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Varying Grouping Strategies for Literature Circle: Does Group Composition

Affect Student Verbal Participation?

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences of twelve regular education fourth grade students and their teacher as they participate in literature circles during their reading period at a small, K-8 elementary school. This study explores the possible correlations between students' verbal participation and various grouping strategies during literature circles. Data was collected and analyzed through the use of surveys, interviews, student work, and participant observations. The study suggests that varying the grouping structure for literature circles has an effect on the rate of verbal participation for students. The study documents no significant change in the students' ability to respond to literature through written response. The author documents changes in the students' attitudes toward the concepts of cooperative learning and literature circles over a four-month period.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
RESEARCHER STANCE.....	1
Background for the Research Study.....	1
Research Question.....	4
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Background Information.....	6
Student Attitudes Toward Reading.....	6
Literature circles.....	7
Benefits of Literature circles.....	8
Increased Comprehension.....	8
Increased Social Skills.....	9
Increased Ownership and Motivation.....	10

Grouping Strategies	11
Ability Grouping.....	12
Gender Grouping	14
Social Grouping	16
Conclusion	17
METHODOLOGY	18
Setting	18
Participants.....	18
Preparation for Action Research.....	19
Study Timeline.....	19
Data Collection	24
Data Analysis.....	28
Trustworthiness Statement.....	30
THIS YEAR’S STORY	35
Introduction.....	35
A New Year Begins	35
“In Omnia Paratus”	38
Practice Makes Possible.....	42
“If At First”	43
Grouping Strategies	44
Round One: Social Grouping.....	45

A Social Calamity: Sammy’s Story	46
Falling on Deaf Ears: Patti’s Story	47
Mending Broken Fences	48
Round Two: Gender Grouping	50
<u>Fourth Grade Rats: A Closer Look</u>	52
Interview Data.....	55
Round Three: Ability Grouping.....	57
Poetry Pastiche.....	61
“B” is for Believing	66
“B” is for Breakthrough.....	67
DATA ANALYSIS.....	70
FINDINGS	80
Theme 1: Student Verbal Participation.....	81
Theme 2: Increases in Comprehension	84
Theme 3: Attitudes Toward Literature	97
Theme 4: Group Dynamics	103
Theme 5: Connections to Literature	108
Theme 6: Attitudes Toward Peers.....	111
Conclusion	114
NEXT STEPS	115
REFERENCES	117

RESOURCES	123
APPENDIXES	125
A – Principal Consent Form	125
B – HSIRB Consent Form	127
C – Parent Consent Form.....	128
D – Cooperative Learning Survey	130
E – Literature Circle Survey	132
F – Reader’s Response Journal Samples	134
G – Sociogram Script.....	135
H – Reading and Writing Assignment Schedule	136
I – Self/Group Evaluation Form	137
J – Observation Skills Checklist	138
K – Verbal Participation Chart	139
L – Verbal Participation Chart for Poetry	140
M – Book Jacket Report Form.....	141
N – Student Interview Questions	142
O – Power Point Book Report Form.....	143
P – Poetry Night Invitation	145
Q – Alphabetized Coding Index	146

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Literature Circle Survey Results: Pre-Study.....	72
2. Cooperative Learning Survey Results: Pre-Study	73
3. Literature Circle Survey Results: Post-Study	74
4. Cooperative Learning Survey Results: Post-Study.....	75
5. Student Verbal Participation Rate Results.....	76
6. Book Report Grades for Marking Period One	95
7. Marking Period One Grades	97

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Student Sample: Patti's First Response	40
2. Student Sample: Peg's First Response.....	41
3. Student Sample: Sam's First Response.....	41
4. Student Sample: Joe's First Response	41
5. Joe's Group Evaluation.....	49
6. Sam's Group Evaluation.....	49
7. Sara's Group Evaluation.....	49
8. Jill's Group Evaluation	50
9. Allen's Group Evaluation	54
10. Sam's Group Evaluation.....	54
11. Poetry Pastiche.....	61
12. Patti's Examples of Poetic Elements	62
13. Sara's Examples of Poetic Elements.....	63
14. Jack's Examples of Poetic Elements.....	63
15. John's Imagery Poem.....	64
16. Sam's Imagery Poem	64
17. Ann's Imagery Poem	64

18. Jill's Imagery Poem	65
19. Graphic Organizer for Coded Bins	71
20. Sociogram	77
21. Pie Chart of Student Group Preference.....	78
22. Sam's Group Evaluation	83
23. Mary's Group Evaluation	84
24. Sara's Group Evaluation	84
25. Example of Text to Text Connection.....	86
26. Example of Text to Text Connection.....	86
27. Example of Text to Media Connection.....	87
28. Example of Text to Text Connection.....	87
29. Ann's Connection	88
30. Patti's Connection.....	88
31. Jill's Connection	89
32. Fishbowl Observation	91
33. Example of Students as Teachers	92
34. Example of Students as Teachers	92
35. Example of Students as Teachers	92
36. Example of "Fat" Questions	93
37. Example of "Fat" Questions	93
38. Example of "Fat" Questions	94

39. Field Log Observation	99
40. Student Motivation for Reading.....	100
41. Student Motivation for Reading.....	100
42. Student Motivation for Reading.....	100
43. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature.....	101
44. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature.....	102
45. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature.....	102
46. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Rats.....	104
47. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Celebrity.....	107
48. Allen's Reader's Response Journal Entry.....	110
49. Peg's Reader's Response Journal Entry	110
50. John's Self/Group Evaluation	112
51. Joe's Self/Group Evaluation	112
52. Mary's Self/Group Evaluation.....	112
53. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Rats.....	113

RESEARCHER STANCE

“I have to have someone who believes I can do it, just like I believe I can.”

