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What's the Deal With Junie?: Responses from Second and Third Graders to Junie B. Jones

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What's the Deal With Junie?:
Responses from Second and Third Graders to *Junie B. Jones*

by

Sarah Hull

December 2012

A culminating project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....i

List of Tables.....v

List of Appendices.....vi

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

Problem Statement.....1

Significance.....2

Purpose.....4

Study Approach.....4

Rationale.....5

Definitions.....6

Summary.....7

Chapter 2: Literature Review.....8

Overregularization in Language Acquisition.....8

Popular Culture and Literacy.....13

Literacy in Popular Culture.....13

Using Popular Culture to Support Literacy.....16

Conclusion.....18

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures.....19

Participants.....19

Context.....19

Positionality.....20

Data Collection.....20

<i>Convenience and Snowball Sampling</i>	21
<i>Book Club</i>	21
<i>Observation and Semi-Structured Questions</i>	22
<i>Videotapes</i>	23
<i>Data Analysis</i>	23
<i>Procedures</i>	24
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	25
<i>Limitations</i>	26
<i>Summary</i>	27
Chapter 4: Findings.....	28
<i>Information the Children Obtained While Reading</i>	28
<i>Language</i>	29
<i>Overregularization of the Past Tense Verb Form –ed</i>	30
<i>Overregularization of the Comparative and Superlative Forms of Adjectives</i>	32
<i>Stressed and Unstressed Initial Syllables</i>	32
<i>Adjectives Modifying Verbs Instead of Adverbs</i>	33
<i>Adding –ish to the End of Adjectives</i>	34
<i>Phrases Utilized by Junie</i>	35
<i>Statements Not Acceptable in Standard English</i>	36
<i>Objectionable Words</i>	37
<i>Language Overall Findings</i>	37
<i>Behavior</i>	39
<i>Children’s Comment: Getting in Trouble</i>	39
<i>Children’s Comment: Junie Should Tell the Truth</i>	40

*Children's Comment: Junie is/is Not Being Bossy/Mean/Selfish/Sassy.....*40

*Children's Comment: I Wouldn't Do That.....*41

*Children Predicted that Junie Would Make an Appropriate Decision.....*42

*Children Predicted that Junie Would Make an Inappropriate Decision....*42

*Children's Comment: That's Not Right, This is What She Should Have Done.....*43

*Behavior Overall Findings.....*44

*Summary of Language and Behavior Findings.....*45

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.....46

*Conclusions.....*46

*The Children Noticed and Were Critical of Junie B. Jones's Language Errors While Reading Books from the Junie B. Jones Series Written by Barbara Park.....*47

*The Children Noticed and Were Critical of Junie B. Jones's Inappropriate Behaviors While Reading Books from the Junie B. Jones Series Written by Barbara Park.....*47

*Popular Culture Books Provide Benefits to Young Readers.....*48

*Implications for Student Learning.....*49

*Students Will Become Better Readers if they are Given a Choice to Read Popular Culture Books, Such as the Junie B. Jones Series, in Schools.....*49

*Students Who Read and Discuss in Book Clubs Can Expand Their Thinking and Further Develop Their Reading, Listening, and Speaking Skills.....*49

*Implications for My Teaching.....*50

*I Would Include Popular Culture Books, Such as the Junie B. Jones Series, For Student-Selected Reading.....*50

<i>I Would Include Popular Culture Books, Such as the Junie B. Jones Series, In Reading Instruction.....</i>	51
<i>Recommendations for Future Research.....</i>	51
<i>Future Researchers Could Conduct Similar Studies with Other Children's Books That Include Controversial Characters.....</i>	51
<i>Future Researchers Could Conduct Similar Studies with Males.....</i>	52
<i>Future Researchers Could Conduct Similar Studies in Which Participants Would Read the Books.....</i>	52
<i>Final Thoughts.....</i>	52
References.....	54
Appendices.....	58
<i>Semi-Structured Questions.....</i>	58
<i>Script Created in Sessions Five and Six.....</i>	60

List of Tables

Table 1: Patterns of Junie B. Jones's Language Errors.....31

Table 2: Patterns of Comments about Junie B. Jones's Behavior.....40

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Questions.....58

Appendix B: Script Created in Sessions Five and Six60

Chapter 1: Introduction

“I think it does a disservice to kids to feed them stuff that's just plain wrong. They get it wrong all by themselves, without having it modeled that way. Give them good stuff so they'll recognize what's wrong in their own work.” -Shawna, a parent (Jordan, 2007)

“As a 3rd grade teacher, my kids love when I read an excerpt from Junie B. Jones before I teach a grammar lesson or spelling lesson. The books are great for those transitional readers that are not quite ready for thicker more advanced chapter books, but that still need to feel more confident than a picture book. Every writer has their style and Junie B. Jones (the student) speaks just like students her age, that is one of the things that draws kids into her books and her character.”

-Dawn, a teacher (Jordan, 2007)

Problem Statement

How do we judge the effects of popular material that may have undesirable elements, though the material also has powerful benefits to literacy? The content and style of popular material leads to mixed reviews among adults. People are concerned

with what children are reading (Scales, 2007; Thompson & Lehr, 2008). Some worry that books without “perfect English” are causing declining reading and writing proficiency rates (Grossman, 2007). In her popular culture books series, *Junie B. Jones*, Barbara Park includes in the language of Junie B. Jones typical grammatical errors made by young children (Ratzan, 2005). Park feels she brings humor down to an early reader’s level by writing the books in first person as a five year old girl in Kindergarten (Grossman, 2007). In later books from the series, Junie enters first grade and turns six years old.

Significance

Parents and teachers notice the grammar, language, morals, character personalities, and writing style authors use, deciding whether children should be reading popular culture texts (Aaron, 2010; Grossman, 2007; Thompson & Lehr, 2008). Positive or negative consequences may occur for children when the children read popular culture books.

At this point in time, the whole language approach is widely believed to be effective in reading instruction (Grossman, 2007; Williams, 2007). Literature is a major component in the whole language approach to reading instruction. Literature includes texts such as popular culture books. Teachers utilizing the whole language approach think about if and how they will include popular culture books into lessons (Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003; Grossman; Thompson & Lehr, 2008). But is there a line that should not be crossed? Is there a point where books take popular culture too far by including poor examples of characters’ grammar, language, behavior, and

morals? Harry Potter, a character from the *Harry Potter* series, often breaks rules at his school and is involved in a great deal of violence (Sawyer, 2007). Junie B. Jones, a character from the *Junie B. Jones* series, cheats, lies, disrupts instruction in school, and uses language including “stupid” and “runned” (Ratzan, 2005). Captain Underpants, a character from the *Captain Underpants* series, conducts several pranks, usually on adults, and almost every child-adult relationship in the books is negative (Aaron, 2010). This study examined what children noticed from *Junie B. Jones*, one popular culture book series.

If teachers do include popular culture books in their classroom instruction or libraries, the next step for teachers is to decide how to utilize them. After students have read these books and go home, some parents worry that their children may pick up on a character's grammar, language, behavior, or morals (Ratzan, 2005). Students need to be made aware of the active literacy skills they are utilizing when reading a popular culture narrative (Hong Xu, 2002). When students have that awareness, they can be guided to transfer literacy skills to other contexts in school and their community (Hong Xu). It is not easy, but carefully integrating popular culture into school literacy learning is worthwhile, and students will reap the benefits of a home-school connection and understanding the perceptions created by patterns in popular culture (Hong Xu, 2002; Williams & Zenger, 2007).

Purpose

This study examined the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park) specifically, and the focus was on what children noticed from the *Junie B. Jones* popular culture series. The information gained led to implications for using this series, as well as other popular culture books, at home and in the classroom. My goal for this study was to examine the kinds of information children obtain from the *Junie B. Jones* series of books.

Study Approach

A case study using a book club was conducted to pinpoint the information children obtained from the books. This qualitative method involved working with four second and third graders in a public library for an hour a week. The book club consisted of the participants listening to me, the researcher, read aloud from two books from the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park). I reserved copies of the same book from the library for the children to follow along in the text. Throughout each session, I asked open-ended, general questions to see what the children noticed about the character, Junie B. Jones. Each session was videotaped so I could transcribe comments made by the children. The videotapes were an important reference since I was the one conducting the book club.

