Unit of Study: Inquiries into the Social Construction of Normalcy and World Cultures

Grade Level: 2 (Chris Hass)  Date: Spring

Planning Units of Study: Center for Inquiry

Envisioning Possibilities: Planning on Paper
Our best planning comes from making predictions and creating conditions for students to engage in particular kinds of thinking (for example, strategies, skills, and content connections).
When planning demonstrations or engagements, it is critical to ask ourselves what kind of thinking, conversations, and learning strategies we want to promote.

Bringing Plans to Life
Curriculum is the transaction occurring between teacher, students, and resources within and across curricular structures; such as morning meetings, reading, writing, and math workshops, and units of study in the social and physical sciences.

Responsive teaching is about identifying patterns in kidwatching data and planning responsively for individuals, small groups, and for whole-class instruction. From kidwatching to curriculum, from moment to moment, as well as planning ahead—the teacher designs minilessons deciding what or who to highlight during strategy sharing sessions.

Creating curriculum with and for children to help them think, work, and communicate as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and social scientists by working within an apprenticeship model (working in front of, alongside, and behind students).

(Mills with CFI faculty, 2008)

Beliefs that Underpin this Inquiry

The goal of education is not to treat children as capital for a future workforce or to compete locally, nationally, or globally. Rather, a primary aim of education is to create an informed citizenry who are equipped with critical thinking skills to interrogate new information, ask questions, consider differing perspectives, and play an active role in the decisions that affect the lives of themselves and others. The traditional curriculum of schooling is contextualized within this broader goal—thus providing children a purpose for learning,
making the world a better place. Such an approach to learning challenges the way in which we have come to narrowly define education: as a means to increase ones’ value in the marketplace.

Teaching for social justice is essential. We should teach children to look at the world critically, to examine whose voices are heard and whose are left out, and to constantly seek opportunities to change the world for the better.

We look for gaps and biases in the curriculum and plan accordingly. We use what we are learning about the past to better understand the present while addressing issues related to inequity. Each of these experiences become opportunities (some taken, some not) to take action.

We need to move beyond the notion of a multicultural education and toward a stronger stance for an anti-racist education. This is one that helps kids learn to see the ways those with power sometimes use difference to hurt others while addressing different means of resistance to these acts.

Questions to Frame this Particular Inquiry

- Are people the same or are they different?
- What do we mean by “normal”?
- Who gets to decide what normal is?
- How is power related to normalcy?
- In what ways have we, ourselves, come to believe in the notion of normalcy?
- How do these beliefs belittle or hurt others?
- What groups tend to be victimized most by the idea of normalcy?
- What can we do to combat such practices?
- How does interrogating the notion of normalcy change the way we see the world?
- What is the role of difference in the world?
- What is the value of learning about others?

Method(s) or Investigation(s) that will Promote Authentic Inquiry

How might students learn the skillfulness of inquiry? Given the questions posed, would observations, interviews, experiments, surveys, controlled studies, or other methods best support this inquiry?

Inquiry will be supported through:

- Partner and class discussion of experiences, ideas, and questions
- Reflection
- Interactive read-aloud
- Independent and partner reading of both fiction and nonfiction texts
- Interviews of family members
- Collaborative research
Individual research
Guest speakers
Journaling
Collecting, sorting, analyzing, and sharing data
Confirming or altering our initial beliefs against the information we find during research

Key Demonstrations and Engagements throughout this Inquiry

What are the primary teaching and learning strategies to be employed?

• Class discussion around the question “What does normal mean?” and “What is normal?” Follow-up with a discussion of the term “abnormal.”

• Work in small groups to create a mural of a “normal” second grader. Manipulate groupings so that some are homogeneous (gender, race) and others are heterogeneous. Groups share posters out with class and explain how they came to determine what to use as a representation of normal. Particularly, how was this negotiated in mixed groups? Explore how this relates to notions of normalcy in our school, community, and world.

• Read texts dealing with people being “othered.” Some titles may include Chrysanthemum, One Green Apple, Cheyenne Again, Terrible Things, and Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon. During each read-aloud, support kids into conversations around the use of normalcy and how it is used as a weapon against those that do not fit within this narrow definition.

• Introduce Children of the World. Take a picture walk through the book noting the kids from each country. Discuss, “Are people all the same?” “Why might some people say that people are all the same? What do they mean by this?” “In what ways are we different from one another?” “What is the place of difference in the world?” “How might some people react to difference?” “What can we do to counteract negative stereotypes?”

• Invite many classroom guests to talk about the cultures or groups with which they self-identify. Ask them to address negative stereotypes that exist about their culture or group. This could include race, nationality, religion, health, body type, etc. Keep an ongoing class chart to record what we learn from each visitor. Have the kids keep notes and reflect after each visitor, adding to our “What we know now” list.

• Create scenarios in which someone is being bullied, excluded, or teased based on a difference. Have the kids work in small groups to develop multiple strategies for dealing with each situation. How do we take action when we see something bad happening?
UNIT 4: Normalcy/World Cultures, Grade 2

- Watch *What Would You Do?* on YouTube dealing with the mistreatment of a Muslim woman at a bakery ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0D4_hFnRIU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0D4_hFnRIU)). Discuss the people who spoke out against her as well as the many who just stood by and watched without taking action. Discuss those who did take action. What did they do? What other choices were there for taking action? What would we do in such a situation?

- Watch segments from the *Unwelcome in America* program on CNN ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA)). Discuss what is happening and why. What questions do we have? How do we feel about this? What would we do in such a situation?