Evander Holyfield

As a student in elementary school, I dreaded the mundane task of reading selections from a basal text, a text with which I had no connection or interest in reading. It was a text that had been chosen for me and for which questions were generated by the teacher or the Houghton Mifflin publishing company. I was always a successful reader but never found myself excited by the opportunity to read. Even when I was put into a reading group that was given a clever name such as the Bluebirds or the Soaring Eagles, the tasks remained the same: read this story and answer these questions. I wondered if the teachers thought that their students were incapable of generating their own questions. I knew I had valuable questions to ask. Why was I not being given the opportunity to pose them? Why did I never have a say in the books we read as a class? It was not until the sixth grade when a teacher introduced me to the idea of book clubs that I realized how enjoyable reading, both for school and pleasure, could be. This woman proved to me that students could be put in charge of the questions used for discussion. She made me believe that what I said and felt was equally as important as anything anyone could *tell* me about a book. According to Vygotsky, “reading and writing must be something the child needs” (1971, p. 117). I believed that creating this need in my students was a huge responsibility that needed to be a top priority. I

believed in my students' ability to be the masters of their own learning. My previous experiences with book clubs, both as a student and a teacher, have made me a strong supporter of Literature Circles as a form of reading instruction. I have faith in the grounding features of Literature Circles and hope to bring to my students that same feeling of elation with respect to reading that my sixth grade teacher instilled in me.

When I first began implementing Literature Circles during my second year of teaching, I was thrilled that I had found a method of reading instruction that provided my students with more choice and allowed them to collaborate with one another as they experienced new texts. Unfortunately, the first encounters my students had with Literature Circles were unsuccessful and, quite frankly, very disheartening. I observed students emerging as natural leaders who eventually ended up excluding other members of their group as they dictated what was to be talked about and when. I had students who were not able to hold their heads above water in a conversation with peers who possessed a much deeper level of comprehension. Students were genuinely frustrated. They were not getting any time to talk; their group members were talking over them and disrespecting their ideas. Mostly, I had groups of students who were simply sitting around staring at each other. They had nothing to talk about. The entire purpose of Literature Circles, engaging students in meaningful discussion about a particular piece of literature, was absent.

The frustrations my students and I were experiencing were what led me to look into the way I had been grouping my students for Literature Circles. I had seen the outcome of having the students grouped solely by book selection and was curious to see if more of the grand conversations Daniels discusses in his writings (1994, 2002, 2004) would be present in various grouping structures. It was during this time that I enrolled for a course specifically designed to study Literature Circles in the classroom. Because of this class, and the relationship I developed with the professor, Dr. Unger that I became certain I wanted to study Literature Circles as part of my thesis. The course gave me many wonderful ideas, but also left me with many questions about how to make Literature Circles function best in my own classroom. Should I utilize Daniels' roles throughout the entire circle, or would it be just as beneficial to use them only during the first few meetings? Do students feel intimidated when placed in a literature circle with students of a higher academic level? Does gender play a role in Literature Circles? Will allowing students to choose their own reading material enhance their interest? I was hungry for answers.

My childhood experiences coupled with my reflections on my past experiences working with grouping students for reading were the basis for the formulation of my research topic. I have chosen to research the effects of various grouping strategies on Literature Circle participation because I have a vested interest in making Literature Circles work for my students the way I believe they

can. I have a desire to promote genuine connections to texts, critical thinking, the acceptance of varying opinions, the confidence to express thoughts and ideas, the ability to learn from the ideas of others and, most importantly, the enjoyment of reading. It is my firm belief that the discussions students are involved in during successful Literature Circles can help to achieve these goals and many more. It is for these reasons that I am going to study the observable and reportable experiences that occur when various grouping practices are used during Literature Circles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The use of Literature Circles as an instructional technique for fostering positive attitudes toward reading has gained popularity among classroom teachers over the past decade. Benefits such as increases in comprehension, social skills, and student ownership of and motivation for reading have been documented in research articles noting the success of this particular method of instruction (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Daniels, 2002; Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Keegan & Shrake, 1991; Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Koskinen, 1994 as cited in Haverty, 1996; Lloyd, 2004; Long & Gove, 2003; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Stien & Beed, 2004). Likewise, researchers have conducted both quantitative and qualitative studies geared at documenting the benefits and drawbacks of using various grouping strategies with students. These studies have yielded contrasting conclusions as to which method of grouping achieves the greatest success while presenting the fewest disadvantages. Each of the issues surrounding these two educational strategies is valuable and worth discussing to aid in fostering a deeper understanding of their importance in the classroom.