Sessions one and two consisted of reading and discussing *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997) Sessions three and four consisted of reading and discussing *Cheater Pants* (Park, 2003). Session five consisted of asking open-ended questions about Junie based on the two books, as well as writing a script to act out based on one

of the books. The participants chose which book to act out, and told me what to write in the script. I guided their conversations to stay on topic, but I did not tell them what to include in the script. The participants were provided with copies of the book to look up anything they wished. During session six, anything that needed to be finished up from session five was completed, and the children had time to read through their lines. Finally, the children's parents were invited to attend a performance of the children acting out their script.

Rationale

Children occasionally generalize familiar regular patterns to new verbs if the child cannot automatically come up with the irregular form (Brown, 1973; Cazden, 1968; Marcus et al., 1992; Pinker, 1999; Xu & Pinker, 1995). Barbara Park includes typical grammatical errors made by young children in the language of Junie B. Jones in her popular culture books series, *Junie B. Jones* (Ratzan, 2005). Park intends for her target audience to be able to laugh at Junie's grammatical errors by including errors the target audience would most likely recognize, such as adding -ed onto words which should be irregular (Ratzan). This study examined the kinds of information children obtained from the *Junie B. Jones* series in order to confirm or refute that children recognize Junie's grammatical errors.

If children recognize Junie's grammatical errors, then should teachers be including books from the *Junie B. Jones* series in their classrooms? Some teachers use books from the popular culture *Junie B. Jones* series in guided reading groups for comprehension instruction, some keep them in classroom libraries for independent

reading, while others do not have the series at all in their classrooms (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Teachers' opinions influence the books chosen for reading instruction and the classroom. Teachers play a part in deciding if the language and behavior of characters in popular culture books is acceptable in school. As an elementary substitute in multiple districts, I see what students like to read in and out of school. At different levels, I see students bringing in pop culture personal books from home or borrowing them from the library, including the *Harry Potter* series, by J.K. Rowling, and the *Junie B. Jones* series, by Barbara Park. Since I have found that children enjoy reading popular culture books, this study examined the kinds of information children obtained from Junie's language and behavior to conclude that the popular culture *Junie B. Jones* series should or should not be included in classrooms.

Definitions

Book club- A collection of readers who participate in the regular discussion of books.

Whole language approach- A literacy philosophy which emphasizes children focusing on meaning and strategy instruction by developing knowledge of graphophonic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of language. It is often contrasted with phonics-based methods of teaching reading and writing which emphasize instruction for decoding and spelling.

Junie B. Jones series-A children's book series written by Barbara Park about a rambunctious main character, Junie B. Jones, who progresses from kindergarten to first grade throughout the series.

Standard English- the English which is widely recognized as acceptable with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated.

Summary

Since today's idea of literacy education is generally whole language using trade books and literature, should popular culture books be included in schools? Many popular culture books are on shelves today, such as the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park). This study examined whether or not Barbara Park's intended audience for the series recognized Junie's grammatical errors. I conducted a book club with four children and asked them many open-ended questions. Transcribed notes from videotapes along with field notes provided data to acquire the kinds of information children obtained from the books. This study will conclude whether popular culture books such as the *Junie B. Jones* series should be included in classrooms, based on the kinds of information children obtained from this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will examine overregularization of language acquisition and the connections between popular culture books and literacy. First, patterns of overregularization of language acquisition will be discussed across different studies. Connections will be made in the research of the language of the main character of the Junie B. Jones series (Park) and typical children around her age. Then, connections between popular culture and literacy will be discussed. Research will be included discussing literacies found in popular culture. Also, research will illustrate the possibility of instructional use for popular culture books in literacy instruction.

Overregularization in Language Acquisition

Through the study of English grammar, Pinker (1999) found three roles for regular verbs. The first is adding –s at the end to show present tense. The second is adding –ing at the end to show present participle, verbal noun, such as in “the incessant opening of the box,” or verbal adjective, such as in “a quietly-opening box.” The third is adding –ed to the end to show past tense, such as in “it opened,” or verbal adjective, such as in “a recently-opened box.”

Pinker (1999) found that irregular forms of past tense verbs are sometimes different from their base forms, such as take/took and bring/brought. Others remain unchanged, such as put and cut. Also, he found that irregular forms and meaning are not correlated. Hit, strike, and slap are words which have similar meanings, yet their past tense forms do not follow a pattern; hit, struck, and slapped.

Xu and Pinker (1995) conducted a study which reviewed transcripts of the everyday speech of nine children, aged two to seven. The researchers looked for incorrect word part forms in the transcripts of the children's everyday speech. Eight out of nine children created patterns at least one time for irregular forms of past tense verbs that were not found in Standard English, such as saying "left" for "lifted" and "braing" for "brought." One general conclusion from this study is that children occasionally generalize familiar irregular patterns to new verbs if the children cannot automatically come up with the correct form. This may explain the error for of "braing" for "brought," as the child may have thought of the pattern to change "sing" to "sang." Errors stuck out in the children's speech, but occurred less than one percent of the time.

Brown (1973) conducted a study of three toddlers' language development, beginning in 1962. Brown analyzed transcriptions taken of conversations in the children's homes. By age two, the three children began to use the grammatical morphemes -s, -ed, and -ing. Between the ages of two and three, the children started to overgeneralize the past tense form -ed to irregular verbs, such as "brokeed" or "broked" for "broke." The children also generalized the present tense form -s to irregular verbs, such as "haves" for "has." Brown concluded that around three, children are overgeneralizing patterns in irregular verb forms in order to regularize them.

Pinker (1999) referred to the language of his three-year-old nephew, Eric, when discussing the use of comparative suffix forms -er and -est. Eric utilized the

comparative suffix forms correctly often, but also overgeneralized these forms and added them onto polysyllabic adjectives such as *specialer*, *powerfullest*, and *gooder*. Correlating his own observations with other studies described above, Pinker concluded that beginning around three years old, children focus on inferring and utilizing rules of grammar, virtually unaware that language rules have exceptions (Brown, 1973; Pinker, 1999; Xu & Pinker, 1995).

Junie B. Jones, the main character of the Junie B. Jones series written by Barbara Park, utilizes language which is clear and logical, but not always grammatically correct (Ratzan, 2005). Junie's grammar mistakes derive from the many exceptions to the rules of Standard English, showing that she is still learning the rules and exceptions of her language (Ratzan). One example is where Junie says that another student "stoled" her mittens (Park, 1997). This is a common word which could be found in a five year old child's vocabulary (Ratzan, 2005). Park feels she brought humor down to an early reader's level by writing the books in first person as a five-six year old girl (Grossman, 2007).

A group of researchers studied overgeneralizations in children's speech and found development of grammar to be similar to the shape of a U (Marcus et al., 1992). The researchers examined 11,521 irregular utterances in transcripts of eighty-three children's spontaneous speech. The researchers found that 95% of the time, the correct irregular form of a verb was spoken. Until the age of three, children seem to be getting their words right. Around the age of three, children seem to begin making more errors as they experiment with rules for regularizing suffixes.

The blocking principle helps to explain why children seem to drop to the bottom of the U shape in their development (Marcus et al., 1992). The blocking principle is innate and allows children to ignore the regularization rules while trying to retrieve an irregular form from memory. If the irregular form is not in the child's memory or is not retrieved fast enough, the blocking principle breaks down and the child applies and overgeneralizes a rule he has inferred based on other words. The blocking principle is utilized with time and practice, allowing the children to come up with the correct forms. The researchers found that the errors are fewer but continue into children's school-age years.

A conclusion was made that even when children make grammatical errors, the children are not always ignorant of the correct forms (Marcus et al., 1992). Cazden (1968) found similar results. Cazden studied three children, aged two to four, by tape recording conversations in their homes. When adults made errors typically made by the children, the children often indicated these errors to the adults. In the following example from Cazden, the child utters the incorrect form "holded," yet recognizes the correct form when the teacher uttered it:

Child: "My teacher holded the baby rabbits"

Adult: "Your teacher held them?"

Child: "Yes"

Park intends for her target audience to be able to laugh at Junie's grammatical errors by including errors the target audience would most likely recognize, such as adding -ed onto words which should be irregular (Ratzan, 2005). In one of the later

books, Junie is excited about graduating from kindergarten, and tells her principal that she does not use the word “runned” anymore (Park, 2003).

Junie B. Jones is a character who is linguistically challenged (Ratzan, 2005, p. 7). Authors and characters in other books intend to be linguistically challenged as well. Dr. Seuss uses invented words that still follow the rules of grammar, such as the words “galumphing” and “chortled” (Ratzan). Peggy Parish writes a series about a character named Amelia Bedelia who has trouble comprehending idioms, such as “trim the tree” (Ratzan). Amelia literally trims the tree with scissors instead of decorating it for the holidays.

