, “Will you tell me some words or phrases in your language?” Ricky (J) seemed eager to share in his answer:

Are you sure you want to know sample of the phrases of Indonesia Language? Okey, here it is: Saya pergi ke sekolah setiap hari senin sampai jumat (In English, I go to school from Monday to Friday.) If you want to express about something amazing, you can say in Indonesia “Oh.. bolen juga ya!” or “Oh... hebat sekali!” or “Oh...mantap banget!”. The translation in English “Not bad! For “Oh.. boleh juga ya!” , “It’s amazing!” for “Oh... hebat sekali!” , It’s wonderful” for “Oh... mantap banget!

Similarly, Faith (J) had a challenge for Tammy (A). She asked her to try to write in the Indonesian language. She said, “I want to challenge for you...the challenge is reply to this letter with the Indonesian haha :p want to?” Tammy (A) accepted the challenge and replied, “I don’t really know how to type in Indonesian language, but I will try... That is my letter!!!! Terima kasih untuk menjawab pertanyaan saya!.” Faith (J) continued to share several words and phrases in Indonesian for Tammy (A) to learn. Tammy told her “please teach me more Indonesian language. Do you know some websites that are really easy that could help me learn to your new language?” Faith (J) agreed. Students looked for various websites to help one another learn some basic phrases.

The dialogue between Jill (A), Kaley (A), and Zana (J) also included discussions about learning to speak in Bahasa Indonesia. Jill (A) admitted, “I just now have heard of Indonesia so I don’t have a clue how to speak any Indonesian words.” Zana (J) seemed to plead, “You don’t speak Indonesian ☹? Please Search in Google Translate. I can speak English, but not much...Please write one sentence into Indonesia language.” The students in Alabama were very hesitant about using “Google Translate” but with help,

most of them succeeded in using the tool. Kaley (A) was able to learn to use Google Translate and wrote, “Harapan ini lebih mudah. (Hope this was easier.)” To show her pleasure and thirst for more translations, Zana (J) repeatedly asked, “Can you use Indonesian language again?”

For most students, sharing and learning the new language was fun and encouraging. After several exchanges of letters which contained learning new phrases and words in the language, Jennifer (A) shared with Anne (J) that it was beneficial to her. She said to Anne (J), “Thank you for helping me speak Indonesia. I feel smart now! OO selamat pagi to you! I want to learn more”.

Learning a new language was frustrating, though, for some students. After several failed attempts to use Google Translate to no avail, Alley (A) shared her frustration with Toby (J). Alley (A) commented, “I went to Google Translate and it translated what you wrote in Indonesia. It was strange I don’t understand it.” This frustration was also demonstrated in other students’ letters as well, such as the exchange between Jill (A) and Zana (J) as Jill (A) relayed, “It’s so upsetting I can’t Google Translate☹”.

Sometimes language differences caused the students to lose meaning and prohibited conversation such as the interaction between Ben (J), Kyle (A) and Job (A), Ben (J) communicated to Kyle (A) and Job (A), “Hello...I a little senile, but like a LOT senile. ..Do you senile? (Like me?)” The sixth graders in Alabama didn’t understand the term. Job (A) explained to Ben (J) in his next email, “Our class really didn’t know what they world “senile” means. We think, I do not have senile and neither does [Kyle] but we

aren't sure what it means. Can you tell us?" Ben (J) tried to explain, "Senile means.... I Don't know in English when it means, in Indonesia it mease pelupa." He added, "In all the letter I send, my english is not so good." Students in Alabama never realized what the word actually meant despite efforts to look it up online.

In other correspondences, language differences caused confusion such as the dialogue between Ian (J), Bob (A) and Cameron (A). Ian (J) asked Bob (A) and Cameron (A) if they had a "fixie" which the American students did not understand. Similarly, Anna (J) used the Indonesian word, "Yogyakarta" in one of her letters to describe her town and "dufan" for playground. There were several occasions when Alabama students asked the meanings of some of the language used. The students in Jakarta were always eager to help and explain the meanings in responses. Many students also asked sixth graders in Jakarta how to pronounce things in their language. We used websites such as <http://www.expatriot.or.id/info/bahasa.html> to listen and learn to say some Bahasa Indonesian language phrases. Students in Alabama also discovered video clips of people using the foreign language on clips titled, "Indonesian Idol" on www.youtube.com.

Holidays. Since the students in Alabama all had always practiced some form of Christianity, many did not understand the differences in how students who practiced other religions celebrated holidays. This was demonstrated between Alley (A) and Toby (J). Alley (A) asked her pen pal, Toby (J), if he celebrated Christmas and Toby (J) answered, "I didn't celebrate christmas because I'm islam." Similarly, Ben (J) explained to Job (A), 'I don't celebrate Christmas in my religion, but I still appreciate it. I wish while I prey.'

Students learned that there were large differences in the religious practices of Muslims. For example, Kelly (A) had asked Niles (J) what he wanted and he replied, “About the Christmas gift I think I not need a gift, so I not have a gift.” This was difficult for students in Alabama to understand. Ralph (A) tried to explain to Kane (J) about Christmas, a Christian holiday he celebrated:

This month we celebrate Christmas! I don’t know if you understand, though. So, I will try to explain the best I can. For Christmas, we traditionally give gifts to each other. This happens on December 25. I would tell you more, but I can’t because I am awful at explaining.

In response, Kane (J) also explained to Ralph (A) his explanation, “I don’t celebrate Christmas. Because I am a moeslim.”

Other students discussed aspects of Christmas such as giving and receiving gifts. Kelly (A) explained to her pen pal, Niles (J), that she wanted a tablet and Ipod for Christmas. In Nile’s (J) next email response, he asked, “Why were you asking tablet (and capsules hehehe) and I pod for Christmas? Can you mention a lot more stuff you were asking for Christmas?”

Even after learning that the pen pals did not celebrate Christmas, some students still illustrated how difficult it was to understand by asking whether or not they had Santa Claus. Farrell’s (J) answer helped them understand. He explained, “Yes, I know Santa Claus but I am not a Christian but I’am muslim.” One student asked if they celebrated Easter months after learning they did not celebrate Christmas. This is an illustration of the difficulty my students had in understanding the differences in religion since it was something very abstract for them.

Transportation. The analysis of the letter revealed that several students were interested in how the students in Jakarta were transported to school each day. This interest could have been sparked by a series of video clips from YouTube that I had shown of traffic flow in Jakarta. Several students were helpful by informing Alabama students how they specifically were transported to school. Ricky (J) explained, “I usually go to school using my family car. I have a family driver, and next time when I grow up and already have driving license I will drive the car by myself.” Ben (J) told his pen pal that he got to school “by a minibus/van” and Ian (J) shared that he traveled to school by car. Farrell (J) also shared with his pen pal in Alabama that he had a motorcycle and his family had a car for work.

While most students in sixth grade in Alabama could not yet drive, Jennifer (A) received some surprising information from Anne (J). Anne (J), like Farrell (J), shared that she had a motorcycle and it was a “little scary” to drive. Jennifer (A), like most students in her class, was not old enough to drive yet and she did not realize that motorcycles were so popular for people who live in Jakarta. In the following letter, Anna (J) wanted to know how long it took Kathy (A) to travel to school. Most sixth graders in Alabama explained to his or her pen pal that they get to school by school bus and all have relatively short travel times since they all live in the small town.

Etiquette. Another major theme revealed within the data was etiquette. A courteous and apologetic tone was common in emails for many students. They were apologetic about the language and religious differences and it was evident that they did not wish to offend one another. They kindly expressed appreciation for each other’s

letters and pictures. They also were courteous in asking about health issues and illustrating that they cared about each other's feelings.

Language differences. The sixth graders were careful not to offend one another. In realizing that the cultures were very diverse, they feared they may accidentally say something that could be offensive. They did not wish to use the wrong words. Several students, such as Emily (A) expressed etiquette about her use of language. Emily, who lived in Alabama, wrote to Ricky (J), "If I have ever said something offensive, I am extremely SORRY for it!"

Other students were quick to apologize about things they said such as the comment by Jill (A) when she asked Zana (J) if there were poor people there but then added, "I don't mean to be rude about that". Likewise, in another letter, Zana (J) responded similarly to Jill (A) saying, "Thank you for trying to use Indonesian..I'm very easy to read, whether I wrote you a letter when there is the wrong word? I hope not."

In other letters to Kaley (A) and Jill (A), she also asked Kaley (A) and Jill (A) about their height and weight then added, "I hope my question no offense☺ Okay? Because I did not intend for it." Students in Alabama were never offended as they realized there was no intent for harm. Kaley (A) replied to Zana (J) promptly, "I weigh 120 pounds. I'm not offended. I know I'm bigger than most girls." In addition, Ben (J) similarly commented to Kyle (A) and Job (A), "I am sorry i can awnser your letter now, i got many homeworks now, and sorry if i write wrong. In all the letter i send, my English is not so good."

Religious differences. The students were asked not to discuss religion so as to be sensitive to the differences in religion between the students and not invite conflict. However, when discussing the differences in each other's holidays, the topic emerged. All of the sixth graders responded sensitively and respectfully to the differences in religion when asked directly. For instance, Jennifer (A) and Anne's (J) conversation about Christmas summed up the sensitivity to the differences in religion. When Jennifer (A) asked Anne (J) about the celebration of Christmas and what presents she wanted, Anne (J) kindly replied, "I am sorry I can not answer you question, because my religion islam. Ow, not that different religion can not we be friends? ☺ I think we can be friends☺." Jennifer told her that they could still be friends. Many students in Alabama asked students in Jakarta about the celebration of Christmas. Most students in Jakarta similarly replied that they did not celebrate it, which was discussed earlier. On one occasion, a student also asked her pen pal if she celebrated Easter. The subject was not mentioned again in any following letters.

Concern of health issues. Sixth graders used good manners and showed concern for each other when discussing health issues. Niles (J), Sally (A), and Kelly (A) entered into a conversation about a concern for health. Niles (J) was absent quite a bit due to a sickness in his family and was unable to write back once during our pen pal project. His pen pals, Sally (A) and Kelly (A) were sensitive to this and wrote, "Hey, we heard from one of your friends that you couldn't write back because your dad was very bad sick so we hope he gets better..." Later, when Niles (J) was able to respond, he answered, "First, I want to thank you for your letter and for your attention to my father's condition..."

A conversation between Ben (J), Job (A), and Kyle (A) also illustrated the care that sixth graders exhibited. For instance, Ben (J) shared with Job (A) and Kyle (A) that he had smashed his arm in a car door a long time ago but did not break it. Job (A) replied:

I am sorry that you have smashed your arm in a car door. I have jumped out of a swing before. I was really high up in the air. When I fell on the ground I fractured my arm and I thought I had broken my arm. I went home that day and to bed. I could barely move my arm. The next day I went to the doctor and got a cast for my arm.

Ben (J) later shared with Job (A) that he had been sick and couldn't practice martial arts for a while and that he also had painfully sore legs. Other students expressed similar concerns. One example was between Miles (J) and Flora (A). Miles (J) expressed his concern for Flora's (A) health as he said, "I hope you are healthy and happy." She expressed the same kind of concern for him as did other sixth graders in similar emails.

Several students expressed concern about the safety of the pen pal living in Alabama after they had heard about recent tornadoes and hurricanes in our area of the United States. For instance, Ricky (J) wrote to Emily (A), "I saw from TV about the storm in Alabama. How about the impact of the storm to you and your friend? I am so sorry about the storm. Hope you and your family alright." Emily (A) eased his concern and replied, "The storms were very scary ☹, but my family is okay. It mainly hit the towns and cities around us."

Care of feelings. Sixth graders were careful not to hurt each other's feelings throughout messages about a variety of topics. One conversation centered around a misunderstanding. In an early letter, Flora's (A) second grade buddy asked Miles (J) the name of his parents. Miles (J) then responded, "wait why did you ask the name of my

parents? Oke never mind..." and he continued to share his parents' names. In her next reply, Flora (A) was careful to apologize and to explain that she not asked for the private information but her innocent second grader pal had wanted to know his parents' names. She wrote, "How are you? I'm fine. So you won't be mad I will tell you that my little friend [Jade] asked what your parents were I didn't! [Jade] is only six or seven years old." The conversation proceeded, and this was never mentioned again. Thankfully, this misunderstanding was cleared up and was not an issue that affected the pen pal relationship.

Many students in Alabama and Jakarta were concerned about each other's feelings concerning performance on standardized tests in Alabama and the national examinations in Jakarta. This concern was evident in the interaction between Flora (A) and Miles (J). Flora (A) wrote, "Good luck on winning the futsal tournament. Pray for me on the ARMT plus – you know the big test at the end of the year." Miles (J) replied, "I hope you are healthy and happy. I hope you are getting good point in your school and I wish you pray for me getting success in my Nasional Examination or UN in may."

Kathy (A) and Anna (J) also engaged in conversation about testing and showed concerned for one another. Anna (J) communicated, "Thank you for your prayers. I and others sincerely hope we value satisfying, when you do the test? We will test on 7-9 May, I hope you and your friends get good grades." Kathy (A) included similar sentiments in one her letters to Anna (J). She wrote, "We have a test that we are preparing for too, but ours doesn't determine whether or not we pass or fail. I am praying for you and your class that y'all make good on y'alls' test!" Many students in Jakarta

included similar requests in the email letters asking for prayer that the scores on the national examination would be high enough for each of them to pass.

Many apologies were included in email letters to one another for a number of reasons. Several students apologized about the length of time for a reply from them. For instance, Ian (J) included an apology in his letter to Cameron (A). He wrote, “I’m sorry I’ve been late to replay your message.” Ezekiel (J) also had an explanation for his letter being late to Ken (A). He wrote, “sorry I late to reply your first message. I late to reply your message because my internet are not working. But now, my internet are working again.” Likewise, Fidel (J) also apologized to Billy (A) for his letter being late due to misplacing his paper.

Some apologies centered around the length of the letter. Jill (A) received an apology from Zana (J) which explained the length of her letter. Zana (J) stated, “I’m sorry I’m cannot write much because I’m confuse☺ hahaha..and in here is preparing for National Exams, but no problem.. Wish me luck OK? Thanks before☺.” Niles (J) also apologized to Kelly (A) about the length of his letter. He corresponded:

I’m sorry I cannot answer all of your questions because I not have a many time for write this letter because I’m hurry when I write this letter. I not write many sentences in this letter but maybe in the next letter.

Ben (J) also apologized for writing such a short letter to Job (A). As the pen pal project ended, Ralph (A) expressed that he cared for Kane’s (J) feelings as he wrote:

This is the last letter I am sending to you. I hope you have enjoyed this experience and are not too sad that I am going. I will have no way to contact you after this, for I have no email or international call or text. So, good-bye.

Many other students in Jakarta wrote similar apologies that expressed care of how each other felt.

Transformation. The last major theme from the sixth graders' interactions was transformation. Toward the end of the project, once friendships and trust were established, students began to ask each other about ideas of ways to help the world and to make it better for everyone. Both schools participated in a recycling project and many shared other ideas about how they could help make the world a better place to live. Both groups' perceptions of people who seemed different and unfamiliar were changed.

Go green program. As children began to think about ways they could work together to make the world better, they asked each other about ideas and described how their school was participating in a "Go Green" project. Jennifer (A) was happy to share about her recycling project as she communicated to Anne (J):

Now we are doing a recycling thing like you but ours are a little different because we are putting bottles in a garbage can. It is awesome. We are recycling so we can save the world and get the pollution out of lakes, ponds, and the ocean.

Likewise, Niles (J) described his school's program to Kelly (A):

In my school are have many program, like language month, earth day, and go green program. Go green program is we have to reduce trash and friendly to earth. We have two or three kinds of trash bin, which are organic, anorganic, and glass or wire things. We don't use Styrofoam. But it is not consistent. The canteen still use plastic cup and Styrofoam, even though the principle had told it's forbidden.