Background Information

Student Attitudes Toward Reading

Banks once stated, “For success, attitude is equally important as ability” (Think Exist, 2007). Despite a student’s academic capability to be a successful reader, attitudes toward reading have played a significant part in each student’s success. Motivation and the desire to read have been key factors in achieving reading success. Students who have exhibited low self-esteem or a lack of confidence in their reading skills often harbored a negative attitude toward reading and showed little interest in engaging in activities that involve reading (Dean & Trent, 2002). Even students who rated their attitude toward reading as positive chose to participate in non-reading activities when given free time (Haverty, 1996; Wojciechoswki & Zweig, 2003). Students viewed reading as something associated only with school and with work (Haverty, 1996). Overemphasis on basal readers and skills, little time during the school day to read for enjoyment, and experiences with uninspiring material have left students with the impression that reading for leisure is an almost unthinkable pastime (Wojciechowski & Zweig, 2003). Without a sense of efficacy with respect to their skills as a reader, students avoid engaging in challenging reading activities and lose sight of the concept of reading for enjoyment (Baker & Wigfield 1999; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994; both cited in Dean & Trent, 2002). Anderson (1988) documented the connection between the amount of time spent on reading

during the school day and student attitudes about the importance of reading stating that students often associate the little amount of time given to reading as a sign of its overall unimportance (as cited in Wojciechowski & Zweig, 2003). The use of Literature Circles promotes students becoming deeply involved with a piece of literature. Students begin to realize the connections that can be made between what an author has written and their own personal lives. This type of connection fosters positive attitudes toward reading (Mizokawa & Hansen-Krening, 2000).

Literature Circles

Although they started out small in but a few classrooms across the country, literature circles, or book clubs, have become an increasingly popular method of reading instruction throughout the nation. With support from the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, as well as documentation from a number of qualitative and quantitative research studies, Literature Circles have achieved notoriety as a collaborative literacy method that works (Daniels, 2002). With more teachers experimenting with the implementation of this strategy in their classrooms, researchers have been working toward gathering a plethora of data that provides evidence for the successful effects on student performance Literature Circles can offer.

Benefits of Literature Circles

Increased Comprehension

One positive effect for students working in Literature Circles is an increase in reading comprehension. Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumm (1998) found that students who worked with peers and generated their own discussions of literature exhibited significant gains in comprehension. Educators are aware that there is more to teaching reading than having students read the words on the page. Helping students understand, interpret, and create relationships with literature is often an area where teachers struggle to achieve success for all students. Working in literature circles assists students in creating connections between their personal lives and texts through comparing and contrasting literature selections with their own experiences (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Keegan & Shrake, 1991). Students also become more adept at making connections between texts they have read (Stien & Beed, 2004). The collaborative setting inherent to Literature Circles provides students with an opportunity “to move from literal, text-based conversations of texts to purposefully reflecting and looking at texts from more than one perspective” (Long & Gove, 2004, p. 359). Burns (1998) stated:

The social interaction that takes place in a Literature Circle is the key component of its success. To be able to verbalize the content, to listen to other modes of thinking, and to hear other perspectives all contribute to deeper comprehension. (p. 127)

By monitoring their own reading and discussing their ideas with others, students strengthen their ability to raise their own questions and construct meaning for what they read by using prior knowledge and information from the text (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Stien & Beed, 2004).

Increased Social Skills

A second positive outcome that results from the implementation of Literature Circles is an increase in students' social skills including, but not limited to, appropriate eye contact, discussion skills, active listening skills, and acceptance of other students. Because students do not exist in a vacuum, these skills are important to their development as members of a classroom community. Possessing the faculties to interact and converse appropriately with peers is a skill that is not only important during Literature Circles, but throughout the students' entire lives. Cooperative learning allows for the purposeful interaction and dialogue of students. It is this ongoing dialogue that fosters greater communication skills, growth in listening skills, and increases the respect and acceptance of others' opinions (Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Lloyd, 2004). This improved willingness to accept each other as individuals who possess worthwhile opinions leads to the deeper valuing of the ideas of others (Stien & Beed, 2004). Lloyd (2004) also documented students involved in student book clubs engaging in appropriate eye contact and responding and reacting in ways that demonstrated "real conversation" (p. 122). These grand conversations, as they are referenced by

Daniels (2002) are the culminating product when all the social skills merge and students are actively engaged in literature discussion.

Increased Ownership and Motivation

A third advantage that may result from the use of Literature Circles is an increase in student ownership of learning and reading motivation. Literature Circles require a high level of student responsibility and autonomy as they require students to choose their own reading materials and then develop discussion topics surrounding this material (Daniels, 2002). “Students involved in Literature Circles are invited to develop and discuss their own questions and answers in ways that expand upon individual interpretations and elevate responses to reading” (Brabham & Villaume, 2000, p. 279). Burns (1998) agrees, stating that the prime characteristic of allowing students to develop and discuss their own questions and interpretations provides them with a sense of responsibility for their learning. This also gives students rather than teachers a chance to be in control of the talk happening within the classroom. Because students are required to determine the reading schedule and assignments as well as determine what is valuable enough to discuss, they are essentially guiding their own learning. Students involved in Literature Circles learn to value literacy and literature, and talk about books and reading both in and out of school (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Lloyd (2004) documented that through Literature Circles even the most reluctant readers can become drawn into the conversations about text.

Providing students with more choice is the chief means by which Literature Circles give students increased ownership of their learning. “Children are highly motivated to read books of their own choosing” (Koskinen, 1994 as cited in Haverty, 1996, p. 47). Literature Circles give students the power to self-select what they will read and discuss. Discussions are held in cooperative learning groups and are completely student led. Students determine what the group will discuss and use social skills to determine who will lead and what are appropriate turn taking skills (Long & Gove, 2003). In a teacher research study, Jewell and Pratt (1999) documented that through allowing students to choose the text that they had the highest interest in, the assignments, and the type of written response they would complete, helped to increase motivation and enthusiasm for reading. However, they note that it is the ability to learn who they are as a reader and what they are capable of doing that is the most important.