Many three-year-old children experiment with regularizing rules of grammar (Brown, 1973; Pinker, 1999; Xu & Pinker, 1995). Usually, children utilize the correct irregular forms of verbs. Otherwise, the child overgeneralizes and applies a rule which he has inferred based on other words. Children often recognize when incorrect forms of irregular verbs are utilized by others, even when the children have made the same mistakes. Authors such as Barbara Park include linguistically challenged characters who make errors the target audience would most likely recognize and find humorous.

Popular Culture and Literacy

Popular culture narratives have some influence on how children construct their own identities (Williams & Zenger, 2007). Nonetheless, popular culture is not something to be shunned or kept at a distance in schools (Hong Xu, 2002). In fact, popular culture is a tool utilized for the literacy lessons it can teach (Hong Xu). Two

ways to think about this topic are considered in this section. Teachers can focus on the literacies found in the popular culture text, and teachers can also integrate a popular culture text into instruction to teach reading and writing skills.

Literacy in popular culture. Parents and teachers are concerned with what is portrayed in popular culture for children and the effects literacy in popular culture can have on children (Williams & Zenger, 2007). Children may be influenced by the perceptions found in popular culture. Society's perceptions on race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class are just a few perceptions repeated in popular culture. (Williams & Zenger).

Williams and Zenger (2007) studied contemporary movies to explore representations of literacy in popular culture. Their initial approach was to study many forms of popular culture, including television, magazines, books, the internet, video games, and advertising. The researchers soon narrowed their study to movies solely, to have a sharpened focus instead of a massive book of results. The researchers studied recent beliefs and theories about literacy in order to compare them to movies such as *X-Men* and *Bridget Jones' Diary*. The researchers found writing up their findings most difficult when choosing which movies to include, since almost every movie the researchers studied involved reading and writing in different forms. The researchers found that popular culture plays a large role in shaping the perceptions people have about identities, institutional practices, and positions of power. The movies the researchers studied include literacies shaped by technology, social status, cultural power, and personal relationships.

Little consideration from literacy teachers is on the reading and writing literacies that are exemplified in popular culture (Williams & Zenger, 2007). When teachers think about literacies in popular culture, the teachers often think of triumph-of-literacy stories such as the movie *Dead Poets Society* (Williams & Zenger). *Dead Poets Society* is about a teacher trying to get his pupils excited about poetry. Another triumph-of-literacy example is *Freedom Writers*, in which a new teacher wants her students to overcome the gangs the students belong to and use their voices through reading and writing to rise against the education system who forgot them (Gruwell & The Freedom Writers, 1999).

Certainly not all popular culture movies and books are based on literacy in schools. Literacy is rarely a central focus of popular culture narratives (Williams & Zenger, 2007). However, there are representations of people reading and writing in popular culture narratives. The contexts of which characters are reading or writing vary widely, as does the characters' purposes for reading and writing. Often, literacy practices are secondary to the main plot. The reader can see the effects of these literacy practices on the characters' lives if the reader pays attention to those practices.

Many literacy skills can be learned from the integration of popular culture narratives into school reading (Williams & Zenger, 2007). A teacher can bring in popular culture narratives for children to seek out characters who read and write. Students can be asked to pay attention to which characters read and write and their purposes for such literacy practices. This information can be compared and

contrasted, themes can be found, and repeated representations of literacy and identity can be found.

Popular culture narratives can influence students' identities, and students should be taught to consider the myths and realities of literacy found in popular culture (Williams & Zenger, 2007). Students should construct their own identities about themselves as readers and writers, contrasting their self-constructed identities with what the students see in popular culture narratives. Students should be aware of their own goals because literacy in narratives may differ in perceptions of gender, social class, and race (Williams & Zenger). Popular culture is a tool to be utilized for the lessons it can teach (Williams & Zenger).

Using popular culture to support literacy. Dahl and Freppon (1995) conducted a qualitative study comparing phonics-based and whole language literacy instruction in four classrooms on the western side of the United States of America. The researchers visited these classrooms twice a week for two years, taking field notes and writing transcripts of reading episodes through thick descriptions. Fisher and Hiebert (1990) conducted a similar study of literature-based and skills-based instruction through collection of videotapes, field notes, teacher interviews, and student sample work over five days.

The researchers of both studies found similar results (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Fisher & Hiebert, 1990). In phonics-based instruction, emphasis was placed on learning letters and sounds through the use of worksheets and choral reading. In whole language instruction, emphasis was placed on learning reading strategies

through small group and self-selected reading materials chosen from a variety of children's literature. Students often became passive in phonics-based instruction, doing the work just to complete it and prove their recognition of facts from memory. Students worked cooperatively and persistently in whole language instruction to learn from books and transfer synthesis skills to reading and writing. These studies show that children are engaged and persistent in learning to read and write when the students read books and interact with peers about what they read rather than complete worksheets.

As teachers consider the inclusion of literature such as popular culture into classroom instruction, the teachers should first investigate the popular culture interests of their students (Hong Xu, 2002). Hong Xu conducted individual research to study what preservice and inservice know about their own popular culture, student popular culture, and how these teachers integrate student popular culture into literacy instruction. Twenty-one teachers and two hundred middle class K-12 linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse students were involved in the study, which was conducted through lists created by participants.

Hong Xu (2002) found that reading books was only a small part of students' popular culture; students did not often focus on books. The teachers were surprised at the students' ability to tell aspects of popular culture that were appropriate versus not appropriate for school learning. It is the teacher's moral responsibility to consider the appropriateness of popular culture selections (Hong Xu). While violence, sex, and foul language are very touchy subjects and decisions should be seriously well-

thought-out, the home-school connection gives popular culture texts a place in school, regardless of some negative aspects (Hong Xu).

Teachers found that students learned literacy skills from the lessons based on popular culture and had a positive attitude (Hong Xu, 2002). These were the same students who previously had poor attitudes about reading and writing when lessons were based on worksheet-like activities. Initially, some teachers saw little possibility of integrating popular culture into literacy instruction. Teachers found many creative ways to integrate popular culture that raised student participation and learning (Hong Xu). Children used a range of literacy skills when interacting with popular culture narratives and it was the teacher's responsibility to make these children aware of these literacy skills. Then, teachers helped the students learn to transfer their skills to other books.

Conclusion

Occasionally, children overgeneralize familiar irregular patterns to new unknown verbs if the child cannot automatically come up with the correct form of a verb (Brown, 1973; Cazden, 1968; Marcus et al., 1992; Pinker, 1999; Xu & Pinker, 1995). Barbara Park includes typical grammatical errors made by young children in the language of Junie B. Jones in her popular culture books series, *Junie B. Jones* (Ratzan, 2005). Students need to be aware of the active literacy skills they are utilizing while reading a popular culture narrative (Hong Xu, 2002). When students have that awareness, they can be guided to transfer literacy skills to other contexts in their schools and communities (Hong Xu). Carefully integrating popular culture into

school literacy learning is worthwhile and students will reap the benefits of a home-school connection and understanding the perceptions created by patterns in popular culture (Hong Xu, 2002; Williams & Zenger, 2007).

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

This study examined what children noticed about the main character, Junie B. Jones from the *Junie B. Jones* popular culture series (Park). The four second and third grade children were involved in a book club, in a setting natural to reading, where the children listened to reading and were asked many open-ended questions about the main character, Junie B. Jones, throughout the six sessions. Then data was analyzed and coded to find the kinds of information children obtain about Junie B. Jones from books included in the series. The information gained leads to implications for using this series, as well as other popular culture books, at home and in the classroom.

Participants

The participants in the study were second and third grade children in a suburban neighborhood located in western New York. Two of the four participants were siblings, and the participants were all females. All participants came from middle class families. Three of the children were white and one child was African American. One child received Academic Intervention Services in school for reading. There were no students with individualized education plans.

Context

The book club took place in a public library. For the length of six weeks, the book club met for one hour a week. The book club took place after school hours.