- Launch a class study of China. Use this as an opportunity to address incorrect preconceptions and to not only highlight the similarities between Chinese and Americans but to delight in the differences as well. This is an opportunity to address nonfiction reading, note-taking skills, determining importance, summarizing, using text and non-text features, etc. Have the kids pool all their information onto posters with class-generated subtopics (schooling, homes, etc). Work in small groups to organize the information and identify what questions are left unanswered. Find the answers to those questions. Groups then take one subtopic and create a presentation that informs and intrigues. Follow this with a discussion about how researching another culture doesn’t truly mean we understand them but it is a good start. Conclude with a written reflection on why we learn about others. Use this to address any notions of a “Great White Hope.”

- Have the kids self-select cultures of interest for individual study. This is an opportunity to share their family’s culture, learn more about where their family came from, or explore a culture they know little about. At the conclusion of the study have kids share this out with the school.

- Identify ways other cultures are represented in picture books, television, and movies. In cases where this representation is insensitive launch a letter writing campaign.

- Conclude with reflective discussion and writing around how this study has changed us. How will we live differently tomorrow than we did yesterday?

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**Envisioning a Possible Touchstone Experience**

Just as touchstone texts are accessed throughout units of study in reading and writing workshop and revisited over and over again to deepen and broaden learning, touchstone experiences are foundational to units of study in the sciences and social sciences. Field studies, visits to the pond, author studies, summer inquiry, science experiments, teaching/learning projects, genealogy projects, and expert projects are a few examples of touchstone experiences. Given the key demonstrations and engagements planned, which one might best serve as a touchstone experience?
UNIT 4: Normalcy/World Cultures, Grade 2

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Strategies, Skills, Content and Concepts to be Addressed Through Demonstrations, Engagements, and Touchstone Experiences

What standards will be uncovered through this inquiry?

- Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

- Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

- Identify the main topic of a multi-paragraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text.

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a Grade 2 topic or subject area.

- Know and use various text features (e.g., captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently.

- Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

- Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.

- Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.

- Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
  a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
  b. Read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
  c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.
UNIT 4: Normalcy/World Cultures, Grade 2

• Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

• With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

• Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).

• Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

• Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
  
  a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
  
  b. Build on others’ talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
  
  c. Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.

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**Strategies for Reflecting on and Documenting Learning**

*How might we demonstrate growth and change? What are our new questions?*

• Kidwatching Notes
• Reading Conferences
• Written Reflections
• Class Discussions
• Partnership/Small-Group Discussions around Literature and Topics of Study
• Writing Conferences
• Culture Projects as an Artifact of Learning

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**Reflexivity: Studying Ourselves and the Implementation of this Unit of Study to Grow and to Change**

*How did it go? What do we want to hold onto? What do we want to revise?*

This inquiry went very well. The most powerful experiences were the opportunities to have visitors come in and talk about their home cultures of Libya, China, Ecuador, and Tanzania. We were also able to hear about African-American culture, Muslim refugees, dwarfism, and second-hand accounts of South Africa and Iceland. Our final guest had many cultures within her family and helped us see that these are not simplistic labels we attach to people. We are touched by all our experiences. In this way culture becomes unique for each of us.
UNIT 4: Normalcy/World Cultures, Grade 2

The interrogation of normalcy opened up space in the classroom to address judgment-based statements we heard each other make. We learned that we all have come to accept notions of normalcy and use it to dismiss or even fear others. Understanding we do this helped us to address this practice. Throughout the remainder of the year we kept catching ourselves, but more often others, use this sort of deficit language. We particularly noticed that being male has been normalized to the point that we use male pronouns for most animals (especially strong ones) and even whole mixed-gender groups (“you guys”).

Next time I teach this inquiry I would like to incorporate an opportunity for the kids to reflect upon and self-report ways they see themselves using deficit language and judging others. It would be nice to revisit this at the end as a means for talking about how they will live differently tomorrow knowing what they know now. Other than that I have to say I was very pleased with this inquiry. Rarely does everything develop so naturally and cohesively. I began with a vague notion of what we might do and really let the kids’ work and discussions guide the way. While my structures were in place the ways in which we filled in those structures came directly from the kids. They were just amazing.

| Data Sources (primary and secondary) to Support this Inquiry: Envisioning Text Sets with Books, Videos, and Artifacts and Possible Collaborations with Related Arts and Technology |

Video:

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0D4_hFnRIU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0D4_hFnRIU) (What Would You Do?)
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA) (Unwelcome in America)

Books/Text Sets:

- *One Green Apple*—Bunting
- *Cheyenne Again*—Bunting
- *Chrysanthemum*—Heinkes
- *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon*—Lovell
- Grace Lin picture book text set
- China informational text set
- Individual text sets on other cultures (as provided by students or public library)
Possible Guiding Questions for Planning

**Conceptual**

Diversity/democracy: What are best possible perspectives to access? Which perspectives (reader, writer, mathematician, scientist, and/or social scientist) offer potential insights or strategies for this inquiry?

Causation: How might we understand key relationships?

Systems: What systems are involved and how are they related?

Balance: How might balance lead us to a better understanding of this topic?

Cycles: How might cycles help us understand?

Change: How might change help us understand?

Voice: Who is heard or privileged? Who is absent or silenced?

Power: How might power structures help us better understand this issue?

**Pragmatic/Universal**

Who developed it?

Why, given the context and purpose?

Where did this knowledge or information come from? Can we trust or believe it?

Has our knowledge or our understanding changed over time?

**Personal Knowledge**

Why does this knowledge or information matter to me?

How has what I have learned changed me?

**Social Knowledge**

Why does it matter in the world?

**From Personal Knowledge to Social Action**

So what?

Now what? How might we take action on what we have learned?

How might we show what we have learned?