Grouping Strategies

The ability to work together is a necessary aspect in today’s society. With an increased desire to mesh the teaching of a curriculum with the development of social skills, educators have turned to the methods of cooperative and collaborative learning (Dalton & Watson, 1997, 1999; Gibbs, 2000; Lipsitz, 1995; Noddings, 1992, 1995, all cited in Wood, Roser, & Martinez, 2001). While varying slightly in their origin, these two grouping strategies share the common goal of creating personal meaning and comprehension through the use of dialogue

and discussion (Davidson, 1994, as cited in Wood et al., 2001). Klebosits and Perrone (1998) recommended “That cooperative learning be used, as an educational tool, since it helps students increase their academic achievement and social skills” (p. 37). There are, however, a number of avenues for grouping that educators can pursue. Due to the fact that each method of grouping presents advantages as well as drawbacks, researchers have spent a great deal of time studying the outcomes connected to their use.

Ability Grouping

The use of ability grouping with students has been a topic of debate in education for many years. Specifically, the implementation of heterogeneous and homogeneous ability grouping of students has caused controversy among both researchers and educators. Contrasting findings from both qualitative and quantitative research has provided teachers with data documenting the successes and failures of each grouping practice.

According to some researchers, the use of heterogeneous ability grouping in the classroom can have benefits for all students involved, despite ability level. Research by Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1997) found that students who were both good and poor readers preferred working in mixed-ability groups over other forms of grouping including same ability pairs. Similarly, Burns (1998) agrees that heterogeneous grouping provides students who find sections of text challenging someone who can help. Student interviews from a study done by Lyle

(1999) showed that students in mixed-ability groups reported receiving assistance from group members, which helped their reading significantly. All children in the study, whether high, middle, or low ability, felt they had learned new literacy skills and developed better group work skills through the heterogeneously grouped cooperative learning groups in which they were placed. Blum, Lipsett and Yocom (2002) propose that the use of Literature Circles is one way to differentiate reading instruction to benefit all students.

Having the opportunity to help lower-ability students increases students' own understanding of certain literacy skills (Lyle, 1999). This type of metacognitive awareness is a desired goal for educators as they strive to help their students achieve higher order thinking skills. Slavin and Stevens (1995) called this type of interaction a "cognitive apprenticeship" in which students work with peers who are at various levels of mastery for particular skills (p. 242). It is the students themselves who provide the support and guidance to one another for all to attain mastery of said skill. The peer apprenticeship becomes an important and powerful support for struggling students.

Finally, the concept that students of different ability levels can work together successfully without damaging the self-image of students of lower ability or creating a learning hierarchy among students of higher academic ability is an important finding in research. Shields (2000) noted no differences in the self confidence, autonomy, enjoyment of school, independent development, and

involvement in school activities or peer relations among students placed in mixed-ability groups.

The use of homogeneous ability grouping has received negative praise from some researchers suggesting that this type of tracking is not beneficial to all students and in fact has the possibility to be detrimental to some. Wheelock (1992) writes that homogeneous ability grouping primarily benefits the students who are of higher academic ability, while the students grouped in lower ability groupings fall into a pattern of working at a much slower pace. This particular type of grouping creates inequalities in the type of instruction and interactions students in the very same classroom experience. Similarly, Oakes (1985) contends that students in low and middle ability levels of tracking are not given the same learning opportunities as students of high academic ability.

Gender Grouping

The differences between boys and girls with respect to classroom talk and involvement are an area of high interest for educators. The need to reach and involve all students in both the academic and social arena present in schools is a concern for all educators. Research conducted by Holden (1993) documents evidence “that the composition of groups has a considerable effect on the quantity and quality of pupil talk” (p. 187). Findings such as this have led researchers on a quest to determine the effectiveness of single and mixed-gender grouping.

Although there are benefits to both single and mixed gender grouping structures, Klebosits and Perrone (1998) conclude that “single gender grouping allows for students to be more functional while working cooperatively” to hone academic and social skills (p. 32). Students working in same gender groups also exhibit positive group interactions, demonstrate valuable social skills, and openly express their opinions with their peers (Klebosits & Perrone, 1998).

Contrastingly, Holden (1993) postulates that it is when mixed gender groups are utilized, that girls have a greater opportunity to express themselves and each sex can learn from the strengths of the opposite gender as they work toward a common goal. Likewise, having students work in mixed gender groups fosters healthy, friendly relationships between members of the opposite sex (McCaslin, Tuck, Wiard, Brown, LaPage & Pile, 1994).

Creating a setting where students feel comfortable enough to express their opinions and offer assistance to their peers are two other important aspects of successful group work. The number of boys and girls in each group has the potential to affect the verbal participation of the students involved (Holden, 1993). This is one reason it is suggested that teachers remain flexible in determining the need for either single or mixed-gender groups (Holden, 1993; Klebosits & Perrone, 1998). Students working in mixed gender groups, although slow to offer their help at the onset of cooperative learning, warm up quickly and are more eager to extend their knowledge to their group’s members than students

engaged in single gender groups (McCaslin et al., 1994). Although contrasting findings on gender grouping do not offer to teachers clear instruction, the idea that it is the teacher's responsibility to determine which form of gender grouping will best benefit his or her students at the present time of instruction is evident.

Social Grouping

Allowing students to choose whom they will work with is a third grouping strategy teachers can implement in the classroom. There are several reasons to consider avoiding allowing students to choose their own group members. Self-selected groups may end up containing students who are all at the same academic level. This could lead to some groups being unable to complete certain tasks due to a lack of sufficient academic knowledge (Arizona Board of Regents, 2002). Also, students who are shy, have difficulty communicating, or are unpopular may find themselves being unfairly discriminated against as students decide with whom they wish to work. This is setting that group up for failure because they are already socially unmotivated (Blowers, 2003). However, Daniels (2002) suggests that as long as students are completing the assigned tasks, engaging in meaningful discussion, and working toward the common goal of the group, allowing students to work with peers of their choice should not prove to be a problem. Self-selected student groups create a fun, relaxed, and safe environment where students can work cooperatively to complete assigned tasks while providing them with the feeling of having some control over their learning (Glenn, 1996).