In Kelly's (A) next response, she explained what her school was also doing. She corresponded:

What we are doing to go green is to put a recycling bin and let people put plastic bottle in it and hang posters everywhere in the hall ways that way other people can see it and help us. We are doing this because we want to help our earth also like you do. We do not want our earth to be so dirty because if it was dirty it would stink and it just wouldn't be beautiful like Indonesia.

Several students included reasons for their participation such as Ezekiel (J) when he explained, "In my school, the go green program in my new program in my school. My school wants to make the earth is safe." In response to Ezekiel's (J) explanation, Ken (A) explained his interest in recycling, "We are doing something to help the planet too. We are recycling plastic bottles that way the bottles don't fill in landfills and poison the earth." Alley (A) also added to her letter to Toby (J) her reason for recycling. She wrote, "We are also recycling because it takes many years for plastic to disintegrate."

Once students shared that each school was participating in a type of recycling project, many students asked about the others' progress. Students in Jakarta even shared how they were doing an additional project in which they were challenged to create an item out of recycled materials. For instance, Ezekiel (J) explained what he planned to create with the

I using a paper, plastic bottles, and the plastic cup only for one Recycle project. Somedays, I using my friend item to make them. And about the GREEN project, I have planning to make a kid size from my useless item, I will make a kid size car. Not using a machine, a hybrid, not do used to drive. Car.

Ben, another student in Jakarta, explained his idea for the project, "About the Green project, I have planning to make a kid sized, made from useless junk, ROBOT, a hybrid, non-function, Eco Green, ROBOT." A few other students also shared an idea for creating something unique in order to reuse the recyclable materials.

Some students issued challenges to each other to help the world. One student, Tammy (A) informed her pen pal about being wasteful. She stated:

Do you waste a lot of stuff like food, water, and money? We do, we waste a lot of stuff!!! I have a challenge for you. Here it is try to recycle as much stuff as you can. Like cans water bottles and paper.

She goes on in another letter to explain her reason for helping with the project:

We have been doing a recycling project. What we do is recycle plastic. We have got a lot of plastic so far. We are doing this so there won't be so much plastic in the landfills. We are also doing it to make the world a better place because it takes plastic thousands of years to decompose.

Other ideas for improvement. All the students shared with each other a variety of ways to help the world other than through recycling. They seemed eager to solicit ideas and encourage the pen pals in another country to join in. Caleb is one of these examples. Caleb (A) wanted to find out his pen pal's ideas. He asked, "What are yall doing to help make the world be a better place?...Hopefully we can all make the world a better place." This enthusiasm to make a difference could be seen in the interaction between Kaley (A) and Zana (J). Kaley (A) corresponded, "We are hoping to do this project with you about how to make the world a better place. What are some ways you think the world could be a better place?" Zana (J) included the answer in her next email. She wrote and asked, "Program in our school to do go green by not using Styrofoam but, using a lunch box and we also do not litter. whether you are doing it too? how do you run the program go green?" This shared exchange helped students in Alabama to become more aware of the use of Styrofoam and prompted several students to want to pick up trash around campus.

Students had even more ideas for ways to help which were related to waste and conservation such as Belinda's (A) idea she shared with Kate (J) to use more coupons

and recycle “because America we are very wasteful, especially with our water and food.” Billy (A) was also concerned about the waste we produced. He asked, “One more thing, how much does your family waste? Mine waste a lot.” He encouraged Fidel (J) to use products wisely in order to produce less waste.

Other dialogue, such as the interaction between Belinda (A) and Kate (J) centered around improving the world by discussing experience with planting flowers and trees. Kate (J) shared, “We have planted trees in these Forest City. Have you ever been planted the tree?” Belinda (A) explained that she had planted trees many times at her house. Another student in Indonesia was concerned about saving trees in Indonesia. Farrell (J) explained his concern about trees and the use of paper in Indonesia. He wrote to Ray (A), “at school we must to save paper Because now the trees have started to thin out. you know that forests in indonesia are 1/3 of the forest in the world! Hence we have to plant many trees.” Many students in Alabama wished to begin to conserve paper and most started using both sides of every sheet of paper in an effort to waste less and use resources more wisely as Farrell (J) suggested.

Several students showed interest in making changes to make the world a better place. Belinda (A) was adamant in taking care of a flower bed near the school building. She insisted on pulling weeds and making the flowers look better for the community. Emily (A) asked about planting flowers and trees and added that keeping garbage and plastic out of rivers and lakes would help the world be a better place. In addition, Cameron (A) shared with the class that his dad and he had created a compost center at home.

As a culminating activity at the end of the school year, all of the sixth graders and second graders decided to create two books to share with others what they had learned from the pen pal project and to tell how the world could become a better place. The first book compared and contrasted some of the things they had learned about living in Alabama compared with Jakarta such as the differences and similarities of each other's food, music, weather, sports and others. The sixth and second graders collaborated to design and create each page. They decided to use their own handwriting to make it seem "more like their work". Some sixth graders chose to write and some second graders chose to illustrate a page. The second book was titled, *Ways to Make the World a Better Place*. Sixth graders collaborated with second graders to brainstorm and write different ways people could help the world become a better place to live. From this list, they decided on one or two ideas to include in the class book. It was decided that sixth graders typed the text and the second graders illustrated the page. Some ideas that were included in the book were turning off lights, leaving the water off when brushing your teeth, using both sides of paper, and picking up litter. Both books were copied and shared with the second grade teacher who shared them with teachers in her grade level.

Another project the sixth graders decided to do at the end of the pen pal project with second graders was a craft activity. They decided to reuse the plastic water bottles to make a craft that everyone could keep to remember our project much like the pen pals in Jakarta had already done. After searching the Internet for an idea, students decided to choose between two activities. Some students created a toy snake from the caps using chenille stems, beads, and buttons. Cameron (A) prepared all the plastic lids by carefully

punching holes in the center for the snake body, a chenille stem, to go through. Most students chose to make a bracelet. I cut bottles into strips for them and they covered sections of the bottles and with a variety of different colorful strips of duck tape.

Perceptions change. At the end of the pen pal project I interviewed a focus group of four sixth grade students about what they had learned during the process and if the ideas about people in Jakarta or any diverse nation had changed at all. The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that sixth graders in Alabama now have a new perspective about people with diverse interests, religions and cultures.

One area of large changes in perceptions was religion, which was evident through an interview with the focus group near the end of the project. When asked if her ideas about people in Jakarta had changed, Alley (A) said:

It's changed because they are the same as us but they believe in a different God than us. But other than that, they are really a lot like us. I used to think that they were completely wrong about their religion but now I realized that they might not be, they might believe in something else but that doesn't make them weird or strange.

A new perspective was also illustrated by Tammy (A) who admitted that before the pen pal project, she felt that people who were not Christians were "weird" and she admitted that she "...couldn't imagine being a different religion," but now she understood, "they are like the same. They just don't believe the same. They're still people like us." Kelly (A) mentioned similar feelings during her interview. She, too, saw her pen pal as the same as her, just with a different belief system.

The students revealed that they had much more in common with each other than they had originally conceived. Multiple areas of change were discussed, including the

comments by Alley (A) about her thoughts of how her perception had changed. She admitted that she had thought Indonesia was a very poor country but, like most of her peers, now realized that the citizens living in Jakarta are “really rich, well, not really rich but like ours kinda rich”. She continued sharing more of her thoughts:

I learned they have a lot of the same toys as us. I asked my pen pal what toys he had and he said I don't have many but what I do have is like pandas, stuffed animals, and remote control cars. I thought since they had a lot of technology and stuff they'd have a lot of toys but he really didn't.

Kelly (A) also shared some areas in which she had changed her mind. For instance, she related that she thought there were no malls or schools in Indonesia but she learned that they had schools and malls much like in Alabama. Alley (A) added that she didn't think they'd have had so many things in common with people in Jakarta, Indonesia. She said she now realized that schools in Jakarta are more high tech than she originally believed, that sixth graders in Jakarta are not underprivileged but like to play video games like she does.

Ray (A) shared his sentiments as he shared what surprised him. He said, “They are all the same. They're not different. We can learn from each other because we are all human and stuff.” He also shared that he was surprised they liked to play football so much there and had so many motorcycles. He shared that he previously believed that there were no sports or modes of transportation other than by foot in Indonesia.

At the end of the interview like most of her peers, Alley (A) summarized how the project had had an influence on her. She shared, “I think I am more accepting because I realize they [people in other countries or cultures] aren't that different from us. They

may look different from us and speak different languages but they are still people and they do the same things as people like us.”

Summary of case one. Five themes were identified from the first case, the interactions of the sixth graders. Throughout the data the following themes were identified: cultural assumptions, search for personal commonalities, cross-cultural student learning, etiquette, and transformation. A variety of sub themes were recognized from each theme.

Multiple assumptions were held by the students about Indonesia. The overall assumption of poverty intertwined with beliefs about every aspect of Indonesia. Students also possessed assumptions about the country’s location. No sixth graders knew where it was located. They also assumed that Indonesia had varied weather patterns.

Sixth graders searched for any personal or family attributes, hobbies, sports, technology, music, or favorites that they may have had in common with the pen pal in Jakarta. While they did find some differences, most students learned that there were more similarities between them than they had originally perceived.

Sixth graders also compared and contrasted aspects of living in his or her respective country. They discussed similarities and differences in the schools, food, weather and climate, transportation, and language. There were large differences in language and weather, but fewer differences in foods, schools, and methods of transportation. Students learned a great deal about the pen pal’s country.

Evidence of etiquette was mutually practiced in almost every email letter. Sixth graders were sensitive about language differences and they expressed that they did not intend to offend each other if they said something offensively. They were eager to express appreciation for each other's letters and quick responses. They were polite to one another when discussing differences in religious affiliations. They showed sincere care and concern when speaking about the health and feelings of the other person and the other person's family.

Sixth graders showed evidence of transformation. Sixth graders were transformed as they shared ways to help the world become a better place and encouraged others to do the same. Each class at both schools participated in a recycling project and reused materials to make a craft. Transformation was recognized by the metamorphosis in the sixth grader's perceptions of diversity. Sixth graders' perceptions of people living in diverse places changed as they began to understand that they were more alike than they had originally perceived and gained a realization that uniqueness was a gift instead of a "weird" phenomenon. They worked collaboratively with a second grade class at the same school to create two books that shared their experiences and ideas in order to encourage others to join in and strive to make a difference in the world.

Case Study Two: Second Graders' Interactions

Participants and setting. The second case consisted of the interactions between sixteen second graders with sixth graders at the same school in Ruralville and sixth graders in Jakarta during the international pen pal project. The second grade teacher, Mrs. Daystar, was a veteran teacher with eleven years experience teaching in the

elementary school system. She had taught second, fifth, and sixth grades during her tenure within the same school system in Alabama. She had a Bachelor of Science in Education in social science for grades 6 through twelve and a Master's degree in elementary education. She was also currently pursuing an Educational Specialist degree in elementary education at the time of this research study.

Mrs. Daystar's second grade class consisted of 11 boys and five girls who ranged in age from seven to nine. In addition, she had two students who moved away during the pen pal project; their data were not included in the study. In addition, one student moved into her class from Mexico during the same time. A majority of the second graders lived in a nuclear family. Ten of the boys and two of the girls lived with both parents. One boy lived with his grandparents and three girls lived with one parent and spent time divided between divorced parents. Fifteen of the second graders were Caucasian and spoke English as the first language and one student, who moved to the school in the middle of the pen pal project, was Hispanic and was an English Language Learner.

To my knowledge, as family religion, all students practiced some varied type of Christianity. All of the second graders, too, lived in Ruralville in a low socioeconomic rural area in northwest Alabama. Most of the second graders had limited experiences in interacting with or speaking with people from other ethnicities or socioeconomic levels as very few had ever had opportunities to travel outside the area in which they lived.

The second grade class, according to Mrs. Daystar, was a well-behaved class and was eager to have sixth graders from two countries as pen pals. Some were shy and slow to open up to the sixth graders at first when we began meeting each week, but they

quickly became at ease and grew to be close friends as time progressed. Each week the second graders excitedly met with the sixth graders and went straight to work with the older pen pals.

As the sixth graders met with the second graders each week, the older students were prepared for the visit. The sixth graders and I had discussed activities they could choose to do with the second grader each week. When both classes met, at times, I would meet with the whole group for a few minutes before they met in partners in order to show a website, read a story, or orient them to the day's planned activities. Some weeks the partners went right to work as they came together. Throughout the weeks together they read pen pal letters, shared informational books, looked at websites, play games, and engaged in conversations among other things. As the sixth grade students spoke with the second graders, they learned about them and what preconceptions the students held about people who might live in Jakarta, Indonesia. The sixth graders also asked them what they wanted to include in the next pen pal letters to Jakarta. After the meeting was over, the sixth graders wrote about the meeting and type a new pen pal letter which was to include the questions or comments from the second grader. At the next meeting the following week, the sixth grader would show the second grader the rough draft for approval before sending it. The second graders never asked for revisions. The content included from the second graders, if any, usually consisted of asking a few questions. In addition to asking questions, a few students shared information about themselves. Altogether, they asked one hundred ten questions and received sixty-two answers from the pen pal in Jakarta, Indonesia.

As during the first case, I opted to leave the language as it was written to capture the authentic exchange between the pen pals. Using proper APA formatting could disjoin the meaning of the conversation, so the original language as written by children was used. In addition, I have used (J) for Jakarta and (A) for Alabama to signify the origination of each pen pal exchange.

Themes and subthemes. After analyzing the data, four major themes were identified. The first two themes, searching for common personal attributes and cross-cultural student learning, were recognized from the content of the pen pal letters themselves. Any second grade content within the letters mostly consisted of questions the second grader wanted to ask the sixth grader in Jakarta with the exception of two students, who also included information about themselves. The last two themes, cultural assumptions and transformation, were recognized from the pen pal letters, journal entries, students' interactions, and interviews with their teacher (see Table 7). Sixteen subthemes were identified from the four themes.

Table 7

Themes and Subthemes from Case Study Two: Second Graders

Searching for Common Personal Attributes	Cross-Cultural Student Learning	Cultural Assumptions	Transformation
Interests	Food	Differences	Changes in Perceptions
Animals/Pets	Technology/Television	Similarities	Recycling
Sports	Transportation		
Favorites	Physical Appearances		Other Ways to Help the World
	Recreation		
	Holidays		
	Language		

Searching for common personal attributes. The second graders asked a variety of questions about the personal attributes of the sixth grade pen pal living in Jakarta, Indonesia. These questions were told to the sixth grader in Alabama, who in turn usually included them into a typed pen pal email letter. As they asked a plethora of questions, it seemed that they were searching for a common thread between them about personal interests, animals and pets, sports, and favorite things.

Interests. Many students asked about things that they liked, had possession of, or enjoyed doing. Several second graders such as Jade (A) and Sam (A) were interested in learning about toys. Alley (A), Jade's (A) pen pal partner wrote to Toby (J), "Jade wants to know what toys you have. We have toys such as dolls, stuffed animals, and Tonka trucks." Jade (A) received an answer from Toby (J) in her next message when he replied, "I have a toys such as helicopter remote control, panda dolls, and dando doll." Sam (A) also asked Anne (J) about toys in her country. He asked her twice about the kinds of toys she had in Jakarta. Sam (A) seemed surprised when he finally learned Anne's (J) answer, "I don't have any toys."

Second graders were also interested in learning about each other's friends. Sometimes the second graders received answers from the pen pal in Jakarta and sometimes they did not. Three second graders wanted to know about the pen pal's friends in Jakarta such as Matt (A), Bell (A), and Sam (A). Matt (A) and Fidel (J) entered into a dialogue about friends. Matt (A) asked Fidel (J), "Do you have a lot of friends? I do. I have tons." Fidel (J) replied to him that he did have lots of friends. Two other students, Bell (A) and Sam (A) also wondered about friendships in Jakarta. Bell

(A) asked her pen pal about the number of friends her pen pal had and Sam (A) asked the names of his pal's friends. Although Bell (A) did not receive a reply, Sam (A) was informed of the names of friends he had asked for.