Positionality

I hold Childhood and Special Education dual certification from the State University of New York at Geneseo. I am a white female from a lower middle class family, and reside in a suburb of Rochester, New York. I believe that all children can enjoy reading if they have interesting and age-appropriate reading materials at their reading level. Reading books that are interesting to children will encourage the children to read more. The main character, Junie B. Jones, in the series studied here, is one example of making reading interesting to children. I believe that since children are not perfect at grammar, they enjoy stories where the character struggles with grammar (Grossman, 2007). One parent says that “kids find humor in the way things go wrong” (Grossman, p.3). I have spoken with children who said they find humor in Junie’s language errors and inappropriate behaviors while reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park). Also, children made connections between their peers and characters from the series. I acknowledge that children may be able to relate to the character, but I wonder if society wants children, who are very influenced by the world around them, to learn to read using books with characters that are not “proper?”

Data Collection

Qualitative research has several characteristics, including a natural setting, direct data collection, rich narrative descriptions, inductive data analysis, and participant perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Convenience and snowball sampling were utilized to acquire participants, based on their availability. The study consisted of six sessions. Data was collected through the use of a book club, which

involved participants listening to two books from the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park). Semi-structured and open-ended questions were utilized to gather data. Then, the participants collaboratively created a script based on one of the books. All six sessions were videotaped so that I could review them for accurate data collection.

Convenience and snowball sampling. My participants were chosen using convenience and snowball sampling. A convenience sample is a group of children chosen because of their availability and a snowball sample is a small group of children that grows when the children or their parents recommend the group to others (McMillan, 2008). I spoke to one set of parents, who recommended others also living in the same neighborhood. From there, two other parents heard about the book club and I had four participants. One participant was unable to attend the first two sessions and decided not to attend the last two sessions because the last two sessions involved the book read in the first two sessions. Informed consent was collected from the children and parents before the study began. The children gave consent after the study was described to them in a friendly language. Parents were given a detailed letter explaining the study, which they signed and returned.

Book club. A qualitative study was conducted that involved the use of a book club. Data was collected to pinpoint the information that children obtained from reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series (Park). The first two sessions consisted of giving the children a brief description of the study, reading *Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997) to the children, and asking the children semi-structured and open-ended questions. Sessions three and four consisted of reading *Cheater Pants* (Park,

2003) to the children and asking the children semi-structured and open-ended questions. The children were provided with both books to follow along with while I read the books aloud. After reading the two books, the children spent the remaining two sessions creating a script to act out based on one of the books. Verbal feedback from the children and the script the children created throughout the book club provided me with information the children paid attention to about Junie B. Jones.

Observation and semi-structured questions. I read *Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997) and *Cheater Pants* (Park, 2003) during the study. The focus of the study was on the information that children obtained about the main character, Junie B. Jones. I chose to read aloud to the children so the decoding aspect of reading would not affect the study. I asked open-ended questions throughout the book club. There is a certain art to asking questions and engaging people in conversation as a participant observer (Jorgensen, 1989). Questions were real, with no specific response anticipated, and used to clarify, seek details, or request stories (Seidman, 2006). I listened more, and talked less, when I was not reading aloud (Seidman, 2006). At any time, the children could have chosen not to participate in the book club.

The questions I asked were semi-structured questions (Hill, 2009). (See Appendix A). Semi-structured questions are questions that do not have predetermined structured choices. The questions were open-ended with a specific intent. Therefore, children answered, in depth, questions about Junie B. Jones based on their thinking. I had to be cautious when asking semi-structured questions so that I did not guide students to think a certain way about the book. Even during the session where the

children created a script based on one of the books, I asked the children for their opinions of what to include, only writing what the children told me. The script came from the children's thinking and ideas only.

Videotapes. Participant observation must deal with human interactions, be in a natural setting, and that setting must be easily accessible and appropriate to the study (Jorgensen, 1989). Therefore, the study took place in a public library. To make such observations, each session was videotaped and transcribed, and I recorded field notes of my immediate comments and reactions. Pencil and paper field notes were useful for brief and important comments, but videotapes were much more beneficial to acquire detailed documentation of conversation because the videotapes could be analyzed repeatedly (Jorgensen).

Data Analysis

To analyze my data, I utilized the constant comparative method. I did not have predetermined categories before I began the book club, and as data was collected, compared, sorted, and analyzed, categories became apparent (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I coded information from the field notes I took during the book club, along with the videotapes and the transcriptions taken from the videotapes. First, I analyzed the data using open coding (Glaser & Strauss). Putting all the information taken from the children's responses into categories resulted in noticeable groups of information that children obtained about Junie B. Jones. Categories were refined as more data was analyzed. Axial coding took place, so data was positioned in new ways by making connections between previous categories from open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Thick descriptions within categories were crucial to making credible interpretations and generalizations for practical decision-making (Jorgensen, 1989). After data was coded, I synthesized naturalistic generalizations, which were suggestions of how others can apply my findings to other situations, in my case to classrooms and home reading (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the data analysis, I utilized pseudonyms for participants. When the study was completed, the tapes from the video camera and any documents with real names from my computer were deleted so there is no way to trace the study back to specific individuals or a particular neighborhood.

Procedures

Week one of the book club, I briefly described the study to the children, gaining verbal consent. The books were introduced and half of *Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997) was read to the children. Since the focus of the study was on the information that children obtained about Junie B. Jones, I read to the children so they would not be worried about the decoding aspect of reading. Copies of the book were provided to the children so the children could follow along and refer to the book during questioning. Semi-structured questions were asked to gain information that the children caught from the main character, Junie B. Jones.

The reading of the first book that started in week one was completed in week two. Semi-structured questions were asked throughout each session, as well as after the book reading was finished. A new book was started in week three: *Cheater Pants*

(Park, 2003). Semi-structured questions were asked throughout this session and session four.

Beginning week five, the children began to create a script for *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997). The children worked together and told me what characters, conversations, and actions the children wanted to include in the script. Since the focus of the study was on the information that children obtained about Junie B. Jones, I took responsibility for actually writing the script so that the children would think more about what to include in the script than the writing aspect. Throughout weeks five and six, the children had access to the book that their script was based on, which the children referred to for specific language or actions. I did not guide their thinking to specific aspects of Junie B. Jones, but guided the children in a way to keep them on track so the script was finished, practiced, and performed by session six (See Appendix B). Parents were welcome to, and did, attend the performance of the script the children created.

Trustworthiness

Persistent observation was crucial to my study. Every session of the book club was videotaped and later transcribed. Therefore, I could return to the data as much as possible, and nothing was overlooked. I also took field notes during each session, to note important observations and understandings. As the leader of the book club, I constantly looked for reactions, asked for clarifications, and asked questions that encouraged the participants to verbalize their thought processes. Participation was essential, for if the children did not participate, there would have been no data to

collect and analyze. The semi-structured questions were created only to open up, further, or redirect discussions on the topic. The reactions, expressions, and words that made up the data of the study were all based on participation from the children who partook in the book club.

Limitations

All participants were females, and came from a range of middle-class families. The series' main character was a female, but having males participate in a similar study might add supplemental data to this study. Since my sample was small, I had limited generalizability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I had to be cautious in relating this data to classroom use.

Many characters from popular culture books could be found controversial. This study examined only one character, Junie B. Jones. Future studies could include books with different characters, and could be triangulated to provide wider generalizations on the topic.

The study was self-reported, and self-reports are not always accurate. Videotaping each session in order to review the sessions for data collection was one measure I took to make my findings as accurate as possible, so that valid conclusions could be made. Researcher effects in this situation may also have included the way children spoke to me, the researcher.

Summary

This study was designed to collect data from second and third grade children in order to see their thoughts and reactions to Junie B. Jones. While being videotaped

for further analysis and transcription, the children's participation was the key element of the study that provided data. The coded data can help people understand the kinds of information children obtained about Junie B. Jones from books included in the series (Park).

Chapter 4: Findings

I researched the kinds of information children obtain from the *Junie B. Jones* popular culture series of books (Park). I conducted a book club, in a public library, to pinpoint the information children noticed from the books. The book club consisted of four participants who listened as I read aloud two books from the series. Throughout each session, I asked open-ended questions to see what the participants noticed about the main character, Junie B. Jones. Each session was videotaped, and comments by the participants were transcribed. The information gained provides implications for using this series, as well as other popular culture books, at home and in the classroom.

Sessions one and two consisted of reading and discussing *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997) with three participants. Sessions three and four consisted of reading and discussing *Cheater Pants* (Park, 2003) with four participants. Session five consisted of asking open-ended questions, and the participants started creating a play script based on *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997). I guided the participants' conversations to stay on topic, but I did not tell them what to include. The participants had copies of the book to reference if they so wished. During session six, the script was completed, practiced, and performed for their families.