Conclusion

Research has shown that separately Literature Circles and the use of various grouping strategies can achieve success for students. However it is when each is looked at in the context of the other that it can be seen how a powerful combination could emerge. Optimizing student learning through the use of various grouping strategies while fostering a love and appreciation for literature is a goal that can be achieved. As teachers and researchers continue to document the experiences encountered with students involved in Literature Circle groups and more knowledge emerges about these two concepts, it will be the responsibility of professional educators to find ways to implement these two success strategies into their daily routine.

METHODOLOGY

Setting

This study was conducted at Our Town Elementary School (pseudonym), a school servicing students in grades kindergarten through eighth in rural Our Town, New Jersey (pseudonym). Located in Northwestern New Jersey, on the Pennsylvania-New Jersey border, Our Town is part of Warren County. The population of approximately 2,500 people is comprised mainly of white, middle-income families with two or more children. The school is the only one in the district and has been so since 1913. My research study was specifically conducted within the context of my fourth grade classroom during the months of September through December.

Participants

The subjects included my twelve fourth grade students whose ages ranged from nine to ten. The students were both male and female. The subject pool included five regular education students, four gifted students, and three students who had been classified as needing additional support in the classroom in the area of language arts. Students were from a variety of socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This study focused on one general education, mainstreamed classroom. As a teacher-researcher, I too was a participant in this study. At the time of this study, I was beginning my fourth year as a fourth grade teacher at Our Town Elementary.

Preparation for Action Research

During the summer of 2006, I worked on finalizing my literature review in preparation for beginning my research study. I provided my principal with a principal consent form (Appendix A) indicating the dates and purpose for my study. The two of us discussed at length the objectives of my study, and I obtained her consent to move forward with my research. I also provided the Moravian College Human Subjects Review Board with the necessary information to obtain consent to carry out my research. After reviewing the proposed information, the HSIRB granted me permission on August 2, 2006 to begin my study (Appendix B).

Study Timeline

On the first day of the 2006/2007 school year, I read aloud and explained to my students a copy of the parent consent letter (Appendix C). Each student received a copy of this letter and was instructed to return it no later than the end of the week. After collecting all twelve of the parent consent forms, all granting permission for the students to participate in the study, I took some time to provide my students with some background of the study. I explained to them the concept of graduate school and the reasons I was interested in studying literature circles.

I answered any questions they posed and fielded their comments with accurate responses. Next, I began to collect some data. During that first week of

school, I administered two pre-study student surveys on cooperative learning (Appendix D) and Literature Circles (Appendix E). I made two tables with the information from each survey (see Tables 1-4), which I used to gain knowledge of my students' opinions and attitudes concerning the two survey topics. Also during that first week, my students and I brainstormed and charted a list of desirable discussion behaviors that were hung in the front of the room where they remained for the duration of the study.

I reserved the second week of school for modeling and practicing the use of a post-it note strategy to aid making connections to literature. I began this modeling by explaining the five categories of connections: text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world, vocabulary, and question to the students. As I read aloud to the class the first half of First Day Jitters, I modeled using post-it notes to make each type of connection. I then had the students practice using the post-it notes to make their own connections as I finished the story. I used a fishbowl technique with two students and myself to model discussing and sharing text connections. During rest of this week we practiced this strategy as a whole group using leveled readers offered through the reading series present in my school.

In the third week of the study, I introduced to students the concept of a reader's response journal. I gave each student a one-subject notebook with an insert stapled into the front of each student journal; this insert displayed a multitude of types of acceptable responses (Appendix F). Each day, three of the

responses were discussed and modeled for students. The students were given the opportunity to practice each response type by responding to Allen Say's Grandfather's Journey and Charlotte Zolotow's Seashore. Response samples were displayed around the room for further reference. Time was also dedicated to having the students practice responding orally to each others' journal entries. This was the introduction to learning to piggyback.

We spend the week of September 24th through September 28th was spent practicing the already learned skills of making connections through the use of the post-it note strategy, responding in the reader's response journals, and using good discussion skills. Students worked with leveled readers and worked on sharing their connections and responses through the use of a speed share in which students are each given three minutes to share, three minutes to listen to their partner, and then ten minutes to discuss together their connections. I also administered a sociogram (see Figure 20) to the students this week in order to determine the members for the first round of literature circles. The students were presented with a 3 X 5 index card on which to write the names of the three students they would be most interested in working with. I used a pre-constructed script to explain the purpose and intent of the assignment (Appendix G).

The first round of literature circles, which was based on social grouping and the genre of mystery writing, began on October 31, 2006 and concluded on November 11, 2006. Students were each given a literature circle folder in which to store all of their materials. I briefly described each of the mysteries, and then

informed the students of their group members. Each group was given one of the mysteries and instructed to meet with their group, peruse their novel, and write some predictions about the story while I worked with each group individually to construct a schedule of reading and writing assignments (Appendix H). As a class we devised a schedule for when the groups would meet and when the students would have individual work time to complete literature circle assignments. At the end of this class, I also handed out and explained the self/group evaluation form (Appendix I).