Some students were interested in the activities that were popular for the pen pals in Jakarta. Sam (A) and Zana (J) entered into a dialogue about daily activities. Zana's (J) answer to Sam's (A) question seemed surprising for Sam (A). Sam (A) asked, "What do y'all do for fun?" Interestingly, Zana (J) replied that she walked around for fun. Other students asked similar questions such as Jade (A), Bell (A), and Eve (A). Jade wanted to know what kinds of things her pen pal in Jakarta did daily. Eve (A) asked her pen pal if he liked to go swimming and Bell (A) asked, "What do you do most of the time?"

Another second grader, Matt (A), asked a variety of other questions about the pen pal's choice of daily activities. Matt (A) asked his pen pal about the types of books he liked to read. His pen pal, Fidel (J) answered him in his next reply, "I love reading comic books."

Bobby (A) also asked his pen pal questions about a variety of interests. In one conversation, he asked about his pen pal's birthday and about the types of instruments he liked. Unfortunately, he did not receive a response to his questions.

Animals/pets. Many second graders seemed interested in the types of animals and pets that could be found in Indonesia. Jade (A) and Miles' (J) interaction illustrated the common interests in animals. Jade (A) asked a series of questions about animals. She

asked, “1. Does your sister like horses or cheerleading? 2. Do you like dolphins?...4. Do you like cats?” She received a series of answers as Miles (J) responded to each question, “1. The second was not 2. Yes I like dolphin... 4. Yes I like cat because funny.”

Kiley (A) and Anna’s (J) conversation also revolved around animals. Kiley (A) asked Anna (J) about the kinds of animals found in Indonesia and about her pets there. Anna (J) did not answer about the animals in Indonesia, but replied about her pet. She wrote, “Saya have a hamster, but now is dead.”

Some of Jake’s (A) and Kane’s (J) dialogue included animals as well. He asked, “What kind of animals do you have?” Kane (J) answered his question, “My kind of pets is parkit, Holland and chicken arab.” Jake (A) also wanted to know if they killed animals to eat. Kane replied, “Yes, but chicken.”

Likewise, interchanges about animals occurred in other students’ letters. Sam (A) asked Anne (J) about having dogs, cats, and chickens, and monkeys. Anne (J) explained that she did not have a dog, monkey, or chickens. She also told him that she once had a cat but that it was missing.

A conglomeration of questions about animals continued to appear in many email exchanges. For instance, Ronald (A) asked what types of fish they [people in Indonesia] had and Farrell (J) told him that they did not have any fish. This puzzled my students. They believed Indonesia would have many types of fish since it is made up of islands so we assumed there was a misunderstanding. Farrell (J) must have answered that he did not have any fish for pets. In addition, Bell (A) wanted to know if her pen pal liked

Komodo dragons and Walker (A) also asked his pen pal twice about the types of animals she liked. Unfortunately, they were unable to gain a response.

Sports. After close examination of the content of the letters, several second graders seemed curious about sports in Jakarta. At times, the second graders acquired answers about sports, but at other times, they were not able to get a response as was the case with Walker (A), Matt (A) and Bill (A). Walker (A) asked his pen pal if she knew what race car races were. Matt (A) and Bill (A) asked their pen pals if they played soccer and baseball. Unfortunately, they each were unable to obtain answers.

Many times, though, students did learn answers to their questions, as Jake (A) did. Jake (A) asked his pen pal, Kane (J), if he played basketball and received the answer that he did not like to play basketball. Ronald (A) was quite surprised by the answer to his question about Nascar to his pen pal. Ronald (A) asked Farrell (J), “Do y’all have Nascar?” and he responded, “What do you mean about Nascar? It’s a community?” Ronald (A) shared that he was astonished that his pen pal did not know about NASCAR since it is very popular in Alabama.

Favorites. One of the most common types of questions from the second graders was about their favorite things. Ronald (A) and Farrell’s (J) letters included discussions about each other’s favorite things. Ronald (A) asked Farrell (J) several questions pertaining to his favorite things. He asked about his pen pal’s favorite color, shirt, drink, and day and month. Ronald (A) received prompt answers for each question. He learned that Farrell’s favorite colors were black and white. His favorite shirt was his “Liverpool

shirt” and his favorite drink was “ice tea.” He also learned that his pen pal did not have a favorite day and month.

Several other students asked about a variety of favorite things. Walker (A) and Jade (A) asked questions about favorite television shows and favorite animals. They did not receive an answer but Nathan (A) was able to get an answer for his question. After asking about his favorite color, Nathan (A) learned his pen pal’s favorite color was yellow.

Three students discussed each other’s favorite foods. Eve (A) and Kiley (A) asked each of her pen pal’s favorite things to eat. In the next email, Anna (J) answered Kiley (A), “My favorite food is chicken.” This was interesting to many second graders since chicken is a very popular food in our culture too. In other exchanges, Matt (A) wanted to know the name of Fidel’s (J) favorite restaurant and learned that it was named “Pek-mpek”.

At times, second graders discovered that they had favorite things in common with the pen pals in Jakarta as with Eve (A) and Ricky (J). Eve (A) wanted to know Ricky’s (J) favorite number and letter. In his next reply, he added, “And, for your second grader...I want to answer her question..My favorite number is seven My favorite letter is F.” Happily it seemed, Eve (A) replied, “I was surprised to know that we have the same favorite number, which is seven.”

Cross-cultural student learning. The second graders had limited experiences outside their own town and families. Most of them had never traveled out of the state of

Alabama or even the county in which they resided nor have they had any experiences interacting with people from another ethnicity or culture. They seemed eager to find out what it would be like to live in a country on the other side of the world such as Indonesia. They asked pen pals a variety of questions about food, technology, transportation, and physical appearances. Some students also wondered about Christmas, language, and economics in Jakarta.

Food. Many second graders wanted to know what kinds of foods were common in Jakarta. Several pen pal partners engaged in a dialogue and learned many facts about foods found in the country in which they resided. The conversations were informative. For instance, Matt (A) asked, “What foods do you eat?” Fidel (J) answered, “My staple food is rice.” Bell (A) asked a similar question to Zana (J). Zana replied, “In here, I’m eat rice, fishes, chickens, and potatoes.” Sam (A) and Walker (A) also learned that their pen pal ate rice. Many second graders learned about the importance of rice for the culture of Indonesia. Kiley (A) asked Anna (J) what type of food she had “...besides vegetables and spaghetti.” Much to her surprise, Anna (J) told her that she also liked to eat fried chicken. She had no idea that her pen pal also ate chicken as she did.

A variety of questions about food was asked. For instance, one student, Sam (A), was interested in the types of food that were served at school. Sam (A) asked Anne (J), “Do you bring your lunch to school?” Anne (J) informed him, “I sometimes bring lunch to school..if I did not bring lunch to school I would buy food in the canteen.:D” The teacher in Jakarta had shared in a class email that pizza was very expensive for her and because of the expense, pizza was not a popular food.

One student asked more specific questions pertaining to the food in Jakarta.

Jakes's (A) questions about food became more specific as he wanted to know if his pen pal killed animals to eat. He discovered they did. He also wanted to know what types of food they do not eat or what they could not afford to eat. Later, he learned that Kane (J) did not eat "pig, dog, or beer. Because they're forbidden for muslim."

Technology/television. Several students were interested in how television in Jakarta compared to television in Alabama. For instance, Ronald (A) asked his pen pal in Jakarta if he ever watched Spongebob. He learned that Farrell (J) did watch Spongebob. Kiley (A) asked about what televisions looked like, and others, like Bobby, wanted to know about particular television shows. Bobby asked Niles (J) if he had ever heard of "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and Devin (A) wanted to find out if his pen pal, Abe (J), knew what "Dragon Ball Z" was or if he had ever played "Splatter House". Unfortunately, they were not able to find out answers to many of the questions they had asked about television or television shows.

Access to video game consoles and video games seemed to be a popular topic about technology among second graders. Three boys asked specifically about video games, Bobby (A), Malcolm (A), and Bill (A). Bobby (A) and Bill (A) asked what video games they played but were unable to find out. Malcolm (A) and Ben (J) discussed a video games console. Malcolm (A) asked Ben (J) if he had a Wii console and he learned that Ben (J) did not have one.

Transportation. The possibility of driving cars and bikes were important to some second graders according to the letters' content. One of Sam (A) and Anne's (J)

discussions centered about driving. Sam (A) wanted to know if his pen pal, Anne (J), could drive a car. Anne (J) informed him, “I had a car but I can’t drive a car...I am not allowed learn to drive.”

One second grader was interested in the length of travel time to school for his pen pal. Walker (A) wanted to know how Kate (J) got to school each day. Most students ride school buses a short distance to our school since our town is small and most live relatively close. Since we live in a rural area and our pen pals did not, we wondered if Kate (J) asked this because of her travel time to school. Sadly, we were unable to find out the answer.

Driving dirt bikes was of interest to some second graders as illustrated when Devin, Bobby, and Bill each asked if their pen pal had a dirt bike. Ezekiel (J), Bill’s (A), pen pal answered, “I don’t have a dirt bike.” Devin learned that his pen pal did not know what a dirt bike was and Bobby never received an answer to his question. We assumed that he did not after learning that Jakarta was an urban area where dirt bikes were very uncommon and none of the other sixth graders in Jakarta mentioned that they had one.

Physical appearances. Altogether, second graders asked the most questions about the culture of Indonesia and what it was like to live in Jakarta. Several second graders asked about the physical appearance of various places in Indonesia such as Jade’s (A) broad question. She wanted to know what the whole country looked like. Matt (A) asked about the sizes of the country and schools. He learned that Fidel’s (J) school was “mediocre.” He also learned that Indonesia was “...not too big but a lot of island.” He asked if his pen pal had shelter in case of storm but did not find out. Bell’s (A) question

was more particular as she questioned why her pen pal lived in houses instead of apartments. Her pen pal answered that she lived in housing but “forgot why she did.”

The conversation between Kiley (A) and Anna (J) helped inform the class about the differences in the homes and schools’ facilities. Kiley (A) asked specifically what the beds, bathrooms, and playgrounds looked like at her pen pal’s home and school. Her pen pal, Anna (J) returned photos of the school’s bathrooms and playground. Anna (J) explained, “Our beds are same like usa beds, our bathroom use gayung to take water and we have squad toilet, we have dufan for playground.”

During our pen pal meetings, sixth graders had a variety of books to read to the second graders about other cultures and specifically about the country of Indonesia. Some of the books were authored by Ann Morris such as *Houses and Homes*, *On the Go*, *Bread Bread Bread* and *Shoes Shoes Shoes*. It seemed that the favorite book was *Shoes Shoes Shoes*. Immediately after reading the book, the children insisted on getting into a circle, placing their feet together and taking a photograph to send to their pen pals. They had hoped that the pen pals in Jakarta would do the same for them. This strong interest in shoes was reflected in the questions. After reading *Shoes, Shoes, Shoes*, some second graders asked the pen pals if they wore shoes and, if so, what they looked like. The questions and answers between Malcolm (A) and Ben (J) helped the class learn how similar shoes were in each country. Malcolm (A) inquired, “What kind of shoes do you wear?” He discovered his answer when Ben (J) answered, “I wear any shoes.” Likewise, Jake (A) wanted to know what his pen pal’s shoes looked like. Kane (J) told him, “My shoes are like yours.” Bobby (A) asked similar questions about shoes and one student,

Walker (A), specifically asked if they wore flip flops. This also led to several students taking the class digital camera to the lunchroom for several days to take photographs of their lunch plates to also send to the pen pals in Jakarta.

Recreation. Recreation, specifically fairs, in Jakarta was a subject of interest about Jakarta's culture it seemed from the emails between Eve (A) and Ricky (J). Eve (A) asked if there were any fairs in Indonesia. Ricky (J) answered Eve (A). He wrote, "Every Independent day, usually each house group (RT=Rukan tetangga = neighborhood) have carnival but not always." The teacher in Jakarta also sent websites of amusement parks located in Indonesia to the class in emails. The websites were in Bahasa Indonesia so they were difficult to understand, but the children did seem to enjoy seeing the website, especially the photographs included on the webpage.

Second graders also discussed places to go visit in Jakarta such as Nathan (A) and Ian's (J) exchanges. Nathan (A) asked his pen pal if they had any special landmarks in Indonesia. Ian (J) answered, "The landmarks I know is 1. Lake toba 2. Mount bromo." In an email exchange between Emily (A) and Ricky (J), Emily (A) learned about several important landmarks and places in Indonesia. Ricky (J) shared about some of the water parks on the island of Java (where Jakarta is located) including Taman Mini Indonesia, Pantai Indah Ancol, and Bintaro Water Park which were all near Ricky's (J) home. Ricky (J) also shared that there were several international shoe factories such as Adidas and Nike in Indonesia. He also mentioned one of the shoe factories in Bandung City called "CIBADUYUT".

Holidays. At Christmas time, several discussions about the season occurred between the second graders in Alabama and the sixth graders in Jakarta. Ronald (A) and Farrell (J) entered into a dialogue about Christmas. Ronald (A) asked, “How do yall celebrate Christmas?” His pen pal explained, “...I am not a Christian but I’m Muslim.” Malcolm (A) and Ben (J) also discussed the season. Malcolm (A) asked how his pen pal celebrated Christmas. Ben (J) replied, “I don’t celebrate Christmas in my religion, but I still appreciate it. I wish while I pray...” Similarly, Bell (A) asked Zana (J), “How was your Christmas? I hope you got something you wished for... How was your new year?” Zana (J) replied in her consecutive message, “There was fireworks in here at New Year.”

Language. Some second graders were curious about the language. For instance, Nathan (A) and Ian (J) talked about a specific word. Nathan (A) asked, “How do you say grandmother in Indonesian language?” Ian (J) answered, “In Indonesia, grandmother called ‘nenek’.” Walker (A) and Nathan (A) also asked questions related to language. Walker (A) asked his pen pal if it was hard to learn English. He was unable to receive an answer.

Cultural assumptions. Through early letters, interviews, and journals, several cultural assumptions about people living in Indonesia by second graders were identified and will be addressed. All of the cultural assumptions discussed here are those of second graders in Alabama, therefore, the (A) has been omitted. Mrs. Daystar shared that none of her students knew where Indonesia was located or had any knowledge as far as she knew about the culture.

Differences. Indonesia was an unknown place for the second graders because no student had ever heard of the country. They expressed many assumptions about differences about the place located on the other side of the world. Mrs. Daystar said that her students all believed that people who lived in Indonesia were different than we are in that they thought they were all poor and needed clothes and shoes. Her students “associated anything not in the United States as poor” and she added, “I don’t know why that is.” Many students envisioned Indonesia to be a poor place that was reliant on the United States and other countries to donate toys, clothes, and food to them in order to survive.

They had assumptions about the difference in the color of the skin of people in Indonesia. While most second graders believed people who lived in Indonesia had darker skin, some thought differently about them. Kiley believed that people in Indonesia had “black and white skin, blonde hair and brown hair and black hair.” Sam said that he believed they would have white skin and different colors of hair because they were on the other side of the world. Ronald told Caleb that their “skin be like a black person. Africa is far away and so is Indonesia.” Jake believed that people in Indonesia looked “a little like Indians because it is called Indonesia” and Sam shared that he thought, “they were all African Americans.”

Second graders had a variety of assumptions about how different the people in Indonesia were compared to people in Alabama. Kiley and Nathan expressed what they thought about the language. Kiley, Bell, and Nathan, like several others, shared that they believed they spoke differently because they assumed they did not speak English like we

did since they were so far away. Sam said he didn't think the people in Indonesia had hair. Jade even said, "they can't have dogs in Indonesia because the alagaders eat them." Bobby guessed that the people in Indonesia wore different shoes than we do while Ronald, Bell, and Malcolm said they didn't think they had shoes at all.