Information the Children Obtained While Reading

Junie has patterns of language and behaviors that occur throughout the two books that were read in this study. Patterns in Junie's language include the overregularization of the past tense form –ed, overregularization of comparative and

superlative forms of adjectives, stressed and unstressed initial syllables, adjectives modifying verbs instead of adverbs, and adding –ish to the end of adjectives. Junie also utilizes self-created phrases individual to her, statements not acceptable in Standard English, and objectionable words.

The children's comments regarding Junie's typically unacceptable actions had noticeable patterns. The children's comments indicated that they or Junie would get in trouble for her actions, Junie should tell the truth, Junie is/is not being bossy/mean/selfish/sassy, the children would not carry out such actions, and Junie would make an appropriate or inappropriate decision. Other comments displayed the viewpoint that her action was not right and suggested what she should have done instead.

The children shared many comments throughout the sessions, and the responses to the open-ended questions at the end of each session tended to generalize the comments they had made throughout the sessions. Generally, the comments indicated that Junie's language did not always sound "right," and the children knew better than to behave like her for fear of doing something wrong or receiving negative consequences from an adult or peer. I will discuss the patterns of information the participants noticed and the participants' reactions in the remainder of this chapter.

Language. In the two books that were read in this study, Junie has evident patterns in her use of language. Patterns in Junie's language include the overregularization of the past tense form –ed, overregularization of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives, stressed and unstressed initial syllables, adjectives

modifying verbs instead of adverbs, and adding –ish to the end of adjectives. Junie also utilizes self-created phrases individual to her, statements not acceptable in Standard English, and objectionable words.

Overregularization of the past tense verb form –ed. In the books depicting Junie in Kindergarten, Junie constantly regularizes irregular past tense verbs by adding –ed onto the end of the verb (Table 1). In books depicting Junie in first grade, this pattern does not occur as often. Altogether, the children commented on eight out of ten incorrect forms of irregular verbs: *hanged, runned, lighted, stole, holded, weared,* and *stamped*. The two incorrect forms that the children did not comment on were *thinked* and *bended*. Each comment made by a child was in disapproval of the incorrect verb form Junie utilized. The children seemed to get annoyed by these errors that Junie made. They often stated that the word Junie utilized was not correct and offered the correct form.

Table 1

Patterns of Junie B. Jones's Language Errors

Pattern	Number of times occurred in 1 st book	Number of times occurred in 2 nd book	Number of children's comments on Junie's language
Added -ed	18	1	18
Added -est or -er	3	4	3
Missing initial unstressed syllable-cause	15	13	0
Adj. modifying a verb instead of an adverb	16	22	3
Adds -ish onto end of adj	1	4	3
Said, "On account of"	0	4	1
Said "Guess what/ guess why"	4	0	0
Said "Wowie wow wow"	1	1	1
Called her teacher "Mrs."	3	N/A	5
Used objectionable words: dumb & stupid	0	5	5

Other times, the children commented that the sentence still makes sense, even with the error, because they knew what she was trying to say. A couple times, the children stated that they would not use the incorrect word in their own speech. When Junie said the word *stoled*, one child exclaimed: "Oh no! She stole the pen!" This was interesting because the participant utilized the correct form of the verb instead of the incorrect form Junie consistently utilized. All comments made by the children,

regarding the words Junie utilized when she overregularized the –ed ending for past tense verbs, expressed dissatisfaction of Junie's word choice.

The children included the word *stoled* six times in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B). They wanted to include this word because it was one of the weird words that they noticed often while I read the two books to them.

Overregularization of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. Junie occasionally regularized irregular comparative and superlative forms of adjectives by adding –er or –est onto the end of the adjective (Table 1). The children commented on three out of four incorrect forms: *bestest*, *wonderfulest*, and *funnest*. When the children commented on Junie's errors, a prevalent comment was “that's not right.” One time when Junie utilized the word *funnest*, a child commented that the word was a funny word and one that babies would say. All comments made by the children, regarding the words Junie utilized where she overregularized the –er or -est ending for comparative and superlative adjectives, were in disapproval of Junie's word choice.

The children included the words *bestest* and *wonderfulest* in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B). They stated that they wanted to include these words because they were words Junie used and these errors added humor to the script.

Stressed and unstressed initial syllables. In many words that young children hear and utilize often, the first syllable of the word tends to be the stressed syllable (Pinker, 1999; Ratzan, 2005). As a result of this trend and the speed at which children

hear speech from older children and adults, initial unstressed syllables are sometimes hard to hear and consequently missed (Ratzan). Junie utilized the word *'cause* instead of *because* frequently in the two books (Table 1). The children did not once react or comment on Junie's use of *'cause*.

The children included the word *because* in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B). This was interesting because, throughout the books, Junie never utilized the full word, yet the children included the full word in their script.

Adjectives modifying verbs instead of adverbs. Junie frequently modified verbs with adjectives instead of adverbs by disregarding the *-ly* that should be at the end of the word (Table 1). The children commented on only one, *quick*, out of the eighteen incorrect forms. The incorrect forms that the children did not comment on were: *sad, happy, nervous, pleasant, secret, loud, real, serious, joyful, slow, delighted, hopeful, proud, perfect, careful, uncomfortable, and curious*. They reacted to and commented on the word *quick*, which occurred ten times throughout the two books, by correcting Junie and stating that the word should be *quickly*. When asked if this error bothers them, the children gave the following responses: "It doesn't bother me, I get what it should be," "We know what it's supposed to say," and "I would think *quickly* in my head." All comments made by the children were in disapproval of Junie's word choice.

Children create their own forms of adverbs until they generate the rule for the correct forms, which normally occurs around age five (Marcus et al., 1992). In *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park, 1997), Junie is five years old. Therefore, research

suggests that she will soon begin to utilize the correct forms. The participants in this study were two to three years older than Junie, so a possible reason the participants overlooked the misuse of adverbs could be that the children have not generated the rule for adverbs yet. Another reason could be that the participants knew the correct forms for the misused adverbs and automatically substituted the correct forms without making it observable to me.

The children included the words *quick*, *joyful*, and *real* in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B). They chose lines straight out of the books that included these errors, and they only explained their inclusion of the word *quick* by stating that they wanted it to be in the script because Junie said the word so often in the books.

Adding -ish to the end of adjectives. Junie occasionally added the -ish suffix onto the end of the adjective (Table 1). The children commented on three occurrences of this, *poopish*, *biggish*, and *meanish*. Three others were in the books that the children did not react to in any way, *sickish*, *weakish*, and *limpish*. Comments consisted of “Those aren’t words she should use in first grade,” “She’s not mature,” and “Why does [the author] put stuff in there that doesn’t make sense?” After the last comment was made, another child responded with “It’s just to be a funny book.” When the children commented on Junie’s errors, they were in disapproval of her word choice. The children did not include any words with the -ish suffix in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B).

Phrases utilized by Junie. The children noticed and reacted to four phrases that Junie utilized. In the second book, Junie occasionally began statements with *on account of* (Table 1). One child declared that Junie was trying to act more mature by using the phrase. This phrase was not included in the script (Appendix B). Another phrase that Junie utilized was *guess what* or *guess why* (Table 1). No comments were made while reading the book, but the children did include *guess why* one time in the script (Appendix B). When asked why, they pointed to where they found it in the book, as part of a line they wanted to include in their script. A third phrase Junie utilized was *wowie wow wow*, which she exclaimed when she was excited (Table 1). The children commented that they thought it was funny when she said this phrase and the children included it in their script for the same reason (Appendix B).

The fourth phrase occurred in the first book, where she called her teacher *Mrs.* and never included her last name (Table 1). Every time Junie referred to her kindergarten teacher as *Mrs.*, the children laughed and commented in disapproval that Junie was not using her teacher's last name when referring to her. The children frequently made the following comments, "It should be Mrs. something" and "That's not a real name." In the second book, the children noticed and commented often that Junie used her first grade teacher's last name when referring to him. One comment that was made was, "At last she doesn't just call him Mr." The children incorporated the phrase *Mrs.* into the script twice, stating that Junie called her that often and that it was funny (Appendix B).

Statements not acceptable in Standard English. Research shows that children acquire the English language by listening to their environment and inferring many grammar rules (Pinker, 1999; Ratzan, 2005). Junie made statements that the children commented on by saying the statements did not “sound right”, but were clear in meaning (Table 1). A couple examples were, “Let’s get a wiggle on” (Park, 1997, p. 44) and “...a jillion million hours” (Park, 2003, p. 44).