For the duration of this round, students met for literature circle three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Mondays and Thursdays were set aside for individual work time. Students continued to read and write in their journals and fill out the self/group evaluation forms after each literature circle. I observed one group on each day using the observation skills checklist (Appendix J) or a form of a verbal participation chart (Appendices K & L) and took field notes on their performance during the circle. I also held a community share period before and after each literature circle meeting for the purpose of instruction and debriefing. I used the community share period before the groups met to teach mini-lessons on finding support in the text and supporting opposing viewpoints. The debriefing session was used to address any concerns either the students or I had concerning literature circles or the study itself. The students were required to create book jacket reports (Appendix M) as the culminating project for their mystery.

I began the second round of literature circles on November 14, 2006. This round was based on gender and a unit on 4th grade characters. I gave a brief description of the books that were available for this round and informed the students of their group members. I passed out the books and a new schedule sheet. I worked with each group separately to create a new reading and writing assignment schedule while the other two groups previewed their novel and wrote predictions in their reader's response journals. I continued to hold the community share sessions both before and after the students met for literature circles. During this round I focused on teaching the students about cause/effect relationships and identifying the author's viewpoint. I also began to interview the students individually at my desk (Appendix N), meeting with three students a day during an individual work period when other students were working on literature circle assignments. Students continued to meet three times a week with their group to discuss their novels while I used the observation skills checklist to document their verbal participation. Each student was required to create a power point book report (Appendix O) based on their group novel. This served as the culminating project for the unit.

Round three of literature circles based on ability level and a unit on poetry, began on November 28, 2006. For this round the students in each group read the same pieces of poetry and the groups would be meeting daily versus only three times a week. Each day during community share the students learned about a new

poetic element including rhyme scheme, personification, onomatopoeia, repetition, sense words, and imagery. They also learned about and wrote haikus, diamantes, cinquains, couplets, triplets, quatrains, biopoems, shape poems, and poems in iambic pentameter. The culminating project for this round was a coffee house poetry night (Appendix P), held on February 6, 2007, at which the students shared favorite poetry as well as original pieces. This event was attended by family, friends, and the school principal.

Data Collection

Observational Methods

An observation skills checklist (Appendix J) and two verbal participation charts (Appendices K & L) were included as a means of measuring the verbal and auditory participation of students during literature circle meetings. Among other desired behaviors, the checklist included four of the dependent variables for this study: student questions posed, student responses to questions posed by others, student sharing of reader's response journal entries and student ability to formulate discussion based on new concepts. Each day, I used the checklist to monitor two or three students' ability to demonstrate said behaviors and documented them using the checklists. I also used this form of data collection to see if there were differences in the number of times a student exhibited a particular behavior when they were in a particular group setting. For example, I may have seen through my records that Student A had more tallies in the poses

questions column when he or she was working in a group that was of the same gender as him/herself as opposed to when the gender was heterogeneously grouped. By only observing two or three students a day, I had sufficient time to observe each student. This also kept the task from becoming overwhelming. The checklist was a quick and easy method for keeping track of a student participation in literature circle and helped me to identify areas of weakness.

I maintained a field log to record my observations of students during all aspects of reading instruction. Students were asked to complete three projects throughout the course of the study: a book jacket, a power point presentation, and participation in a coffee house poetry night. These projects provided me with three more methods of assessment to monitor students' academic success.

Interview/Survey Methods

Two attitudinal surveys using a Likert Scale for rating were given to the students to assist in creating some baseline data for my study. One of the surveys was used to determine the types of grouping that students preferred and their general opinions on collaborative working groups. The second survey was used to obtain student thoughts on literature circles and reading in general. By administering these two surveys, I was able to ascertain an idea of where my students stood in their experiences with using group work as a teaching tool during reading instruction and also gained knowledge concerning their previous experience with literature circles. The surveys were again given at the close of

the study as a means of comparing student attitudes on the two topics addressed after working with literature circles for half of the school year.

After gathering data from the surveys, I formally interviewed all students to gain a more in-depth perception of the students' feelings on the use of literature circles as a method of reading instruction. Through a series of open-ended questions, I expanded on the ratings given by students in the attitudinal surveys. Two or three students were interviewed each day during the seventh week of the study. I interviewed the students individually at my desk while the remainder of the class worked independently on literature circle assignments or met in their literature circle groups. In order to put the students more at ease, in hopes of getting the most honest answers, I informed them that the only people who knew what we talked about were the two of us. These interviews allowed me to dig deeper into my students' perceptions and impressions surrounding the use of literature circles as a means of reading instruction. Informal interviews with students were also conducted throughout the study to help keep me abreast of changing attitudes in students.

Student Work Collection

As part of their literature circle experience, students were asked to keep a reader's response journal in which they responded to each night's reading. An insert (Appendix F) was stapled into the front of each student's journal displaying a multitude of types of acceptable responses. Each response was modeled for

students during week three of the study. Students used these journals to prompt discussion in their literature circle meetings and also as their own space to put down their thoughts and feelings about what they were reading. Once a week I collected and briefly responded to the response journals of each group while they read independently; I returned them before the end of the period. The journals provided me with a weekly look into my students' personal interactions with their text. The journals accounted for the majority of the students' grades.

Student self/group evaluations were another form of data collection for this study. These evaluations (Appendix I) were given to the members of the groups at the end of each literature circle meeting, read by myself, and used to target any concerns students were having about the way they or their group members were performing. By combining the comments of the group members, I was able to discuss with students ways to make their circle run more smoothly or compliment strategies they were employing that were working successfully.