Some children had different ideas about what they thought Indonesia looked like such as Nathan and Malcolm. Nathan believed a place like Indonesia on the other side of the world would be "dusty, dirty, and desert." Malcolm (A), too, guessed that Indonesians "lived in desert."

Along with the land, some children had assumptions about what possessions looked like in Indonesia. Jade shared with Summer that she thought children in Indonesia would have "really, really old dolls because we give them old stuff." Mrs. Daystar also explained that some of her students thought that all of the cars had three wheels and that some of her students thought they didn't have cars at all but had to walk wherever they went. Eve thought that Indonesia did not have any cars and people walked everywhere they went. Malcolm expressed his idea that people in Indonesia were poor and only had meat that they hunted to eat. He also believed that they did not have enough money for schools or homes and people there made all of their own clothes.

Through these interactions I have described, many of the second graders' cultural assumptions were addressed both directly and indirectly. Other preconceptions and misconceptions were repaired or confirmed within the letters or verbal interactions with Mrs. Daystar, the sixth graders, or myself. Some second graders, too, had told me and the second grade teacher that their families helped them look up things about Indonesia

on the Internet at home. One student had been to the bookstore and had purchased a book about the country.

Similarities. While second graders held many assumptions about Indonesia and its people that were different from us, some students recognized and believed that Indonesia was probably the same as us in some ways. Some students recognized they were “people”, “humans” and “weren’t aliens.” Bill said, “we are both humans because God made us both.”

Three students shared assumptions about clothing. Sam, Kiley, and Malcolm assumed that people in Indonesia wore the same types of clothes and shoes as we did. Kiley added that she believed they may wear the same clothes “because they may have the same stores.” Walker shared that he thought the people in Jakarta would have clothes because “everyone has them.”

Some students assumed people in Jakarta had the same access to technology. One student, Nathan, assumed the technology was similar when he shared that he believed that they would have Facebook just like we did. Bill said he thought there were Ipods and cell phones there. Eve believed the people in Jakarta had the same games.

Some students envisioned the same sports and social activities. Ronald, for example, believed that they would have football like we did because “a lot of countries play football.” Matt, too, assumed that his pen pal also went to church like he did. Bobby told Kelly that he figured the people in Indonesia had school every day. Bobby and Bell believed that they had schools and jobs like we did. Eve (A) thought that Indonesians had

some of the same games, played tag, and also ate chicken fingers like us. In addition, Jade shared that they had pets, shelters, food and jobs just like us.

At the first meeting, Kiley (A) told Kathy (A) that she believed Indonesians didn't all speak English but wore the same clothes and had some of the same stores as we did. Bobby (A) knew that people in Indonesia had school every day just like us. Bobby (A) told Gill (A) that he thought people in Indonesia played hide and seek and had a lot of the same stuff as we did.

Transformation. Each week when new email letters arrived, students met in small groups before breaking up into partners. Sixth graders kept a folder with all of the letters neatly tucked away inside. At the beginning of most meetings, I met briefly with the whole group to share a book or website to address some of the noted preconceptions and misconceptions. We looked at maps and the globe, websites and pictures on the Internet, and emails I had received directly from the teacher in Jakarta who informed us about many aspects of the country. After I met briefly with the whole group, sixth graders shared with a small group the highlights of the new letter and showed any attached pictures. This group sharing time enabled all students to learn a variety of content, especially information about Indonesia that they had not previously addressed in partners. After the groups finished sharing, the sixth grader and second grader pairs met in partners to review the previous letter and to read the new letter. At the end of the meeting, the second grader told the sixth grader what they wanted to include in the next letter to the pen pal in Jakarta which usually consisted of a few questions. The sixth

grader was asked to include the second graders' comments and questions in the next typed email letter to Jakarta.

Change in perceptions. Some noted changes in perceptions, or transformations, were evident in the students' journals. One change was related to skin color. For example, Malcolm (A) expressed his belief early that Indonesians were black because of being in the sun, but later wrote that "they were born that way." Bobby (A) also illustrated his change of thinking. He thought that people in Indonesia were tan like us because they lived far away, but he later realized and penned that they were dark because "they're a different culture." Devin (A) similarly thought people in Indonesia were tan "from staying outside" and Walker (A) thought they were dark because "they ate too much bark." They both later recorded that they had darker skins because "God made them that way." Jake (A) believed that Indonesians played with wooden toys "because they weren't close to stores" but later cited that "Indonesia was a big city."

Second graders also illustrated some changes in thinking about other aspects of living in Indonesia during conversations. These changes were related to the material possessions that they had. For example, Walker (A) told Belinda (A) when they first met that Indonesians played with trucks and toy guns that they had to make themselves and that people in Indonesia didn't have shoes because they lived in the jungle. Later, though, he wrote that he knew that they didn't live in the jungle, that they had electronics too, and were smart.

Other changes were related to technology. Ronald (A) discovered that his pen pal in Indonesia had computers instead of "only having old toys to play with." One student

noted that students in Indonesia listen to songs in English. Another student realized that we eat many of the same foods such as spaghetti and pizza.

To sum up the second graders' change of thinking about people who lived in Indonesia, Jade (A) told Alley (A), "Just because they're different doesn't mean we shouldn't like them." Mrs. Daystar noted, "I feel that through pen pal letters, video clips, books, etc., they have come to see that in many ways they are the same as Indonesian students.

Recycling. When the second and sixth graders learned that the sixth graders' school in Jakarta was "going green", they were interested in beginning a similar project. They met and brainstormed ideas for our school. They decided to begin a recycling project. Through searching the Internet at the computer lab during one of the pen pal meetings, the students learned that plastic takes the longest to decompose in landfills. The consensus was to collect plastic and plastic bottles for the recycling project. Together they made signs made of construction paper to hang around the school campus. The second and sixth graders went together to place the bin in the hallway in a central area of the elementary school and helped the sixth graders announce the project over the intercom to the entire school. Altogether, over twenty-five large plastic bags of plastic bottles were collected and taken to the nearest recycling center. The location of the nearest recycling center added a twist. Since the nearest center was over twenty miles away from the school, I had to store them in a large pile in my classroom until I planned to travel to the center. At times, several bags were piled high in the classroom, which caused giggles among the children, especially when visitors came into our classroom and

the children explained why we had such a pile of plastic in our classroom! They thoroughly enjoyed the comedy in it. This had a huge impact on them. Mrs. Daystar said, “My students really liked participating in the recycling project. [Jake] brought several bags of bottles from home.” In another interview, Mrs. Daystar added:

My students are now more cognizant than ever of the massive amount of trash we throw away every day. Many of them bring plastic bottles to school to recycle every day. I have heard them tell friends from other classes to make sure they bring bottles to school so that they can be carried to the recycling facility.

The recycling project they were engaged in also influenced some of their questions in the letters as Nathan (A) and Sam (A) asked about recycling at the school. Ian (J) and Anne (J) respectively answered that they did recycle at school. Sam (A) specifically asked if she recycled bottles. Anne (J) answered, “I sometimes recycle the bottles be the sea ship.”

Other ways to help the world. The pen pal project started a spiral of ideas for the children to help the world and make it become a better place. Many students realized that each person could do small things that could have a large impact. To record and share these ideas, the students decided to make a book entitled, “How to Make the World a Better Place.” They brainstormed together and each wrote ideas. The sixth graders typed and printed the page while the second graders chose to illustrate it. Some of the ideas were spectacular. For example, Kathy and Kiley wrote this, “We can help the world by buying products that can be recycled.” Ralph and Jake wrote that, “Make sure when you use the water hose to turn off water.” Belinda and Walker chose to include, “Reuse garbage bags.” Job, Kyle, and Malcolm added, “Make more solar power cars instead of

gas cars.” Cameron even began his own compost pile at home with the help of his dad. He wrote that, “We could create compost with everything possible such as banana peels, apple cores, and other organic things.” All the students included their ideas in the book that they collectively wrote.

The project culminated a myriad of positive influences on all the students. Mrs. Daystar said, “I really think they [the second graders] became more conscious of littering too. Every time we went out, they would ask to pick up trash if it was on the ground.” She also said, “I overheard one of my little girls telling another little girl to make sure she used both sides of the paper to cut down on paper usage.”

Changes in how students treated others also became evident during the pen pal project. A new student, Ned, moved into Mrs. Daystar’s class from Mexico about midway through the year. Previously, the second graders had never been in class with a student from another country. Mrs. Daystar said the following:

When he first came to our class, most of my kids were very curious and would stare at him. When I had the opportunity I reminded them about our studies of other cultures around the world. We talked about ways in which we are all different and alike. One student, [Bell], brought up the connection between [Ned] and our Indonesian pen pals. She thought that they are all kids with many of the same issues.

Mrs. Daystar also explained, “I really think that this transformation helped my students to adapt very quickly to my student that moved [here] from Mexico.” She added this:

I really think that our study of Indonesia really helped my students to interact with our students from Mexico. Upon his arrival, they already expected that even though Indonesia was on the other side of the world, kids there were a lot like them. This helped them to see that our new student was in many ways just like them.

Mrs. Daystar also said subsequently, “I think they [my students] are more open to people who are a little different from them than they were before. I think my kids focus more now on what they have in common than their differences.”

Summary of case two. The data analysis for case two resulted in four themes: searching for common personal attributes, cross-cultural student learning, and transformation. Each theme included multiple subthemes.

The second graders primarily included questions to pen pals in Jakarta. These questions consisted of asking information to learn about common personal attributes. They were interested in: what they liked to do, animals and pets, the sports they played and favorite things. Most students found similarities between them. Some had the same favorite number and pets, and liked to play the same sports.

Some of the questions were focused on learning about the country too. They were curious to find the similarities and differences in the different places. They wondered if they ate the same kinds of food. They also asked about specific television shows and if they also had video games. Several students were curious to find out about driving, how they got to school and about whether they used dirt bikes in Indonesia. They asked questions about the physical appearances of aspects and places in Jakarta. They were curious about the celebration of holidays, use of language, and economics there.

Cultural assumptions, the third major theme, were addressed. Students shared what they believed to be some of the major differences between Alabama and Jakarta.

They also discussed what they thought were some of the ways they were similar to people living in Jakarta.

Transformation was also a major theme discovered through multiple types of data. Some of the changes in the children's perceptions were discussed. Students were eager to join with friends in Jakarta to engage in a recycling project at both locations. The students in Alabama also collaborated to make two books to share with others what they had learned and some ideas to help make the world become a better place. Mrs. Daystar shared many of the ways in which her students' ideas about others had changed and had become more sensitive to others' needs.

Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis was conducted to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the interactions of the sixth graders and the interactions of the second graders during this international pen pal project with sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia. In a cross-case analysis, the researcher seeks to build a general explanation that fits each of the cases (Merriam, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that researchers look carefully within each case to identify patterns that transcend the cases. Furthermore, Yin (2009) stated that a multiple case design may be preferable to a single case study in that the researcher's analytic conclusions from two cases will be more powerful than from one case. Generally, the two cases were very similar in themes with varying subthemes. Five themes were identified from the analysis of both cases: cultural assumptions, search for personal commonalities, cross-cultural student learning, etiquette,

and transformation. Etiquette was a theme evident only in the first case. These themes and subthemes can be found in Table 8 and will be the focus for this cross-case analysis.

Table 8

Cross-Case Analysis: Themes and Subthemes of Sixth and Second Graders' Interactions

Cultural Assumptions	Search for Personal Commonalities	Cross-Cultural Student Learning	Etiquette	Transformation
Poverty	Interests	Food	Language Differences (6 th)	Recycling
Location	Animals/Pets	Technology/TV	Religious Differences (6 th)	Other Ways to Change the World
Weather	Sports	Transportation	Appreciation (6 th)	
People	Favorites	School (6 th graders)	Concern of Health Issues (6 th)	Changes in Perception
	Family (6 th graders)	Weather/Climate (6 th graders)	Care of Feelings (6 th)	
	Music (6 th graders)	Language (6 th graders)		
		Holidays (6 th graders)		

Cultural assumptions. Since the groups of children live in such disparate areas, many differences in the perceptions of cultures were anticipated. As Tan, et al (2001) had noted in their study that groups hold both positive and negative stereotypical

ideologies about others, both groups of children had preconceived thoughts and ideas about Indonesia and the people who might live there. Previous traditional teaching about world geography could have reinforced any misconceptions students may have had about other cultures (Holloway, 2002). To better understand the children's preconceived ideas, sixth graders met with second graders on several occasions and discussed their assumptions about the country and the people who live there. In addition, sixth graders wrote journal entries about their own beliefs prior to the study. The second grade teacher was also interviewed about her students' preconceptions.

One subtheme for this theme was poverty. The overwhelming idea for both groups was that the people living in Indonesia were stricken with poverty and struggle in many ways. This idea of being poor was assumed to be learned through social media as indicated by Tan, et al (2001). Children see commercials for organizations seeking donations for the children of the world. My assumption is that these children misinterpreted the commercials to think every child not living in the United States needed our help, which is far from the case in Indonesia. While the reason for the overwhelming assumption of poverty in Jakarta for the students in Alabama was not discussed within this study, Hunt (2002) suggested racial attitudes of Caucasians interpreted the cause of poverty to be individualistic which fits within the realm of the findings.

The location of Indonesia was another assumption among the children. Due to lack of knowledge about geography, most children believed the country to be a dry and desolate place even after learning that the islands of Indonesia are located along the Equator. Although some thought it was a jungle or rainforest, most had no perception of

where Indonesia was located and guessed it was located in various places such as north of the United States, Africa, and north Asia. Some ventured to say it was one of the seven continents. This is consonant with Holloway's (2002) interpretation that many young students today are not proficient in geography and NCES's (2010) findings from the 2010 NAEP geography assessment of elementary aged children that found a lack of proficiency in knowledge about geography.

Weather was another sub theme for cultural assumptions. Some sixth graders assumed Indonesia had similar weather to us, including tornadoes and regular periods of rain while others envisioned it to be very dry for long periods of time. While some students understood that Indonesia was subject to hurricanes, others did not. Many students believed Indonesia to have widespread changes of temperatures. They assumed temperatures in every country fluctuated somewhat by season as ours did. Some students envisioned the terrain as containing mountains and trees while others saw dusty long roads and people living in huts along the trail among very sparse trees.

The assumptions about the people who live in Indonesia were also evident as children met with each other. Several students expressed their assumptions to each other during the early weeks of the study. Most students believed the people had darker skin. They also assumed they did not speak English, mostly because they were located so far away. Both second and sixth graders held assumptions that people in Indonesia wore clothes and played with toys that were donated to them or ones they made themselves. They also assumed they did some of the same things that we did but had fewer opportunities than we do to go places and play outside. This lack of knowledge may be

contributed to a lack of lessons about global cultures or reinforcement of misconceptions through traditional world geography units (Holloway, 2002).

Search for personal commonalities. Both cases, the sixth graders and the second graders, included questions about the personal attributes of pen pals in Jakarta and shared information about them. This series of questions and answers seemed to be search for common characteristics between them. This search for personal commonalities is consonant with Graham et al. (1998) who stated that people are more attracted to and motivated to interact with people with whom they share common attributes. As a prerequisite to build a common friendship, children searched for commonalities in personal interests, animals, sports, and favorite things. Sixth graders also searched for commonalities among family and music.

Both groups of children compared and contrasted each other's information such as personal interests with the pen pal in Jakarta. Both groups asked about the age and birthday of each other's pen pal. Some sixth and second graders both discussed families and named specific friends. The sixth graders shared that they liked to do activities outside such as hunt, fish, and play sports. Other sixth graders shared that they liked drawing and listening to music. While the second graders did not ask specifically about hunting, fishing or music, they asked about daily activities and wanted to know what the students in Jakarta did for pleasure. They also asked about toys and shared favorite books.