Most comments made by the children noted the humor as well as the fact that the statements did not sound right. Statements that received this reaction include, “Let’s get a wiggle on” (Park, 1997, p. 44), “...a jillion million hours” (Park, 2003, p. 44), and “My stomach turned into a knotball” (Park, 2003, p. 71). In *Junie B., First Grader: Cheater Pants* (Park, 2003), Junie came up with *Pallies* as the title of a poem her group was going to create. One child questioned the word *Pallies* as a title, and another child responded by saying “We can name poems whatever we want as long as it makes sense.” This was interesting because Junie made many statements throughout the two books that may sound odd to some people, but still make sense.

Sometimes, the children commented that these statements could only be found in these books. This comment was made once when Junie said “...my nose was all sniffing and drippity” (Park, 1997, p. 54). A few times, the children’s comments excused her odd statements because of her young age, such as when Junie said “My heart pounded at that sight” (Park, 2003, p. 8).

The children wanted the statement “Let’s get a wiggle on” in the script because it was humorous to them (Appendix B). They invented and included the

words *hotsy* and *peoples*, explaining that they are words Junie would use (Appendix B). Their invention of the word *peoples* was interesting because Junie never used the plural suffix –s to regularize irregular nouns in the two books utilized in this study. Overregularization of the suffix –s to plural nouns is another characteristic that researchers have found in young children (Marcus et al., 1992; Pinker, 1999; Ratzan, 2005)

Objectionable words. Junie intermittently included the objectionable words *dumb* and *stupid* in the second book (Table 1). Every time either word was read, the children commented in disapproval. Comments included, “That’s a bad word,” “That shouldn’t be in the book,” “That’s mean,” and “She’s going to get in trouble.” The children associated saying these words with getting in trouble, and explained that this book should not be read to Kindergarteners because it would “teach them bad words.” This was interesting because their comments seemed to show that they knew better than to use these words themselves but Kindergarteners did not know better. The children did not include the word *dumb* or *stupid* in the short script they created in the fifth session (Appendix B).

Language overall findings. The children shared many comments throughout, and the responses to the open-ended questions at the end of each session tended to generalize the comments they had made throughout the sessions. Overall, there were three general ideas about Junie’s use of language from their responses. One was that Junie’s language did not always sound “right.” The children commented that Junie “talks like someone who can’t talk that well” and she also kept adding –ed onto the

ends of words. Ratzan (2005) studied language acquisition and found that “when a child’s memory cannot come up with an irregular word quickly, her language framework defaults to applying the rule, resulting in overgeneralizations” (p. 35). Ratzan commented that Junie has figured out and indeed follows many rules of Standard English; her mistakes are the result of the many exceptions to the rules. Ratzan also stated the following:

The target audience for these books, early elementary school readers, has typically outgrown the speech patterns of younger children. Readers in this age group can therefore laugh with smug self-assurance at Junie B.’s childish way of talking, boosting their own sense of linguistic superiority. (p. 36)

The children did laugh and comment on Junie’s use of language, confirming Ratzan’s statement. Looking back at the end of a session, a child stated that the *Junie B. Jones* books shouldn’t be read to Kindergarteners because they would use the bad or weird words she had in her speech. Two suggestions were offered, to skip the “bad parts” or to say different words instead of the “wrong words” Junie utilized.

The second general idea was that language such as Junie’s was only found in books from the *Junie B. Jones* series. They also stated that Junie’s use of language made the book funny, even if it was “wrong.” Twenty-eight times, a child said, “it’s just a book!” or “I wouldn’t talk like her.” The previous general idea and this one were especially popular while responding to the first book.

The third general idea was that Junie’s language had improved from the first book, where she was in Kindergarten, to the second book, where she was in first

grade. The children came up with examples from both books to prove this point, including how Junie uses the word *ran* (instead of *runned*) often in the first book and not in the second book, and utilizes her first grade teacher's last name (she called her Kindergarten teacher *Mrs.*). Several times, the children commented that Junie's language was "more mature" in the second book than the first. One child stated that her language was getting better, but not perfect yet, because she had only just entered the first grade.

Behavior. The participants frequently commented that Junie's actions were unacceptable. Patterns emerged from their comments regarding what Junie did wrong, consequences for her actions, and what she should have done instead. The participants also frequently discussed what they would have done if they were in Junie's position.

Children's comments: Getting in trouble. More often in the second book than the first, the children commented on some of Junie's behavior by saying that Junie or the child herself would get in trouble for performing such an action (Table 2). This comment occurred when Junie scribbled on her own hand with a red pen, cheated on her spelling test, copied a classmate's homework, and argued with her teacher about taking off her mittens. One child explained that she doesn't like being partners with a boy in her class because he tries to copy her work, and then they both get in trouble for not working cooperatively on it. The children made these comments for Junie's behaviors that were both central to the plot and not.

Table 2

Patterns of Comments about Junie B. Jones's Behavior

Pattern	Number of times comment was made throughout 1 st book	Number of times comment was made throughout 2 nd book
Said "Junie [or participant] would get in trouble"	2	5
Said "Junie should tell the truth"	0	3
Said "Junie is bragging/being bossy/mean/selfish/sassy"	19	1
Said "Junie is not being bossy/mean/selfish"	0	14
Said "I wouldn't do that"	9	15
Prediction that Junie will make an appropriate decision	3	2
Prediction that Junie will make an inappropriate decision	5	5
Said "That's not right" [a better suggestion is offered]	14	9

Children's comment: Junie should tell the truth. In the second book, the children commented on some of Junie's behaviors by saying that Junie should tell the truth (Table 2). This comment occurred when Junie did not do her homework, cheated on a spelling test by copying a classmate's word, and did not want to show a teacher's note about cheating in school to her parents.

Children's comment: Junie is/is not being bossy/mean/selfish/sassy.

Throughout both books, the children commented that Junie was or wasn't being bossy, mean, selfish, or sassy (Table 2). This comment was made more than any other comment. Most comments in the first book revolved around the idea that Junie was being bossy, mean, selfish, or sassy. This comment occurred mostly when Junie was

showing off her new mittens by yelling about them to everyone she saw, including her friends and teacher. Other times this comment was made in the first book include when Junie conversed with her friends in school, didn't take her mittens off when her teacher asked her to, and didn't switch roles in a game with her classmates during recess. One child remarked, "Junie is like, 'I'm going to do what I want and you can't stop me,' and she has a hissy fit."

The children's comments about Junie's bossiness were very positive in the second book. Only one time did a child state that Junie was being mean to her friends, referring to when she tapped them on their heads in school. The remaining comments indicated that children regarded Junie as not being bossy or selfish, including when Junie played her role as part of a team to think of a topic for her group's poem. The children stated several times throughout the second book that Junie was more mature than and not as mean to her friends and teacher as she was in the first book. The children compared Junie's behavior between the two books with and without prompting, and backed up their opinions with details from the books.

Children's comment: I wouldn't do that. This comment was stated often by the children regarding some of Junie's behaviors (Table 2). The children seemed to know what is accepted as right and wrong by declaring this comment when Junie behaved in ways that the children considered inappropriate. This comment occurred when Junie kept her mittens on after being asked by her teacher to take them off, danced on her kitchen table, yelled to call 911 when her mittens disappeared from the schoolyard, threatened a possible thief of Junie's missing mittens, put her head on her

desk and pouted in school, stole a pen she found on the floor, copied her classmate's homework, and copied another classmate's spelling word on a test. When Junie copied her classmate's homework and the spelling test word, the children explained why they would not perform such actions by questioning the correctness of the homework and spelling test that she copied from. One child made a connection by saying that a classmate of hers has tried to copy her homework, and she refuses to allow it.

Children predicted that Junie would make an appropriate decision. A few times in each book, the children spontaneously predicted that Junie would make a decision that is typically deemed appropriate (Table 2). The children stated that Junie would put the pen she found on the floor into the lost and found, wouldn't take an item she found in the lost and found that did not belong to her, and wouldn't copy her classmate's spelling test.

Children predicted that Junie would make an inappropriate decision. The children spontaneously predicted that Junie would make a decision that is typically deemed inappropriate more often than appropriate (Table 2). In the previous subsection, children made two predictions involving Junie making appropriate decisions, that Junie would not take an item she found in the lost and found that did not belong to her, and that she would not copy her classmate's spelling test. For each of these predictions, another child predicted that she *would* perform each action. Other predictions of Junie's inappropriate decision-making included that she would copy her classmate's homework and sign her parents' names on the teacher's note

instead of having her parents sign it. The children agreed with each other that Junie had not learned her lesson about cheating, even after the consequences that occurred in the book. The children concluded that since Junie had not learned that cheating was unacceptable, Junie would cheat again in school.