During week four of the study, students were asked to fill out an index card with the three students they would most like to work with in a group during the year. These cards were used to construct a sociogram which was used to determine the groups for the first round of literature circles for the study. I developed a script (Appendix G) to read to the students explaining the purpose of this activity.

Data Analysis

Using a sociogram, (Figure 20), I analyzed the type of student with whom my students enjoy working. I was interested in seeing whether students chose peers who had similar academic ability, learning styles, and interests or peers who were opposite themselves. A sociogram provided me with a visual piece of data that illustrated student opinion and choice. The data gathered from the sociogram showed me what type of student my students thought were most beneficial to work with.

I evaluated the students' reader's response journals throughout the study. I looked for evidence that they were taking what was being discussed in their group meetings and incorporating it into their journals. I evaluated the variety in their responses to monitor levels of comprehension. Are they posing questions, making connections with text, and do I see evidence of the mini-lessons being taught during the community share sessions of the reading period? I analyzed the students' self/group-evaluations to monitor the actions of each literature circle. I hoped that the students were honest enough to provide me with important information concerning their frustrations and successes.

I examined students' attitudinal surveys pre- and post-study. I documented any change in student perceptions and opinions. Had their liking of a particular type of grouping changed since the onset of the study? Did they see the value of discussion as a learning tool? Had their experiences with literature

circles strengthened their confidence in expressing their opinions within a group? I analyzed the interview data to document students' attitudes toward literature circles and collaborative learning groups. I wanted to gain an understanding of the students' perceptions concerning the reasons group work is implemented in classrooms and the benefits/disadvantages that accompany this learning method. Why did they think teachers used collaborative groups? Why did students prefer certain group dynamics to others?

I analyzed the observation skills checklist each week. I looked for evidence of growth in students' ability to demonstrate the desired behaviors on the checklist. I was interested in seeing if any differences in the students' behaviors in different group settings emerged. Lastly, I returned frequently to my researcher field log to analyze the data contained within. By looking for connections between observations, I began my search for emerging themes in my data. I used coding and binning to group the data by these recurring themes. When coding, I looked for examples or evidence of participation in literature circles, student comfort level in expressing opinions during literature circle, demonstration of active listening skills, students' use of discussion techniques introduced during community share, and evidence of the use of appropriate discussion behaviors. Gathering student work samples through the reader's response journals provided a comparison of student work throughout the study. The use of the observation

skills checklist documented student growth of their ability to verbally participate in literature discussions as well as their ability to listen actively to their peers.

Administering the attitudinal surveys pre- and post-study allowed me to authenticate changes in student perceptions and attitudes toward the use of Literature Circles and collaborative grouping. Collecting responses from student interviews and self- and group-evaluations gave me a deeper understanding of their opinions concerning key concepts involved in this study. Maintaining a researcher field log allowed me to record my observations, which I later returned to to search for emerging themes in my data.

Trustworthiness Statement

The multiple methods of data collection I implemented in this study allowed me to triangulate my data, thereby increasing the level of the study's validity. My design included student attitudinal surveys, student interviews, observation skills checklists, student work samples, student self- and group-evaluation sheets, and researcher notes. These methods provided various angles from which to view my research. I also maintained a researcher field log in which I recorded observations of my students. The log was also an area for storing anecdotal records in the form of vignettes, figurative language analysis, and my own personal reflections on the progress of my study. Through these records, I was sure to document the students' reactions to and attitudes toward literature circles as they became more involved throughout the study. I returned regularly

to my field log to code and bin my data. I sought out recurring themes in the data which provided me with a path for my research to follow (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Through the use of attitudinal surveys and one-on-one interviews, I acquired an understanding of my students' attitudes about the use of literature circles for reading instruction. These two sources also provided a window into my students' feelings about the use of collaborative working groups in the classroom. The use of both an oral and written method for gathering these data gave students the opportunity to be as open and honest as they felt necessary. For my interviews I specifically asked open-ended questions and followed up on my students' answers without probing them for what I hoped to hear (Seidman, 1998). Knowing that the information they provided would only be shared with me also allowed them to put forth more honest opinions (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). By administering both forms of data collection, I got the most accurate representation of my students' opinions. Through implementing self/group evaluations, I made the most of student feedback concerning literature circles. The input provided through these evaluations helped me better formulate mini-lessons to address areas of concern and frustration, while highlighting strategies that were successful. I also assured students that their work and ideas would be protected throughout the study by means of a randomly selected and assigned number key (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005).

I informed parents of all aspects concerning my research, including its importance to the students, the teaching profession, and me. I requested their permission to include their children in my study and assured them that their children's work and identity would remain protected throughout the course of the study. Parents had the option to remove their children from the study if, at any time, they or their children became uncomfortable with the nature of the research (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Although all students would participate in literature circles as one of the primary forms of reading instruction, I only included data for students from whom I had received a signed informed consent form. My principal was also informed of my study and its objectives. Principal consent was obtained before any aspect of the study commenced.

I discussed the nature of my study with the case managers and basic skills instructors of the students in my class who qualify for such services to assure that said students' needs were being met. I also kept my principal abreast of the study's progress. The perspectives these colleagues shared improved my study. I conducted my study for approximately four months to supply a sufficient amount of data to analyze. After reviewing literature regarding collaborative learning and the use of literature circles, I had a formidable background from which to direct my research. I also reflected upon prior experience as a classroom teacher to guide my research.