Another sub theme that was identified from the cross-case analysis was animals and pets. Questions about animals and pets were prominent in both cases. The second

graders asked general questions about the types of animals and pets in Jakarta. Most sixth graders and some second graders wanted to know if their pen pals had dogs or cats as pets. Some students also asked about other animals such as horses, dolphins, fish, and monkeys. One second grader even asked about the Komodo dragon. Sixth graders asked similar questions about the pets, but they also went into more detail and asked more specific questions. For example, they wanted to know if people in Jakarta killed animals to eat, and they discussed hunting and seeing dangerous animals.

Sports were another prominent subtheme found in both cases as in Barksdale's et al. (2007) study. Many students in both groups included questions to the pen pals about football and other sports. One sixth grader shared with her pen pal about riding four wheelers and another shared about riding dirt bikes. Three second graders asked specifically about Nascar and racecar races. Other second graders asked pen pals in Jakarta if they liked to play specific sports such as soccer, baseball, and basketball.

Both sixth graders and second graders shared about many favorite things. Many students from both cases asked pen pals about favorite color, sports, foods, and television shows. Some sixth graders asked about specific favorite artists, songs, and books. Some second graders asked pen pals about favorite number, letter, and animal. One second grader even asked his pen pal what was his favorite shirt.

Two subthemes, family and music, could be found only in the sixth grade data. Family played a prominent role in the pen pal letters between the sixth graders. They asked several questions about where each pen pal lived and who they lived with. Sixth graders wanted to know each others' ages and birthdays as well. Five sixth graders also

asked about each other's home and his or her brothers and sisters. In addition to personal questions about family, several sixth graders mentioned music. While some asked general questions about each other's favorite type of music, artists and songs, others asked more specific questions and commented about artists such as Green Day, Katy Perry, Carrie Underwood and Bruno Mars.

Cross-cultural student learning. The two cases had very similar themes related to learning about each other's country. Both cases asked many questions related to how living in the different country might be alike or different from the way they lived themselves.

One area in which both groups were similar was the sub theme of food. Many students from both groups asked the pen pals about what they liked to eat and what the favorite foods were. Some shared pictures of food and described some of the foods that they liked to eat. Both groups learned that the staple food in Indonesia was rice. The second graders asked more broad questions about the food the pen pal consumed, with the exception of one student who had asked specifically about chicken fingers, vegetables, and spaghetti. In contrast, the sixth graders asked more specific questions about particular foods to find out if they ate certain things like we did, such as fried foods. Two sixth graders even were interested in specific recipes for the food they learned was drunk and eaten in the country.

Technology was another important subtheme for both groups. Both groups included many questions surrounding access to technology. The sixth graders were especially interested in information about computers and online sites. They found out

that the students in Jakarta have more online access at home than students here have. Most Jakartan sixth graders asked about Facebook, Twitter, or other particular websites. Many students here shared that they did not have Facebook accounts. Three sixth graders were also interested in comparing the type and brand of cell phones with the pen pal in Jakarta. Both groups also asked pen pals about access to video game consoles. A student from both groups asked pen pals about watching the “Spongebob Squarepants” television show. One second grader asked specifically about what his pen pal’s television looked like and another asked if his pen pal had ever seen the show “Alvin and the Chipmunks.”

Another subtheme from both cases was modes of transportation. At least one student from both groups engaged in conversations about how students in Jakarta get to school every day. Two sixth graders talked about driving and asked questions about the age children could drive there. Sixth graders also discussed motorcycles and four wheelers. One second grader asked his pen pal if he had a dirt bike and shared that he had one.

There were four subthemes that were found only in the sixth grade portion of the letters and data. One subtheme found only in sixth grade was school. Sixth graders, especially the ones located in Jakarta, were very interested in talking about testing. They shared that they had to focus on studying for the national examination, which was why the letters were late or short at times. The test was very important to them since it determined whether they passed to the next grade or standard. Sixth graders in Alabama mentioned testing too but not to the same degree. Several sixth graders also spoke about

the science fair and asked about the subjects that were taught in Jakarta. One sixth grader asked whether or not the pen pal had to wear school uniforms.

Weather and climate was another subtheme found only in the sixth graders' interactions. Some sixth graders discussed temperatures and others spoke about seasons and storms. When discussing weather issues such as recent storms most sixth graders also expressed etiquette. There was much concern for the safety of the students in Alabama by the pen pals in Jakarta. One student shared a website to help her pen pal learn more about tornadoes. Safety from hurricanes and earthquakes was also discussed by several sixth graders from both countries.

Most sixth graders and one second grader asked about the language that was used in Jakarta. Several students expressed interested in learning how to say some and write some phrases and words in Indonesian. One student became frustrated when trying to use "Google Translate." It was too confusing and was not able to properly translate as her pen pal had requested. There was a certain lack of understanding at times between several sixth graders, but they always exercised etiquette. Several students from both countries were quick to apologize for any offensive language that they might have written and made it clear that they did not wish to offend the pen pal by saying something wrong.

One other area related to learning about the country was the subtheme of holidays expressed only by the sixth graders. Around November and December, several students in Alabama asked how Christmas was celebrated where they lived. Some students asked if their pen pal knew about Santa Claus. One student asked her pen pal what presents he wanted to receive for Christmas. Every time the sixth graders in Alabama asked about

Christmas, students in Jakarta always replied that they were Muslim and therefore did not celebrate Christmas. One student forgot about my reminder about not mentioning religious holidays and later asked her pen pal about how she celebrated Easter.

Etiquette. From analysis of data for the cross-case analysis, I identified evidence of etiquette that was revealed only among the sixth graders. Students were careful to be polite and sensitive in letters since cultural differences were recognized. My students were unsure how the cultural differences might affect how the students in Jakarta interpreted the tone or subject of the letters.

Language differences. Students exercised good manners when discussing language differences. In fact, they seemed curious about the differences and showed interest in learning more about them as displayed when several students engaged in conversations about learning words and phrases from Bahasa Indonesian and numerous apologies for any language offenses. This curiosity was displayed through Emily's expression to Ricky that she was sorry for anything offensive she could have accidentally written and Jill's similar apology to Zana for any rude comment she could have said. Ben also issued a similar apology to Kyle and Job for writing anything "wrong" since he indicated his English was not very strong.

Religious differences. Religious differences were also an avenue for etiquette to be included in letters. Several students, through discussing Christmas, learned the disparity between practiced religions but they were very kind about it to one another. This was illustrated through Anne's reply to Jennifer that even though she practiced Islam, she still wanted to be friends. In all cases when religion was mentioned, the

students dropped the subject and did not continue writing about any differences in religion between them. The fact that the students in Alabama practiced Christianity and the students in Jakarta were Muslim was stated but not discussed further in any emails.

Concern of health issues. Good manners were also demonstrated between sixth grade students as they mentioned health issues. This care and concern was reflected in how Sally and Kelly showed concern for Niles' father when we learned that he was sick, which was the reason for Niles' extended absence from school and lack of a reply. This was also indicated in Job's comments that he was sorry to Ben for smashing his arm and many other students' manners in greeting and closing letters.

Care of feelings. Sixth graders were sensitive to how they tried to make each other feel. This sensitivity was shown in Flora. In one instance, Flora was concerned that she had offended Miles about asking personal information about the names of his parents. She carefully explained that her second grade pal wanted to know, and that she did not mean to offend Miles. No other mention of this situation occurred. Also, several students gave sincere apologies for having their pen pals wait so long for a reply such as Ian, Ezekiel, and Fidel. Others, such as Zana, Ben, and Niles, apologized about the length of the letters. Worries about scores from the national examinations were also a major concern for sixth graders in Jakarta. The students in Alabama were concerned for the pen pal's worries over the scores from the impending national examinations. Flora (A) commented that she wished for good fortune for her pen pal as she said, "Good luck..." and also asked for prayer for her upcoming tests, the ARMT, as well. Kathy also bestowed good wishes to her pen pal for the upcoming exams.

Transformation. During the cross analysis I noticed that sixth graders and second graders exhibited transformation. Both groups revealed changes in perceptions and both groups were eager to engage in a project to help make the world a better place while encouraging others to do the same. Both groups participated in choosing to begin, organize, and conduct a school wide recycling project with pen pals in Jakarta. Not only were schoolmates involved in the recycling project, but the students' families learned about Jakarta, Indonesia through researching and reading the pen pal letters and all became involved in recycling

Recycling. When they learned that the pen pals were beginning a "Go Green" campaign at the school in Jakarta, both groups in Alabama seemed eager to mirror them and initiate a project of their own. At the computer lab, both groups discovered how long it took for plastic to disintegrate and were equally eager to begin the project to collect and recycle plastic. Both groups worked to complete campaign signs to encourage others to recycle that were placed strategically on campus by the students. Altogether, the groups collected over 20 large black plastic bags of plastic bottles and containers that were taken to the local recycling center. The second graders collected plastic each week and brought it to the bins located in the hallway or in the sixth grade classroom. One sixth grader challenged her pen pal to waste less and several students asked their pen pal about the progress at their own school.

Other ways to change the world. Both the sixth graders and the second graders were enthusiastic in sharing other ways we could help make the world a better place for everyone. One sixth grader encouraged her pen pal to use coupons when shopping.

Some expressed concern about being too wasteful. One student wanted to plant flowers and trees and several students wanted to save paper by using both sides. Both groups in Alabama worked collaboratively to create two class books, one listing and illustrating many additional ways people could make a change to make the world a better place. The students wanted to share them with other classes at the school in the same grade level, and to encourage peers and families to do the same.

Changes in perception. Changes in perceptions and ideas were evident in both groups. The sixth graders in Alabama realized that they had much more in common with students in Jakarta than they had originally thought. They discovered that they had the same access to electronics, toys, and shopping as peers in the other country. They quickly figured out that they could learn from each other and became more accepting of people from different ethnicities, religions, and cultures.

Mrs. Daystar, the second grade teacher, was confident that the global pen pal project made a change in how her students perceived people from other cultures. The second graders realized that the pen pals in Jakarta had much of the same things as they did such as food, toys, and electronics. In addition, the second graders no longer believed that the pen pal's skin was darker because of what they ate or because they stayed out in the sun too long. Two of the second graders wrote that they now believed the difference in the skin color was because God made them that way. Mrs. Daystar remarked that she noticed a change in how her students treated a new student from Mexico with an implicit realization that he was just like they were. According to Mrs. Daystar, the second graders

also became more conscious of littering. They wanted to conserve paper and use less plastic.

Summary. From the cross-case analysis, I recognized four themes between the two cases, the sixth graders' interactions and the second graders' interactions. The themes revealed were: (a) cultural assumptions; (b) searching for common personal attributes; (c) learning about country; (d) etiquette;, and (e) transformation. The themes were very similar between the groups with small differences including one group being more specific in questioning than the other.

Cultural assumptions held by each group were revealed. The differences and similarities the students assumed about Jakarta, Indonesia were included. The students' ideas about poverty, location, weather and people were explained and discussed.

Both groups were interested in searching for commonalities in the personal lives of the pen pals in Jakarta. They compared many things with one another including hobbies, animals, sports, and favorite things. Sixth graders discussed family and music. They discovered many similarities. The largest difference was the lack of being football fans, as we know it in Alabama. The sixth graders were also interested in discussing family and music. They asked specific questions related to the number of siblings, and other family members who live with them. Music was an important topic for sixth graders. They discuss several specific music artists and discovered his or her pen pals listen to the same kind of music.

Both groups discussed so much that was related to how living in a diverse country was alike or different from how they lived. Sixth graders' and second graders' interactions involved questions pertaining to common food, technology, and transportation. Common only to the sixth graders were discussions about school and exams, weather, language, and holidays. Sixth graders displayed etiquette within letters. They showed sensitivity to language and religious differences. They were careful not to offend the pen pal and showed concern for the health and feelings of others.

Transformation was evident within both cases of the study (Lichtman, 2013). The sixth graders and second graders collaborated to plan, organize, and conduct a recycling project for the entire school. Both groups were eager to make changes in order to make the world better for everyone, including the pen pals in Jakarta, who were also participating in a Go Green program at their school. They worked together on completing two class books. One was written about what they learned about the pen pals and the other was a culmination of what people could do to help make the world a better place, which was shared with other classes at our school. Both groups exhibited changes in how they thought about others who were from a different ethnicity, religion, or culture. This cross-case study analysis and the themes and subthemes that were identified revealed how assumptions vastly changed once sixth graders and second graders were able to interact via email with sixth graders in Jakarta. The interactions enabled the groups to step into each other's shoes and see culture from a new perspective. The next chapter is a discussion of the findings, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Throughout this multiple case study, I explored the implementation of an international pen pal project in my classroom in order to better understand how transformation education was enacted by a group of second and sixth grade students. Participants were from a school in Ruralville, located in north Alabama, and a school located in urban, Jakarta, Indonesia. Students' journals, pen pal letters, and email messages were collected. Interviews were also conducted with the sixth graders and the second grade teacher and included in the data analysis. Four overarching questions were used to guide this study. The research questions were:

1. How do sixth grade students in north Alabama and Jakarta, Indonesia enact transformation education through a pen pal project?
2. How do sixth graders describe transformational experiences as a result of being pen pals with second graders in north Alabama and sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia?

3. How do second grade students in north Alabama describe their interactions with sixth graders at their school who are interacting with sixth graders in Jakarta, Indonesia?
4. What does transformation education look like for second graders in an international pen pal project?

This chapter will review and discuss the major findings from the study. After that, implications for educators and recommendations for further study will be made followed by a summary.

Major Findings

A careful and in-depth analysis was conducted in order to discover answers to the research questions. After analyzing the results in a cross-case analysis, five overlapping themes were identified from both cases that answered the research questions, and one theme was identified from only the sixth graders' data. Throughout the pen pal project, students from both cases held cultural assumptions about Indonesia and the people who live in Indonesia. Both groups engaged in a search for commonalities between them personally and between cultures. Etiquette appeared to play a large role in the interaction among sixth graders and finally, transformation, was achieved for children in both groups. Through a discussion of the major findings in these themes, the research questions were answered.

Cultural assumptions. The students' cultural assumptions about Jakarta, Indonesia were very interesting. None of the students had substantially accurate prior

knowledge about Jakarta, Indonesia before the study. The preconceptions held about the people, location, and weather did not last too long. Due to the lack of ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity at our local school and community, it was no surprise that children revealed misconceptions about the people who lived in Jakarta. With no background knowledge or experience with diverse others, children were unable to correctly identify any aspects of the culture of Jakarta before the study. Similar to McMillon's (2009) study, participants were able to confront their biases and assumptions about people from another culture and question the origin of their values and beliefs. The pen pal project also revealed some stereotypes that the participants had not recognized (McMillon, 2009) which were also reflected in this study.

Furthermore, since the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported that a low percentage, less than 30 percent, of students tested in geography scored at a proficient level in 2010, results of this study's students' preconceived notions about Indonesia's culture from this study were not surprising. Based on knowledge they gained from social media alone since there was a lack of interaction with people of diverse cultures, children in Ruralville perceived people in Indonesia as stricken with poverty and lacking the basic necessities to live. Without more effective lessons in global education and less perpetuation of stereotyped people in the media, students may continue to suffer from a lack of knowledge about the world. The lack of social studies education in elementary education due to the content area not being part of the standardized testing is often neglected, seldom taught, or relegated to the least amount of time in the curriculum (National Council for the Social Studies, 2007).

A lack of knowledge about geography possibly led to students' misconceptions about the location and weather of Indonesia. Students guessed the location of Indonesia to be all over the world and had no understanding of how the location near the Equator has an influence on climate. Like some countries portrayed on television and other media as being desolate and poor, most children thought Indonesia was a dry and barren land.