Children's comment: That's not right, this is what she should have done...

The second most prevalent comment was that Junie's behavior was not right (Table 2). Then, the children usually gave suggestions of better decisions Junie could have made. Four comments and suggestions appeared often in the transcripts. First, Junie should have taken her mittens off when her teacher asked her to, because her teacher might have taken them away. Second, Junie should not have taken an item from the lost and found that wasn't hers. The suggestion was to take only her item if it was in the lost and found.

Third, Junie should not have yelled at the girl who took her mittens. The suggestions were to ask where she got the mittens, ask politely to give the mittens back, or threaten to tell the principal if the girl did not hand them over. The last suggestion was intriguing. After numerous condemning comments of Junie acting inappropriately toward others, a participant suggested that Junie should have threatened the girl. I wondered if the participant considered a threat an acceptable action to take if she felt that someone had taken something from her.

Fourth, Junie should not have copied her classmate's homework. The suggestions were to tell the teacher she did not have it and would complete it for the next day, or tell the teachers that she forgot it at home. Both of these were interesting

because they came from the children's personal experiences; neither had occurred in the book. The second suggestion, for Junie to tell her teacher she forgot her homework, was interesting for another reason. The participants often suggested more acceptable behaviors, yet this behavior suggested that Junie attempt to cover up her cheating behavior with lying about it. I wondered if lying was considered more acceptable than cheating to the participant who suggested lying.

Behavior overall findings. The children shared many comments throughout, and the responses to the open-ended questions at the end of each session tended to generalize comments the children had made throughout the sessions. Overall, three general ideas were made about Junie's behaviors from the children's responses. First, a popular comment was that the children would not behave in ways that Junie does for fear of doing something wrong or receiving negative consequences from an adult or peer. The children utilized words such as sassy, dramatic, and crazy when describing Junie. They discussed the undesirable consequences they might have faced had they acted in ways similar to Junie. The second general idea is more of a broad spectrum of comments; that the children often suggested more acceptable behaviors. Third, they justified Junie's actions as acceptable for her age, since she was only in Kindergarten or first grade. They seemed to say that they knew better than to behave like her, since they were older than her.

When creating the script, the children wanted to include several of Junie's "inappropriate" actions, and their reasoning was that these actions would tell the story and add humor to it. The children included such actions as yelling to her friends about

her new mittens, ignoring her teacher's request to take the mittens off in the classroom, yelling to call 911 when her mittens went missing, considering taking an item out of the lost and found that was not hers, and yelling at the girl who she suspected to have taken her mittens (Appendix B).

Summary of Language and Behavior Findings

The children communicated many opinions throughout the sessions, and the responses to the open-ended questions at the end of each session tended to generalize the comments they had made throughout the sessions. Overall, the comments indicated that the children knew better than to behave like Junie for fear of doing something wrong or receiving negative consequences from an adult or peer. The participants, who have outgrown many of Junie's erroneous speech patterns, pointed out several of Junie's errors. The participants stated that Junie's language errors and unacceptable behaviors made the book funny. The children often suggested more acceptable behaviors. Comments suggested that the children knew better than to behave like Junie, since they were older than Junie. The children included several of Junie's inappropriate actions and language errors in the script they created to add humor. My findings displayed the kinds of information children obtain from the *Junie B. Jones* popular culture series of books (Park).

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined what children noticed from the *Junie B. Jones* popular culture series (Park). I conducted a book club, in a public library, to pinpoint the information children noticed about Junie B. Jones. The book club consisted of four participants who listened as I read aloud two books from the series.

Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook (Park, 1997) and *Cheater Pants* (Park, 2003) were read and discussed in the first four sessions, utilizing open-ended questions. Sessions five and six consisted of the participants answering open-ended questions and creating, practicing, and performing for their families a play script based on *Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook* (Park). Each session was videotaped, and comments by the participants were transcribed. My goal for this study was to examine the kinds of information children obtain from the *Junie B. Jones* series of books.

Conclusions

An abundance of evidence was collected throughout the six sessions of my study, which led to three conclusions. First, children notice and are critical of Junie B. Jones's language errors while reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series written by Barbara Park. Second, children notice and are critical of Junie B. Jones's inappropriate behaviors while reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series. Finally, children are engaged and utilize reading skills while reading popular culture literature. All three conclusions are substantiated with evidence from the study I

performed. I acknowledge that my study was self-reported, and being the researcher may have had effects on the study.

Children notice and are critical of Junie B. Jones's language errors while reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series written by Barbara Park. Studies from Xu and Pinker (1995) and Brown (1973) show that around age three and often lasting through the early school years, children begin to occasionally generalize familiar irregular word patterns to unknown words. Junie made language errors consistent with Xu and Pinker and Brown's research, as Park intended for the character (Ratzan, 2005).

Ratzan wanted Junie's language errors to be recognizable by her target audience, who has typically outgrown the language errors. Often in my study, the children stated that it was okay for Junie to make errors and use language incorrectly since she was in kindergarten or first grade. The participants indicated humor and disapproval of the language Junie utilized. Sometimes the participants would seem to get annoyed with her language, or correct her language errors. My study confirms that children notice and are critical of Junie's language errors.

Children notice and are critical of Junie B. Jones's inappropriate behaviors while reading books from the *Junie B. Jones* series written by Barbara Park. Park wrote the series with the intent that children would find Junie's behavior humorous (Grossman, 2007; Ratzan, 2005). The participants often excused Junie's behaviors for the sake of humor and Junie's young age, like research suggested. Sometimes, the participants were quick to comment disapproval in her actions, even

though the participants found her actions humorous. Most of their comments suggested that they would not act in such ways, and they recognized situations where they were bothered when their peers acted in these ways. Some comments were alternative actions Junie should have considered. My study confirms that children notice and are critical of Junie's inappropriate behaviors.

Children are engaged and utilize reading skills while reading popular culture literature. Dahl and Freppon (1995) and Fisher and Hiebert (1990) completed studies on the effects of phonics-based instruction versus whole language instruction. Both studies concluded that students are more engaged and work cooperatively when reading literature. Hong Xu (2002) completed a study and found that teachers responded positively to utilizing popular culture texts in their lessons. The students in Hong Xu's study were highly motivated to read popular culture texts. As research suggests, the participants in my study seemed to intently listen and expressed interest to continue reading literature.

The semi-structured questions asked during each session of my study were meant to make their thoughts on the language and behavior of the main character, Junie, visible to a researcher (Appendix A). Students in Hong Xu's study (2002) and my study utilized reading skills such as critical analysis and making inferences and connections. The children in my study inferred what they thought Junie meant to say and put themselves in Junie's shoes in certain situations, analyzing her language or actions. Without guidance from the researcher, the participants utilized evidence to

discuss Junie's growth in maturity from kindergarten to first grade. Children are engaged and utilize reading skills while reading popular culture literature.

Implications for Student Learning

Students can benefit from the ideas and findings of my research. First, students can become better readers if they are given a choice to read popular culture books in school. Also, when students read and discuss popular culture books in book clubs, the students can expand their thinking and further develop their literacy skills.

Students will become better readers if they are given a choice to read popular culture books, such as the *Junie B. Jones* series, in schools. The participants expressed interest in the books read in the study, particularly because of the humor created through Junie's immature language errors and unacceptable behaviors. Ratzan (2005) states that children love books, such as these, that make them feel smart and in control because the target audience has outgrown Junie's immature ways of speaking and acting. When children are motivated and want to read, they will read more (Alverman, Hong Xu, 2003; Hong Xu, 2002). As a result, children become better readers because of the increased exposure to text. If this series, or any other popular culture book, is of interest to children, it should be an option for them to read. Some teachers fear that popular culture books will do harm to students (Alverman, Hong Xu, 2003). This study shows that these children recognized Junie's language errors and unacceptable behaviors.

Students who read and discuss in book clubs can expand their thinking and further develop their reading, listening, and speaking skills. I observed that

the participants discussed the texts with each other, often building on each other's understandings or opinions. Sometimes, they felt it necessary to explain their thinking so that the other participants would understand them better. Almasi and Gambrell (1994) found that when students read and discussed literature in small groups, they listened to each other, discussed multiple a book's perspectives and meanings, shared opinions, and questioned each other.