Search for personal commonalities. Since sixth graders are very interested in social relationships at this age, pen pals are a great way to form safe friendships (Barksdale et al., 2007). Barksdale et al. shared that pen pals establish that relationships are equal between friends. Establishing the common ground helped the students establish their relationship and build a stronger friendship. This connection was shared between Kathy (A) and Anna (J). Kathy (A) and Anna (J) built a friendship throughout the pen pal project. Anna (J) shared with Kathy (A) how much her letters meant to her. Kathy (J) wrote, "I was very relaxed read the letter, because you understand me so much Alabama, thank you because already I want to be penpals friends, thank you because you have read and munlis letter to me..."

After many friendly exchanges such as this one, it was evident in many letters the pen pals were reluctant to end the exchange. Alley (A) and Emily (A) noted these sentiments in their final comments. Alley (A) said, "I will miss you and I like talking to you. I hope your life will be fun." Emily also said, "I wish we could still talk though." Belinda (A) also shared how close she had become with her pen pal as she ended with, "I am so sad. I won't get to chat with you anymore and I want to tell you thank you for what you have taught me about Indonesia...Maybe in the summer we can still talk..." During

our last meeting, Matt (A) began to cry. When asked what was wrong, he told his teacher that he didn't want it to end and was sad to leave his sixth grade partner. By the emails, interactions, and Matt's response, it seemed several students' friendships had grown closer and they did not want the project to end.

The children from both cases sought to learn about each other. They asked each other many questions about a number of aspects involving each other's personal life, seemingly to search for commonalities. The participants learned many similarities and some differences about each other's personal life including families, animals, hobbies, sports, favorites, music and technology. This was similarly discovered by Barksdale, et al. (2007) through their study in which students engaged in similar conversations including discussions about understanding and comparing cultures, language, and making personal connections.

Several students had commonalities between the families' compositions. Commonalities in families, for example, could be found between Jennifer (A) and Anne (J) as they discovered they both had two brothers and no sisters. They also both lived with both parents. Likewise, Bob (A) and Ian (J) learned they each had a sister. Surprisingly, Tammy (A) and Faith (J) found out that they each had brothers and sisters and lived with a mom and dad. These similarities were common for most students. However, there were five students in Indonesia who did not have any brothers or sisters while only one student in Alabama had no siblings. Similarly, children in a study by Barksdale et al. (2007) also discussed differences and similarities in families.

Comparisons about each other's animals and pets were also notable within the dialogue of sixth graders as was in a study by Barksdale et al. (2007). In their study, the discussion of pets was similarly very popular. In this study, Cameron (A) and Ian (J) entered a dialogue about pets as Cameron (A) asked if Ian (J) had pets. Cameron (A) shared that he had many including a dog, several cats, ducks and cows. Ian (I), however, shared that he did not have any pets. In another conversation, even though Ralph (A) did not share about his pets, Kane (J) told him that he had a baby bird, a type of Finch, and named him Bucil. Emily (A) and Ricky (J) also shared about their pets. Emily (A) explained about how her family had had a funeral for a dead cat and, in response, Ricky (J) told her about the time he had an aquarium with five fish that had also died.

Interest in hobbies and sports was also popular in the comparisons between the students. Pen pal pairs seemed eager to find similar hobbies and sports. Some shared hobbies were discussed. The love of swimming was a similarity within the interaction of Jennifer (A) and Anne (J). Gill (A) and Abe (J) both enjoyed playing outside. Cameron (A) and Ian (J) discovered that they both liked to draw. Josh (A) and Ezekiel (J) learned that they both enjoy swimming. Many students learned they each enjoyed the same sport such as football. Students learned that football is different in Indonesia than in Alabama and resembles American soccer.

Both the sixth grade and second grade students included discussions about their favorite things in letters. This was reflective of third and fourth graders in a study by Barksdale et al. (2007) in which favorites were an important topic during their pen pal exchanges. Both groups in this study talked about their favorite colors, books, songs,

television shows, and things that they enjoyed doing among many other things. This comparison of favorites was an effective way for them to find similarities between them and when commonalities were discovered, it seemed to excite the students such as when Tammy (A), Emma (A), and Faith (J) realized that their favorite number was seven. Belinda (A) was also excited to learn that her pen pal's favorite instrument to play was the piano just like hers. Their favorite subject was science too.

Sixth graders in both locations enjoyed listening to music. Through the emails it was evident that some students enjoyed listening to the same kinds of music. They also shared interests in some of the same artists, such as Katy Perry and Green Day. While some students enjoyed country and some liked pop styles better, it was evident that most students enjoyed discussing music with the pen pals as they shared the same enthusiasm for music.

Technology seemed to be a popular topic, too, as they searched for commonalities between them. Moore and Seeger (2009) stated that when children are engaged in conversations about what they feel is important and meaningful to them; their voices are more clearly heard. Several students discovered that they each enjoyed the same video games and websites. They compared interest and access to many video game systems and video games. Many students, too, discussed and shared about Facebook account names. Some students also talked about the brands and models of cell phones they had.

The sixth graders were eager to listen to each other and open up in order to better understand one another's culture through the interactions as pen pals. Discussions which

compared and contrasted aspects of each other's personal lives helped the students to make connections with the pen pal and feel important.

Cross-cultural student learning. Vygotsky (1986) believed that personal communication through social constructs played a prominent role in learning. In addition to pen pal letter exchanges, children learned about Indonesia through reading and discussing literature. Reading and discussing a variety of books about different aspects of cultures around the world enabled students to experience and appreciate the perspectives of others (Xu, 2007). Through sharing books about Indonesia or being different in groups each week, students were challenged to see the texts through the eyes of someone else. This new perspective opens up a new world to them and enables them to build a deeper respect for diversity.

Kincheloe (2004) said that one aim of education should be to create a more socially just world. He further noted that all knowledge constructed is shaped by the people and the values they possess (Kincheloe, 2004). In order to develop a "more socially just world" in hopes of making a change for students to see "what could be," (Breunig, 2005, p.112) students were engaged in conversations that broadened their understanding of people living in other cultures.

Second and sixth graders asked a plethora of questions in dialogue with pen pals to learn about the unfamiliar country. Learning about other countries could bring students together to build respect for diversity and eliminate some cultural biases and misconceptions about others who seem different. Writing pen pal letters can help children to learn about another country and better understand cultural practices and

experiences of diverse students (McMillon, 2009). Both groups of children were curious about each other's daily lives and exchanged information about the country's schools, food, weather, language, holidays and modes of transportation.

Children learned about schools in each other's country. They realized that each pen pal took some of the same subjects and students were subjected to both homework and standardized tests in each culture. Students in Alabama were relieved that standardized testing in this country did not determine whether they passed the grade level but was the case in Jakarta.

Both groups in Alabama learned that rice is a staple food product in Jakarta. The pen pals shared many aspects of the food eaten in each country. Students found that they eat similar dishes in most cases but there were differences in how food was prepared and served. Tammy's (A) letter about cendol, the drink with "green worms", was an effective example for the children of the differences in the cultures' food choices. Although the drink was unusual to the students in Alabama, most of them were willing to try it and seemed intrigued by the idea of having a new food to try.

Children from both cases had little background knowledge about the weather in Jakarta. While the sixth graders provided conjectures about the weather, the second graders did not venture to guess. This can be connected with the NCES (2010) findings to explain why only 21 percent of fourth graders are proficient in geography. Little background knowledge about geography may be explained by a lack of instruction beginning in the earlier grades.

Both groups were interested in the difference in language. This overwhelming interest may be partly explained by its obscurity for the children in Ruralville. With almost no interaction with ethnically and linguistically diverse people, children have no experience with this type of diversity. The Bahasa language spoken by the pen pals in Jakarta intrigued both the second and sixth graders. Students in both groups asked the pen pals to teach them how to say certain words and phrases in their native tongue. Many were also interested in listening to video clips of people speaking other languages.

Children were interested in comparing how they each celebrated holidays, especially Christmas. The interaction about holidays was consonant with the project conducted by McMillon (2009) in which participants discussed differences in religious holidays. While the students in Alabama learned that Muslims did not celebrate Christmas, this was very difficult for them to understand. Most of the students had never heard of being a Muslim and they did not understand what it meant. In fact, one sixth grader still asked her pen pal about celebrating Easter even after learning that her pen pal was Muslim. Since religion was closely tied to the celebration of holidays, I suggested the children avoid the topic so as to not to offend anyone. I feared that discussion of religion could further cause unnecessary debate and may produce hard feelings among the children. The children accepted the difference in religion but agreed to remain friends. Barksdale et al. (2007) also found that participants in a pen pal project did not discuss differences in religion but accepted that they had differences in their beliefs. McMillon (2009) stated that the pen pal project was a great way for students to build knowledge about cultural practices of diverse student populations. The exchange of

cultural information helped students to learn importance differences and gain a stronger respect for diversity.

Both groups were equally interested in transportation. Alabama students were appalled at the difference in traffic flow from a video clip “Traffic in Jakarta” on YOUTUBE™ that we watched. Children were surprised that the traffic law enforcement was different for Jakarta citizens as it is here in Alabama. As Mrs. Daystar noted that her children thought the cars in Indonesia only had three wheels, this could have been connected with their assumption about poverty and not having automobiles like we have. Sixth graders discussed the ability to drive and owning motorcycles or dirt bikes. This comparison of transportation could have been related to their searches via the Internet to make connections in order to establish a friendship.

Ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906), if present during the study, was not expressed in negative ways during exchanges in this pen pal project. Taylor and Jaggi (1974) noted that when activities are developed for students to increase awareness and tolerance for diverse cultural groups, negative ethnocentrism is decreased. The findings from this study reaffirmed Borden’s (2007) findings that students’ contact and engagement with people from a diverse culture for several months led to the decrease in ethnocentrism. During this study, students developed an appreciation for people living in another country and culture while receiving affirmation that they loved living in Alabama. Belinda (A) affirmed how much she loved living in her town and Emily (A) shared that she loved her school.

Etiquette. The use of etiquette in writing dates back centuries from, Philip Dorner Stanhope, in his published letters to his son about using etiquette (Battistella, 2009), so it was no surprise to find the use of manners exercised in the pen pal letters within this study. Barksdale et al. (2007) also found evidence of student compassion and sympathy within the study that they conducted. Etiquette was present in almost every letter between the sixth grade pen pals but not in the second grade interactions. This may have been due to the age of the children since second graders may still be developing the learned skill. This also may have been attributed to the limited amount of information and questions included by the younger students. Sixth graders chose what to include and not include in the letters from their interaction with the second grader. Any reference of etiquette by second graders could have been inadvertently omitted.

With the population of minority ethnic groups expected to rise by 44 percent by the year 2050 in the United States (Brand et al., 2011), there will be an increased number of opportunities for people from a variety of ethnicities to interact with one another in every community. The use of etiquette can help children to get along with others. Students need to be equipped with the knowledge of how best to communicate effectively and exercise etiquette with all groups of people to avoid conflict or problems.

Porter (2006) noted that “the problems of today’s world stem from an inability to trust, an unwillingness to bend, and a lack of understanding of one another” (p. 33). Through sharing personal information and interests, the students developed trust over time. The trust they built together had enabled the pen pal relationship to grow into friendships. Trust was demonstrated in Moore and Seeger’s (2009) study between

participants. Through discussions about their homes, schools, and interests the participants established trust by honest engagement (Moore & Seeger, 2009). Several students became close comrades, developing trust, as Kathy (A) and Anna (J)'s interaction illustrated. Kathy (A) and Anna (J) built a friendship throughout the pen pal project. Anna (J) shared with Kathy (A) how much her letters meant to her. Anna (J) wrote, "I was very relaxed read the letter, because you understand me so much Alabama, thank you because already I want to be pen pals friends, thank you because you have read and munlis letter to me..."

Moore and Seeger (2009) stated that trust was built and maintained most successfully between pen pals when writers were sensitive to each other. This sensitivity was evident in many correspondences, as it has been for centuries (Battistella, 2009; Curtiss, 2011). Students were sensitive to language differences and exercised good manners when discussing any differences. As children discussed the language they employed within the letters, several students seemed to issue a type of disclaimer that no offense was intentional if they had said something offensive or wrong. Students were very cautious about comments they wrote about religion. Students were careful not to include much information about religious beliefs so as not to raise caution or cause hard feelings for others who may have held different beliefs.

Religion was also a sensitive topic dealt with very gracefully by the sixth graders. Since there was a great disparity between the religious affiliations of the pen pals, I was initially concerned that this could invite conflict if not handled tactfully. Even though students were asked to avoid the topic altogether, some students engaged in comparing

religion without incident. This disparity did not appear to dampen the interactions as can be seen through Julie (A) and Anne (J). Even though they realized they did not share the same religious beliefs, they still agreed to be friends. Similar to findings from Barksdale et al.'s (2007) study, children accepted that there were differences in religious beliefs. When students learned that they shared different beliefs, the conversation continued and the difference never became an issue. Even though Anne (J) realized that her pen pal practiced a different religion, she expressed her wishes to remain friends. She wrote, "Owh, not that different religion can not we be friends? ☹ I think we can be friends ☺." Of course, Jennifer (A) promptly replied to accept the friendship.

Sixth graders expressed an appreciation for the time and effort each other took in caring enough to respond to their previous letter. Almost every student wrote "thank you" for the reply or issued an apology for how long it took them to respond, or about the length of the letter. This mutual kindness was essential to maintain trust and nurture the relationships.

The students were genuinely concerned for each other's health and feelings. While Niles' father was sick and Niles was unable to reply, his pen pals were very concerned about his health. Kelly (A) and Sally (A) wrote that they hoped he got better quickly. Other students included kind comments to each other about health. Fidel (J) asked Billy (A) several times if he was healthy and Ricky (J) told Emily (A) he was glad she was healthy.

These displays of mutual respect and acceptance may have been attributed to discussions in class about respect and acceptance of others. During several character

education lessons and discussions I talked with the classes about how we should refrain from being disrespectful of others' choices. Students shared reasons why we should show love and compassion for each other. Life can be short, as they were reminded in the loss of their dear friends in the fire several years ago, which has had an impact on them. Everyone is different because God made each of us the way He wanted us to be. This is a blessing and should not be shunned or disapproved by others. These class discussions and lessons could have influenced the content of the letters and was reflected in many of the exchanges about the difference in the cultures. Students did not chastise one another for having different languages or religious beliefs but embraced them as friends just the same.

As students' friendships grew, they cared more deeply for others. I teach the Golden Rule in my classroom to treat others the way you want to be treated. This belief is very important to me and is the center of many character education lessons throughout the year. This idea could have influenced the way they showed care and concern for the health and feelings of others and was displayed in some students' letters.

Transformation. Transformation occurs when students learn to care about the world and strive to make a difference in the world (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007).

Aldridge (2004) reminds us that teaching to transform the world involves a joint effort among students, teachers, and families. To come together and make a positive difference beyond our own life is transformative. As Wink (2011) discussed in her work, students' letter writing can change things when transformation starts in the classroom but moves out into the community. With careful planning and providing students autonomy to make

their own choices about what they study or write, learning grows exponentially and lives can be transformed. Within this study, conscious decisions were made to relate teaching to real life in a way so students could grow and improve their lives through social transformation (Wink, 2011).

Recycling. Change, through letter writing with students in Indonesia, came as a result of the pen pal experience. Through collaboration, all the participants planned, organized, and engaged in a recycling project at their respective schools. The students in Jakarta began a “Go Green” campaign at the school in which the school was collecting trash into three bins labeled, “organic,” “inorganic,” and “glass.” The lunchroom was decreasing its use of Styrofoam and students were engaging in a project to reuse trash to create a type of object to share with the class. A few students shared their ideas with the pen pals in Alabama that they were going to create a life sized robot out of “junk” and one student was going to make a car that didn’t really work. Meanwhile, students in Alabama began a recycling center at the school to collect plastic bottles. In an effort to reuse them, at the end of the project, students created toy snakes and bracelets from them. Working together to reuse things and recycle across countries was not taken lightly. As a result, students exhibited a change in perceptions about people living in Indonesia. Many students no longer envisioned Jakarta as a place stricken with poverty and despair, but noticed many similarities in their pen pals’ lives and their own. As students attempted to make a difference through recycling and caring about others, student lives were changed, and transformation education was enacted (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007).

Other ways to change the world. As students' interest in making the world a better place grew, students exhibited collaboration in sharing other ideas for improvement. Freire (1998) reminded us that we should realize we are in the world, with the world, and with others and should become aware of our position in it to come to realize we can make decisions to address social problems through our language and actions. Christensen et al. (2009) described how university students enacted transformation that spawned in other teachers' classrooms to help make a difference in our global society. Transformational education can start in the classroom and go out into the community to make life better (Wink, 2011). Teachers have the potential to influence students and enable social change (Giroux, 1997) through thoughtful lessons and involving families. Students were very enthusiastic about their efforts to make the world a better place and that enthusiasm spread to others. For instance, Cameron (A) started a compost pile with his family and several students shared that their family also began recycling plastic and paper at their houses. Many students shared that they and their families are now recycling plastic bottles at home.

Changes in perception. Students' consciousness about people living in another culture, practicing another religion, and engaging in a different life was changed. Through the interactions, literature, websites, reading, and conversations, children in these classes learned a great deal about how Jakarta and Ruralville were similar even though they are a world apart. This new revelation helped shape the students and the values they held (Kincheloe, 2004). Similar to the findings in the study conducted by Walker-Dalhouse et al. (2009), participants developed a deeper respect for diversity and

empathy for others. Participants also became aware of stereotypes they unknowingly held about others (McMillon, 2009). This was a big realization that changed their thinking and provided them with a new sense of identity and a higher level of consciousness. Kincheloe (2004) said that teachers can assist children to develop a pedagogy that empowers them to question and raise a new consciousness. When children's level of consciousness is raised, we can make our world a better place to live (Strevy & Kirkland, 2010).

Insights

Conducting this study has truly transformed my life. I know the project has already made a difference for many others and for me. Through conducting this international pen pal project research study, many valuable insights related to students, the children's interactions, assumptions, how assumptions changed, teachers and the importance of collaboration, and recycling were gained. The regular and personal communication between the groups of pen pals, and the sociocultural context of the study, greatly influenced the learning of students, teachers, families, and the community (Vygotsky, 1986). These insights are important to the findings' of the study's longevity. The insights are all related to how change can lead to transformation which in turn has the potential to make the students, the school, the community and, ultimately, the world a better place to live.

Students' assumptions were changed as a result of this research study. Both Alley and Tammy had a complete transformation of beliefs about religion. Before the project, both girls believed people who were not Christians were wrong or "weird" but now they

understood that they just had different beliefs and that didn't make them wrong. Many students also realized that they had wrongly stereotyped people in Indonesia to be poor and very different from us. Alley admitted that she was more accepting of people after the project. Learning the differences in cultures through the interactions helped also her find similarities with her pen pal as it did with many students. Writing letters regularly to our pen pals and using literature enabled children to ask questions and come to the realization that our society is biased. Literature portrays cultures, ethnicities, and genders from one perspective, but interactions and critical literacy enabled my students to better appreciate the perspectives of others (Xu, 2007).

Another insight is related to children and their interactions. Multiage grouping and peer collaboration experiences were truly life changing for the students. As Vygotsky (1986) taught us, it was through social interactions that my students gained much knowledge. Developing personal understandings of other people would not have been possible without the interactions between the international pen pals friendships (Barksdale, et al., 2007) and multiage collaboration. Through the personal, social interactions, my children have come to believe that a person's belief system does not make them who they are. Children no longer see people who do not practice Christianity or who have different color skin as "weird", as I heard them say before the project began. The children discovered they had more similarities than differences with their Indonesian pen pals. Finding these commonalities helped cement their friendships (Graham, et al. (1998). My hope is that the students will continue to write each other, as other pen pals have in the past, and tell others about their experience with the international pen pal

project. The friendships that spawned have to potential to grow into lifetime companionships.

Pairing the children across grade levels had many benefits. My sixth grade students learned to become “teachers” of the second graders as they interacted with them each week. They learned to model, ask questions, assess, find resources, and manage behavior. They were able to see instruction from “teachers” viewpoints. As students interacted each week and shared each new pen pal letter, they also increased their capacity to speak publicly. This may help them in the future when they have opportunities to work and interact with others. Wink (2011) explained how important conversations are in letter writing to transform relationships and initiate changes and improvements. A second grade student who had been extremely shy and barely said a word had many opportunities to speak with her sixth grade partner each week one-on-one. As a result, she began talking more and appeared less shy by the end of the project. Another second grade student, Matt, became so attached to his partner that he cried at the last meeting because he didn’t want the project to end. These actions illustrated the powerful influence and affect the partnerships had on the children.

The knowledge the students gained about Bahasa Indonesia language and being of the Muslim religion also helped the children understand that differences in language and religion are only minor details and beliefs do not completely define a person. This realization enabled the students to gain a better perspective on what diversity really means. Diversity defines the differences in people that make them truly unique. Students such as Devin and Walker learned that diversity is a great thing because these differences are what make each person unique and, as they noted, “special as God made us”.

It is important for children to have experiences to interact with and get to know people with varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, a privilege I never had as a child. Being able to initiate research and establish a friendship with Mrs. Jessie and chronicle the friendships of our students has been one of the celebrated experiences of my life. Acknowledging our own misconceptions helped to illuminate other areas in which prejudices or stereotyping existed.

Another insight pertained to recycling and saving our precious resources. The recycling project that the students decided to do was a special way to bridge the two cultures. As a result of the recycling project, the students in Alabama were much more cognizant of the resources they used and wasted each day. Mrs. Daystar described how her students were much more mindful of conserving resources after the project. They used both sides of paper and picked up litter. Aldridge (2004) reminded us that transformational teaching helps make a positive difference that not only affects students, parents, and guardians, but goes beyond their own lives and spreads to others. This new realization may influence the children and their families for the rest of their lives. Many children may grow up remembering the importance of working together to help the world become a better place. The results could provide exponential benefits when the children tell their neighbors and families about our project and their experiences with conserving resources and recycling.

Insights related to teachers' realization of the importance of collaboration were evidenced in this study. This project provided opportunities for teachers within and across grade levels to collaborate and has influenced other teachers to work together toward an end goal. It is important for teachers to collaborate and assist children in

becoming empowered to ask questions and raise their consciousness to a new level (Kincheloe, 2004). As Mrs. Daystar and I shared our collaborative project with coworkers at different grade levels, we may have had a lasting influence on them. Mrs. Daystar and I shared the books our children completed with the teachers in our grade levels. In addition, a description of our project and our students' photograph was published in our local newspaper that is distributed free of charge to all residents in the county. We became closer friends through these interactions and took pride in seeing our children's friendships blossom each week. Mrs. Daystar and I were forever changed as a result and will use the information we have gained to continue to enact transformational projects in the future.

Another insight is related to my personal assumptions prior to the study and how so many people were transformed as a result of the international pen pal project. I have lived and worked in a very small, low socioeconomic, rural community my entire life, and have had limited experiences in interacting with people from other ethnic groups or socioeconomic classes. Throughout my elementary and high school years, I was surrounded by people who were Caucasian, like me, and who lived in the same rural community. Prior to beginning college, I had never interacted with anyone outside my ethnic group. Because of my limited perceptions, I had always envisioned people of other ethnicities and living in other countries as "different" and apart from me. I never envisioned being able to interact and become friends with someone living in Jakarta. I wrongly assumed, too, that people who were "different" wouldn't want to be friends with me. I assumed I would have nothing in common with someone so different from me and consequently never tried to make connections with anyone outside my own social and

ethnic group. Through this study and my growing friendship with Mrs. Jessie, I have gained companionship across continents and have come to understand firsthand the importance of diversity.

The insights gained from this research study's findings are important. The knowledge constructed has the capacity for longevity, to change lives, and positively impact many people. My hope is that children and everyone involved will transfer what they learned about diverse people living in Jakarta to how they feel about people who may be diverse in other ways such as the elderly, special needs, or any other difference that may exist between other people they may meet. As Tan, et al. (2001) noted, through socialization and positive social support, we can identify our misconceptions and stereotypes about people who are diverse and correct them. Connecting people from two such diverse places and establishing friendships while enacting a student- led recycling project has been truly transformational in my life as it has been for myriad others. It is my hope that the other teachers and families will enact similar projects in the future with their children so that additional students can reap similar benefits. This data analysis and report has the potential to touch a myriad of people and change many lives, especially children.

Denzin (1989) reminded us that stories make up who we are. Following his logic, the children in all three groups that experienced the pen pal exchange, wrote about it, reflected on it, planned and implemented a transformational recycling project on two hemispheres have indeed created a phenomenal story. This story will touch everyone they tell or have told. Family members of the participants, classmates, teachers in both

Ruralville, in north Alabama and Jakarta, as well as, faculty on my committee who read this narrative, who have participated in any fractional way may share this story.

Horizontal and vertical diffusion of this transformative project among sixth grade classes and a class full of eager second graders have had an epiphany (Denzin, 1989). That is to say, this open ended, major event in all of the children's lives will not be forgotten. It will be a marked year as they reminisce on their elementary years. No one can predict or truly know the effect that this project had and will have on the children, their future, and the world. This is evidence of the power of transformation education. Children will take projects such as this and lead.

Implications for Educators

Several implications for educators can be drawn from the findings of this research study. Implications that are noted include integration of subjects, writing instruction, collaboration, critical literacy, and transformation. As noted earlier in the study, scores from standardized tests have been an increasing prevailing entity in today's society while the non-core subjects are being left to chance in many classrooms. Experts have recognized that important content has been dropped from the curriculum due to the prevalence of standardized testing and the decrease in instructional time due to focusing on the test (Higgins et al., 2006). Educators can use a pen pal writing project as a means to incorporate social studies and other non-core subjects in a fun and meaningful way. Educators can include critical literacy by "examining texts from a variety of viewpoints...in a wide range of classes including literature, social studies, science and mathematics" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004b, p. 55). Vasquez (2010) reminded us "the world as text...can be read from a critical literacy perspective" (p.2). Through

integrating subjects, educators can entangle critical literacy, and critical pedagogy, into classroom activities and make it a way of life. Educators should be encouraged, as well, to challenge students to initiate projects such as the recycling project students in this study organized and carried out to integrate subjects but also to raise students' level of consciousness.

Writing letters has been around for centuries and is a prized part of our history and culture. The advent of technology has changed the face of writing as we know it to include more texting and email or instant messaging and less of the traditional letter writing as society once had. Pen pal letter writing, even if exchanged via email, can act to hold on to that type of exchange as our ancestors once engaged. Wink (2011) discussed the importance of conversation in letter writing and how it can lead to a transformation of relationships and initiate great changes to make the world a better place. Letter writing with a purpose and audience can be a powerful vehicle for engaging children in writing (Chohan, 2011). Educators of children of all ages can use letter writing as part of their curriculum in creative and motivating ways by integrating subjects and including writing skills as part of a letter writing project.

Pen pal projects can act as vehicles for teachers to collaborate and discover creative and interesting ways for children and families to interact. Educators can invite families to become more involved through a pen pal project between its members. Letter writing between school and family can be a useful tool for the home and school community especially when the communication is between its members. Many times children may include content in letters that otherwise may go left unsaid. This open

communication could assist in improving relationships and encourage emotional and personal growth.

Finally, educators can find ways to use their students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) in each classroom as a springboard for transformation. Each family is unique and educators can use each family's unique skills and experiences to enhance classroom lessons. Ensuring that each child and his or her family feel important to each other is essential to educators' efforts to begin transformation. Educators should model care and concern for others so that children and families would be encouraged to care more about each other and have a stronger desire to reach out to help others. Teachers and students, as advocates of change, have the power to make a difference in the world.

Educators should first understand what it is to become critically aware (McLaughlin & Devoodg, 2004a; Freire, 1998) and then they should increase the use of literature and other resources in classrooms for teaching critical literacy (Wolk, 2003). Through the creative use of literature, children can be empowered to use a variety of perspectives to see the viewpoints of others (Shankin, 2009). Implementing critical literacy practices in classrooms would help children to question how people of different cultures are portrayed in texts, discuss these perceptions, appreciate the perspectives of others and take action to change their own misconceptions or stereotypes about others. Teachers should examine displays on walls and bulletin boards to ensure that equality among ethnicities is portrayed. This equality of all ethnicities can lessen the portrayal of

the assumption or hidden curriculum (Eisner, 2002) that one ethnicity is “better” than another.

Educators should engage their students in projects like this one. Educators come to school, like students, with past experiences, knowledge, values, and beliefs. Educators should identify their own biases and stereotypes to prevent wrongfully influencing students or perpetuating any misconceptions. In addition, educators should make efforts to learn about students’ preconceptions about others and create learning activities and opportunities for students’ misconceptions to be challenged and rethought if necessary. In fact, Wolk (2003) encouraged educators to help students become empowered by engaging them in activities to view multiple perspectives and asking questions in order to make a more peaceful world. When children are exposed to multiple perspectives, they can “step into someone else’s shoes” and gain new insights about the world around them. This would open up a world of new possibilities for children to learn all the content areas and experience transformation in order for our world to become a better, more understanding, global place.

Recommendations for Future Research

Many possible avenues for further study can be drawn from the results of this research project. Further research which may include a longer data collection period or a larger variety of data could produce different results.

Perhaps the addition of teacher journals, interviews with more students or students’ family members, or interviews with administrators could be collected that may

shed different light on the perspectives of people, other than the participants, on the effect of pen pal projects.

Since this study solely focused on the interactions between elementary boys and girls in second and sixth grades, further research should be conducted to include other children in a variety of grade levels. Perhaps a study between groups of children in lower grades with middle school students would produce different results. Other studies could focus on pen pal letter writing between students in college or between adults. Studies to compare boys' and girls' interactions are needed to discover if there exist differences between the exchanges of boys and girls.

This study focused on the interaction of elementary students in the southeastern United States and Jakarta, Indonesia. Further research could be conducted of pen pal studies between other locations within the United States and Indonesia or within other countries or continents.

This research study involved students in very different socioeconomic conditions. Further research could be conducted between students in similar socioeconomic conditions to compare and contrast results. For instance, a study could be conducted between two groups of children who both live in low socioeconomic conditions. In addition, studies between two groups in lower socioeconomic levels could be compared with studies between two groups in upper socioeconomic conditions. Studies of children in varying socioeconomic levels could provide valuable insights to educators.

While this study only focused on the interactions between Caucasian and Malayan Mongoloid, studies between other ethnic groups would be beneficial to learn how findings might be similar or different from this study. For example, studies between Caucasians and African Americans or American Indians and Hispanics could illuminate new findings.

Further research is also needed to study the interactions and perceptions of pen pals who have different religious practices. This study was restricted between Christians and Muslims, but findings between children who practice other religions may bring new findings. In addition, since religion was one of the areas children were asked to not focus on during this study, further studies that identify the perceptions about religious practices between pen pals would be recommended.

More research of pen pal writing on the effect of language could be informative. While this study provided information on the interactions of students who speak English with students who speak English as a second and third language, studies that focus on students who speak other languages and comparing the results of those could be valuable. Studies of how teachers use pen pal writing to teach writing skills would be beneficial to teachers of all grade levels.

Research studies are also needed to investigate the effects of pen pal projects beginning with young citizens' and families' perceptions of diversity. Since this study did not include parents or families, further studies to include them would be interesting and add to the existing literature. By including families, more potential for change would

be possible in transformation. With careful thought and dedication, many studies in the future could prove to be beneficial for the betterment of our global society.