Alverman, Moon, & Hagood (1999) found that students develop and demonstrate many literacy skills when interacting with popular culture. Independently and collaboratively, the children in my study utilized reading skills such as critical analysis and making connections and inferences. The children also utilized listening and speaking skills such as comprehension, collaboration, and the ability to present knowledge and ideas.

Implications for My Teaching

I see myself benefiting from the ideas and findings of my research. My findings showed that children noticed and were critical of Junie's language errors and inappropriate behaviors, and popular culture provides benefits to student readers. My findings lead me to consider the use of popular culture in student-selected reading and literacy instruction to be beneficial.

I would include popular culture books, such as from the *Junie B. Jones* series, for student-selected reading. Findings that led to the first two conclusions show that children are critical of Junie's language errors and inappropriate behavior. If students are to read these books independently, I would not fear that popular

culture books such as these would negatively influence my students. Students most likely already have a good sense of right and wrong in their use of language and their behaviors. Findings from my study give me comfort in thinking that since the participants recognized Junie's language errors and unacceptable behaviors, most students will not imitate her language errors and unacceptable behaviors. The children in the study were particularly interested in the popular culture texts read, and as mentioned previously, interest and motivation to read will lead to students wanting to read more often, which would be wonderful in a classroom (Alverman, Hong Xu, 2003; Hong Xu, 2002).

I would include popular culture books, such as from the *Junie B. Jones* series, in reading instruction. Popular culture texts can be great assets to teachers for use in instruction (Alverman, Hong Xu, 2003; Hong Xu, 2002). I would teach students to critically analyze the texts that are part of their current social media. Students would be encouraged to critique the world around them through the lens of popular culture books, including discussing what is acceptable and what is not (Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003). These are authentic literacy experiences that the students can transfer to their everyday lives. Since children seemed to know right from wrong in my study, and Hong Xu found that teachers who utilized popular culture texts in their lessons responded positively, I would definitely work to include this genre of text into my classroom instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers could conduct similar studies with other children's books that include controversial characters. There is limited generalizability to texts outside of the *Junie B. Jones* series because popular culture texts differ greatly. Future researchers would add to the validity of this study by conducting studies in a similar fashion with other popular culture texts. Other texts that have been found to have controversial characters are books from the *Captain Underpants*, *Harry Potter*, and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series (Ratzan, 2005).

Future researchers could conduct similar studies with males. There is limited generalizability to the influence popular culture may have on all children because the participants were all females. This limitation was not intended, but occurred as a result of convenience sampling. If a researcher were to conduct a study in a similar fashion with some male participants, there would be greater generalizability in saying that children are not likely to speak and behave like a character after reading a popular culture text.

Future researchers could conduct similar studies in which participants would read the books. The texts utilized in this study were read to the participants for the sake of time and so that the results would not be affected by reading ability. The books were provided to the participants if they wanted to follow along as I read aloud. A future researcher could conduct a similar study with a group of children who have the reading ability to actually read a popular culture text. While personally

reading the text, participants might notice and comment on more, less, or different aspects than they did while being read to throughout the six sessions of this study.

Final Thoughts

Through studies such as this, people can judge the effects of popular culture texts on children. Positive or negative consequences may occur for children when they read popular culture books. Barbara Park includes typical grammatical errors made by young children in the language of Junie B. Jones in her popular culture books series, *Junie B. Jones* (Ratzan, 2005). Park felt she brought humor down to an early reader's level by writing the books in first person as a five year old girl, who later in the series turns six and enters first grade (Grossman, 2007). The participants in this study did find humor in the language errors and unacceptable behaviors that Junie displayed, and the participants also commented that Junie was immature, throughout the six sessions of the book club.

Popular culture texts have powerful benefits in literacy instruction. Students need to be made aware of the active literacy skills they are utilizing when they read a popular culture narrative. When students have that awareness, they can be guided to transfer literacy skills to other contexts in their schools and communities. It is highly recommended that teachers carefully plan their classroom libraries and instruction to include popular culture texts.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Questions

The following questions were asked during and after the reading.

- What did you like about this section? Why?
- What didn't you like about this section? Why?
- We're done reading for the day, do you wish we could keep going? Why or why not?
- How would you describe Junie?
- If Junie moved into your neighborhood, would you be friends with her? Why/why not?
- Does Junie remind you of anybody that you know? Why or why not?
- Do you think that Junie acts her age? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the way Junie speaks?
- What do you think about the way Junie acts?
- Why did you [smile/ laugh/look confused] when I read about [section of the book]?
- Find one section that was really funny to you. Why is it funny?
- If you were [in the same situation as Junie in a chosen book], what would you do?
- What did you think about this book as a whole?
- What was the major theme of this book? (or) What was it about?

- Ask for opinions, clarification, explanations and further information
- Express astonishment to encourage more sharing- ex: REALLY?!
- Ask hypothetical questions- ex: What if Junie became your neighbor?

Appendix B

Script Created in Sessions Five and Six

Junie B- Child #1

May, Principal, and Crook- Child #2

Teacher and Grandma- Child #3

Junie- My name is Junie B. Jones. The B stands for Beatrice. Except I don't like Beatrice. I just like B and that's all. My grandma gave me the bestest mittens in the world. I'll never give them away. They are made out of pink furry fur.

Narrator- Junie went to school and was yelling while showing them off.

Junie- HOW MANY CHILDREN CAN SEE THESE WONDERFULEST THINGS?

Narrator- Junie kept screaming about and showing off her new mittens.

Junie- MAY! MAY! LOOK AT MY GORGEOUS NEW MITTENS! SEE THEM?
THEY ARE MADE OUT OF PINK FURRY FUR!

Narrator- May petted the mittens and started to brag.

May- My family has a lot of fur. Fur coats, fur gloves, and fur rugs!

Narrator- The bell rang. Junie zoomed to her room like a speeding rocket. Guess why?

Junie- More people to show my mittens to! Mrs, look!

Teacher- Ohh they are soft! Put them in your jacket pocket so they don't get lost, ok?

Narrator- Junie skipped to her desk.

Junie- Yeah, only I'm not even going to lose them. I am going to wear them right on my hands because I love these guys.

Narrator- Mrs. Takes the mittens and off Junie's hands and puts them on her desk.

Teacher- You can have these back at recess.

Narrator- Junie does a sigh and puts her head on her desk, pouting.

Narrator- At recess, Junie ran up and took her mittens back before they went outside.

Junie- It's hotsy out here! Peoples, don't touch my mittens, got it?

Narrator- Junie put her mittens by a tree. While Junie was playing, a little girl saw them and picked them up.

Narrator- The bell rang to go inside.

Junie- SOMEBODY STOLED MY MITTENS! SOMEBODY STOLED MY MITTENS! 911! 911!

Teacher- Who, Junie B? Who stole them?

Junie- A stealer, that's who! A stealer stoled them!

Teacher- Go down to the principal's and check the lost and found.

Narrator- Junie checked the lost and found. She did not see her mittens. She did see a teddy backpack. She put it on and skipped around. Real thrilled, she hollered...

Junie- Ooo, I always wanted one of these. Maybe I will take this instead!

Principal- That is not yours. Put it back. Come down to look again tomorrow.

Narrator- Junie put it back and went back into the hallway.

Junie- Hey! It's one of those pens that writes four different colors! Wowie wow wow!

I should take it to the lost and found. But I bet the owner didn't even take care of it. I can give it a good home.

Narrator- At home, Junie was searching inside grandma's purse.

Junie- Grandma Frankie Miller! Grandma Frankie Miller! We gotta go to the mitten store! We gotta go to the mitten store!

Grandma- Go where?

Junie- The mitten store! Let's get a wiggle on! Someone stoled my mittens, and I didn't even know there were crooks at this place!

Grandma- Sorry, that was the last pair. Did you check the lost and found?

Junie- Yes!

Narrator- The next day at recess, a pink fluffy girl skipped by Junie.

Junie- Hey! My mittens! My mittens! In her pocket! She is the crook! She stoled them!

Crook- No I didn't. I found them. I thought nobody wanted them.

Teacher- Hush!

(to Crook)- Even if you wanted them, it was wrong of you to take them.

Crook- I'm sorry. Here you go.

Narrator- Junie quick put her mittens on and danced around real joyful! Later, Junie put the pen she found in the hallway into the lost and found. She wore a grin for the rest of the day.

All- The end.