Summary

My aim for this study was to discover how second and sixth graders enacted and described their interaction in a transformational pen pal project with sixth grade students in Jakarta. This chapter included a discussion about the major findings described in the themes in the last chapter as a result of the pen pal project research study. In light of the major findings, implications for educators were given. Then, recommendations for further research were shared.

In review, Giroux (1997) said teachers have the potential for making social change. Students, too, can change the world through their actions. “Teachers can develop pedagogical theories and methods that link self-reflection and understanding with a commitment to change the nature of the larger society” (Breunig, 2005, p. 116). Throughout this study, I sought to enact transformation education through having children self-reflect and redevelop a way of thinking about others. These ideas, united, can and did produce powerful results and have the potential for making widespread changes.

As I began this pen pal project of attempting to enact transformational education with my young students, I had thought of the pen pal project as my garden. There had been many a montage of seeds planted in the garden. Many seeds were from different packages and became mixed together. I was the gardener and the children were my rows of different types of vegetables, some that would grow fast, some more slowly, but they

all were going to produce great things. The content of the letters and what they were to learn were the greenery that was to grow. I was not aware of which seeds were planted in the rows but with my gentle leading and guiding, watering and fertilizing with nutrients, the plants would grow to become something grand. Sometimes, when seeds are planted, one knows what to expect to sprout, but sometimes a mutation occurs and something unusual protrudes. That unusual plant could be something great, something rare that only blooms once in a lifetime. Every plant, everything that sprouted was precious to me. This project was a chance, I had hoped, for lots of special plants to grow with lots of great interactions with students from another culture. Students in Jakarta cultivated my garden and helped me provide the nutrients it needed. In the end, more seeds of critical consciousness were spawning.

I helped my students to understand the uniqueness of each individual and see the world filled with richness because of the diversity in it. Each plant's fruits and vegetables produced more seeds that could be planted for other gardens to grow. Transformation was the final result.

I concluded with a beautiful garden filled with a variety of plants that produced both fruits and vegetables. Seeds were planted and seeds were yielded. As Freire (1998) once said, there is no teaching without learning, and there can also be no gardens without seeds.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on August 29, 2016. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: HILL, MARCIE

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X111004006**

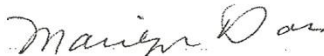
Protocol Title: *International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Early Childhood Project*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 10-28-11. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 10-28-11

Date IRB Approval Issued: 10-28-11


Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
205.934.3789
Fax 205.934.1301
irb@uab.edu

The University of
Alabama at Birmingham
Mailing Address:
AB 470
1530 3RD AVE S
BIRMINGHAM AL 35294-0104

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT IN ALABAMA

Winston County Schools

Post Office Box 9 • Double Springs, Alabama 35553 • (205) 489-5018 • Fax: (205) 489-3203

Sue Reed
Superintendent

Board Members
Larry Yancey, President
Greg Batchelor, Vice Pres.
Ralph Williams
Joe Laseter
Joey Boteler

October 5, 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I am excited to grant permission to Marcie Hill, sixth grade teacher at Addison Elementary School, to conduct her research at Addison Elementary School for her dissertation as she is working on earning a PhD in early childhood education from the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

As Mrs. Hill as explained to me, her dissertation involves a pen pal project between her students and students living in Jarkarta, Indonesia. I feel that this project will be a wonderful learning project for Mrs. Hill, as well as her students. They will gain a much greater understanding of another culture as the project proceeds.

I am delighted to support the work of Mrs. Hill as she furthers her education. She is a tremendous part of the educational team at Addison Elementary, and always seeks new and exciting opportunities for her own professional growth and the academic growth of her students.

If I can be of any additional assistance, please let me know.

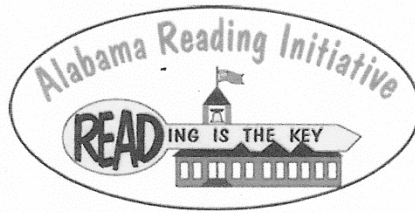
Sincerely,



Sue Reed
Superintendent

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL IN ALABAMA



Addison Elementary School
P. O. Box 660
16411 County Road 41
Addison, Alabama 35540
Phone 256-747-1665
Principal: Ellan Oliver

Alabama Math, Science,
and Technology Initiative



October 3, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

As principal of Addison Elementary School, I offer my permission and support for Marcie Hill to conduct a multiple case study research project with students and teachers at Addison Elementary School. Her research which involves a pen pal project between her students and children in Indonesia is very beneficial and I wish much success in her endeavors. I encourage her efforts and will help her in any way that I can.

Sincerely,

Ellan Oliver

Principal

APPENDIX D

APPROVAL LETTER FROM DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL IN INDONESIA



SEKOLAH KARAKTER
"Pembelajaran Holistik Membangun Karakter"

Jl. Raya Bogor KM. 31 No. 46 Cisalak, Cimanggis - Depok
Telp. (021) 871 2022, 8770 0569

September 19, 2011

To Whom it May Concern:

I am pleased to offer my permission and support for Marcie Hill to conduct a multiple case study research project with students and teachers at Karakter Elementary School. Her project is entitled "Diverse International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Elementary School Project" and is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in early childhood at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in the United States of America. I appreciate her interest in working with the children and educators of Indonesia and wish her much success in this project.

Signed,

Wahyu Farrah Dina

Director of Karakter School

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ALABAMA)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Alabama)

TITLE OF RESEARCH: International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Early Childhood Project
IRB PROTOCOL: X111004006
INVESTIGATOR: Marcie Hill
SPONSOR: The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

For Children/Minors (persons under 19 years of age) participating in this study, the term *You* addresses both the participant ("you") and the parent or legally authorized representative ("your child").

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

This is a research project that will explore your knowledge about the culture of the people who live in Indonesia. It will help you gain knowledge and understanding about cultural diversity by identifying similarities and differences between you and your pen pal. You are invited to be a part of this research project because you are in my class in elementary school.

Participation in this study will require approximately a total of about five or six hours of your time. First, you will be asked to write journal entries about what you know or have learned about Indonesia such as their economy, foods, climate, schools, technology, and the lifestyles and personal interests of the people who live there. After this, you will be asked to read and write pen pal letters to an assigned pen pal located in a sixth grade class in Indonesia. You may work with second grade students and share your pen pal letters with them. You may also be asked to participate in an interview about what you have learned about the diverse culture. Also, you will help to create an electronic book about what you have learned to share with second graders.

RISKS OR BENEFITS

The only risk of participating in this study is the potential for loss of confidentiality. In order to minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, all records related to you will be kept in a locked closet and only first names will be used in all correspondence. You may find the experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful to you when we study Indonesia and begin writing our pen pals who live there.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, you will read a book quietly at your desk while your classmates are completing their work.

UAB IRB

Page 1 of 2
Version Date: 10/28/11

Date of Approval: 10-28-11 Participant's Initials: _____
Not Valid On: 10-28-12

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education, and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). However, your identity will not be given out.

COST OF PARTICIPATION

There is no cost to you for participating in this research.

REFUSAL OR WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PENALTY

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

As an Addison Elementary School student, taking part in this research is not a part of your class work. You can refuse to enroll, or withdraw after enrolling at any time before the study is over, with no effect on your class standing or grades at Addison. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Mrs. Marcie Hill at (256) 747-2345. You may also contact the director of Karakter School, Wayhu Farrah Dina at farrahina23@yahoo.com or by telephone at (021) 871- 2022, 8770 0569.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

SIGNATURES

Signature of Research Participant 7-14 years of age

Date

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT FORM (SECOND GRADE TEACHER IN ALABAMA)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Second Grade Teacher in Alabama)

TITLE OF RESEARCH: International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Early Childhood Project
IRB PROTOCOL: X111004006
INVESTIGATOR: Marcie Hill
SPONSOR: The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

This is a research project that will explore your students' knowledge about the culture of the people who live in Indonesia and give them an opportunity to partner with Mrs. Hill's sixth graders to write pen pal letters to sixth grade students in Indonesia. It will help your students gain knowledge and understanding about cultural diversity by identifying similarities and differences between them and their pen pal. You are invited to be a part of this research project because you are a second grade teacher at Addison Elementary School.

Participation in this study will require approximately a total of about four or five hours of your time. First, you will be asked to have your students to partner with Mrs. Hill's students to write journal entries about what you know or have learned about Indonesia such as their economy, foods, climate, schools, technology, and the lifestyles and personal interests of the people who live there. After this, your students will be asked to partner with Mrs. Hill's students to read and write pen pal letters to an assigned pen pal located in a sixth grade class in Indonesia. Toward the end of the study, you will be asked to share a book created by Mrs. Hill's students about what they all have learned through writing the pen pals. You will also be asked to participate in an interview about what your students have learned about the diverse culture and their reactions to the book and overall study.

RISKS OR BENEFITS

The only risk of participating in this study is the potential for loss of confidentiality. In order to minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, all records related to you will be kept in a locked closet and only first names will be used in all correspondence. You may find the experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful to you when we study Indonesia and begin writing our pen pals who live there.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

UAB IRB

Page 1 of 2
Version Date: 10/28/11

Date of Approval 10-28-11
Not Valid On 10-28-12

Participant's Initials: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked closet in my classroom during the study and for three years after the study is complete. The data will only be seen by me, the researcher. The information obtained in this study may be publishable in educational journals or presented at educational meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data so no specific information about you personally will be identifiable.

COST OF PARTICIPATION

There is no cost to you for participating in this research.

REFUSAL OR WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PENALTY

Whether you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with UAB.

Taking part in this research is not a part of your duties as an employee of your school. You can refuse to enroll, or withdraw at any time before the study is over, with no effect on your job. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions before, during, or after the study, you may contact Marcie Hill at any time. She may be reached at (256) 747-2345. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

SIGNATURES

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVED CONSENT FORM (INDONESIA)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Indonesia)

TITLE OF RESEARCH: International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Early Childhood Project
IRB PROTOCOL: X111004006
INVESTIGATOR: Marcie Hill
SPONSOR: The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

For Children/Minors (persons under 19 years of age) participating in this study, the term *You* addresses both the participant ("you") and the parent or legally authorized representative ("your child").

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

This is a research project that will explore your knowledge about the culture of the people who live in a diverse country, the United States of America. It will help you gain knowledge and understanding about cultural diversity by identifying similarities and differences between you and your pen pal. You are invited to be a part of this research project because you are in a sixth grade class in Indonesia.

Participation in this study will require approximately a total of about five or six hours of your time. You will be asked to read and write pen pal letters to an assigned pen pal located in a sixth grade class in north Alabama in the United States of America.

RISKS OR BENEFITS

The only risk of participating in this study is the potential for loss of confidentiality. In order to minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, all records related to you will be kept in a locked closet and only first names will be used in all correspondence. You may find the experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful to you when we study Indonesia and begin writing our pen pals who live there.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, you will read a book quietly at your desk while your classmates are completing their work.

UAB IRB

Page 1 of 2
Version Date: 10/28/11

Date of Approval 10-28-11
Not Valid On 10-28-12

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education, and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). However, your identity will not be given out.

COST OF PARTICIPATION

There is no cost to you for participating in this research.

REFUSAL OR WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PENALTY

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

As a Karakter School student, taking part in this research is not a part of your class work. You can refuse to enroll, or withdraw after enrolling at any time before the study is over, with no effect on your class standing or grades at your school. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or research related injury, please contact Mrs. Marcie Hill at (256) 747-2345 or marciehill@bellsouth.net. You may also contact the director of Karakter School, Wayhu Farrah Dina at farrahdina23@yahoo.com or by telephone at (021) 871- 2022, 8770 0569.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

SIGNATURES WAIVED DUE TO LOCAL CONTEXT

APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVED ASSENT FORM (ALABAMA)

Child Assent Form (Alabama)

Title: International Pen Pals Engaging in a Transformational Early Childhood Project

IRB Protocol No: X111004006

Sponsor: University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

Investigator: Marcie Hill

The investigator named above is doing a research study.

These are some things we want you to know about research studies:

We are asking you to be in a research study. Research is a way to test new ideas. Research helps us learn new things.

Whether or not to be in this research is your choice. You can say Yes or No. Whatever you decide is OK. We will still take good care of you.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are pen pals with students in Indonesia. This research will help show what you are learning from your pen pals and what they are learning from you.

What is this study about?

The researcher would like to find out how much the pen pal project helps you learn about people who live in a different country and how much it helps your pen pals learn about you. This will help the researcher make the pen pal project even better.

What will happen during this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will:

- Write letters to a pen pal in north Alabama in the United States
- Read letters from your pen pal
- Help your pen pals create an electronic book about your project

What are the good things that might happen?

You will not get paid for being a part of this study, but you will be able to learn about what life is like for people who live in north Alabama in the United States and in Indonesia.

Page 1 of 2

Participant's Initials: _____

Version Date: 10/26/11

UAB IRB

Date of Approval 10-28-11

Not Valid On 10-28-12

What if I don't want to be in this study?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to.

Who should I ask if I have a question?

If you have any questions about this study, you or your parents can ask your teacher.

Do I have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. Even if you say yes now, you can change your mind later. It is up to you. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to do this.

Now that I have asked my questions and think I know about the study and what it means, here is what I decided:

_____ OK, I'll be in the study. _____ No, I do not want to be in the study.

The researchers have told me about the research. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions at any time. I want to be in the research.

If you sign your name below, it means that you agree to take part in this research study.

_____	_____	_____
Your name (Printed)	Age	Date
_____		_____
Your Signature		Date
_____		_____
Signature of Witness		Date
_____		_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent		Date

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (SIXTH GRADERS, ALABAMA)

International Pen Pals Engage in a Transformational Elementary School Project

Interview Protocol (Sixth graders in Alabama)

1. What have you learned (if anything) about Indonesia that you didn't know before?
(Probe: What has surprised you about your pen pals?)

2. How has your thinking about people who live in Indonesia changed? (Probe: What did you used to think about people who live in Indonesia? Do you still think that? Why?)

3. How is your pen pal similar to you? (Probe: Did this surprise you? Why or why not?)

4. How are your pen pals different from you? (Probe: Did this surprise you? Why or why not?)

5. Tell me about what you learned about the economy. How is this different from what you thought before?

6. Tell me about what you learned about the schools. How is this different from what you thought before?

7. Tell me about what you learned about the technology. How is this different from what you thought before?

8. Tell me about what you learned about the popular toys. How is this different from what you thought before?

9. Tell me about what you learned about the popular foods. How is this different from what you thought before?

10. Tell me about what you learned about the weather or climate. How is this different from what you thought before?

11. Tell me about what you learned about the ways to travel there. How is this different from what you thought before?

12. Tell me about what you learned about the people's hobbies, lifestyles or interests. How is this different from what you thought before?

13. How has your thinking about others who are different from you changed (if at all)? (Probe: Do you think you are more tolerant of others now? Explain why or why not.)

14. What have you learned by working with second graders throughout this project?

15. Is there anything else you want to tell me that you know about Indonesia or the people who live there?

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (SECOND GRADE TEACHER, ALABAMA)

International Pen Pals Engage in a Transformational Elementary School Project

Interview Protocol (Second grade teacher in north Alabama)

1. Tell me about your student body. (Probe: What are your students' personalities like, their families, their overall demeanor.)

2. How did your students respond when learning about the pen pal project? (Probe: What are some things they have said to you or to each other?)

3. Describe your students' reactions to what they learned about Indonesia. (Probe: How would you describe the students' reactions?)

4. What would you say transformation looks like for your students?

5. Were they surprised about anything they learned? If so, what? (Probe: What have they learned about the differences and similarities?)

6. What are any changes (if any) you have noticed in your children through their every day interactions with others? (Probe: Have there been any transformations in their thinking about others? Have they displayed more tolerance for others? If so, in what ways?)

7. Are there any further comments you would like to add about your students' engagement in this pen pal project?