Because I had a personal connection to my research, I had to work very hard to keep my biases in check. My enthusiasm for literature circles as a form of literature instruction had the potential to skew the way I analyzed my observations if I did not continually remind myself that this bias existed. Similarly, it was possible that the biases I had with respect to my students' previous performance in the classroom as well as what I had heard from their previous teachers concerning their classroom behavior and academic performance would interfere with my performance as a researcher. One way I attempted to combat this interference was by not discussing any particulars of my study with any teachers other than those in my researcher support group. This protected me from encountering any feedback from teachers who had my students in previous years. It was also crucial for me to separate my own personal experiences with literature as a student from the experiences my students created.

I remained open to the multiple outcomes my study produced. In addition to the possibility of students engaging in deeper levels of conversation during literature circles, I may have seen students' discussion skills increase in other areas outside of literature circles. It is possible that through working collaboratively in a safe environment, students would likely share their opinions and ideas on subjects other than literature. Students may have begun to read more on their own and may even begin discussing these books with their peers at other times throughout the school day. On the contrary, I may have observed students

engaging in the same behaviors as students I have had in the past with respect to literature circles. The data I collected may reveal that students at this age are not capable of engaging in the deep levels of discussion I envision.

Finally, through working with a researcher support group on a weekly basis, I discussed what was happening with my study. The opinions, suggestions, and feedback the members of my group offered me kept me an honest and trustworthy researcher. These co-researchers brought an outside eye to my study, which strengthened the entire action research process.

THIS YEAR'S STORY

Introduction

“Within our dreams and aspirations we find our opportunities.” Sugar Ray

Leonard

This study was an opportunity, an opportunity to follow my aspirations of creating a rich literature environment where my students could experience the freedom of sharing their innermost connections to literature. It was an opportunity to better myself as a teacher as I strived to make memorable the interactions with reading my students would encounter this year. During the next four months, my students and I would begin to realize the innumerable opportunities for personal and academic growth that could be found through working cooperatively in Literature Circles. Together we would work through challenges and triumphs in an ultimate struggle to achieve our goal of creating successful book clubs.

A New Year Begins

All teachers are aware that it takes some time to become accustomed to the school routine after a relaxing summer vacation. This is true both for the students as well as the teacher. Getting back into the swing of things is often the primary obstacle that needs to be overcome during the first few weeks of school. However, I never think it is as difficult for the teacher as it is for the students. The advancement from third to fourth grade may not seem daunting when only considered at the surface level. However it is a transition into a setting where the

teacher is going to place many of the responsibilities once bolstered by the teacher upon the shoulders of the student. The workload increases as does the difficulty of the material. Students move from reading short excerpts in their anthologies to engaging in the reading of chapter books and texts that are very content laden. This is often quite a culture shock for the students! I knew it would take some time for my students to adjust to the new expectations, but felt that introducing my study during the first week would allow us ample time to work through any confusion surrounding regular classroom procedures or the study itself.

Like a fighter before a match, awaiting the sound of the bell, it was with great excitement and trepidation that I introduced the idea of literature circles to my students. Having been unsuccessful with their implementation in the past, I wanted nothing more than to prove to both my students and myself that they were a wonderful way of studying literature. Across the country, literature circles have achieved notoriety as a collaborative literacy method that works (Daniels, 2002), and I was hoping my students would be as interested as I was to see if they would work for us. Their initial interest was almost tangible as they bombarded me with a barrage of questions.

Jack: “Do we get to pick the groups?”

Miss Pierzga: “In a way, yes, you will get to determine some of the groups.”

Jill: “Wait, we get to choose the books? What if everyone wants a different one?”

Miss Pierzga: “I will be providing a few different books each time we do a new

circle. I'll have you write down which books you're most interested in and I'll try my best to give you your top choice."

Sara: "Are you gonna grade us?"

Miss Pierzga: "Yes, of course I'm going to grade you. For the first marking period, Literature Circles are going to be a big part of your reading grade."

According to Vygotsky (1978), "Any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history" (p. 84). This rang true for my students since a few of them immediately connected literature circles to the Literary Lunch Bunch they had been engaged in during the previous year. Here they would spend a few lunch periods a month with their teachers reading aloud and discussing books. It eased my anxiety knowing they had some form of reference for what they were about to be a part of for the next four months. During this first week, I would also need to gather some base data with respect to my students' attitudes and opinions toward the concepts of collaborative learning and literature circles. I explained to the students that I would be giving them the same survey twice, once in the beginning of the study and once toward the end, to determine if their attitudes had changed over the course of the first marking period. I gave two separate surveys, one for each concept, and created tables (Figures 3 & 4) to interpret the data.

“In Omnia Paratus”

“In all things prepared” is the motto of Rider University, the institution where I conducted my undergraduate education. Strongly believing in this creed, I set about preparing my students with the tools they would need to be successful readers participating in literature circles. The first matter at hand was determining the types of behaviors that would be appropriate during literature circle. I posed this topic to the students, and together we brainstormed a list of behaviors that would remain posted in the classroom for the next few months. Their responses, although plentiful, focused more on what I deemed classroom behaviors such as raising your hand to speak and keeping your hands and feet to yourself. Although these are certainly behaviors I expect to see in the classroom, they were not exactly the responses for which I was aiming. We needed to talk about discussion behaviors. I thought perhaps a different approach would elicit the responses I desired. “What kind of ‘rules’ do you use when having a conversation in the cafeteria?” I asked. Sadly, there could not seem to be a connection between cafeteria conversation and the conversation we might have over a piece of literature. I thought perhaps the students had become so accustomed to structured discussion of literature that they might not even be able to see it as something possible in a leisurely way. Finally, Sue suggested taking turns to speak as an appropriate discussion behavior to which I strongly agreed. This got the

conversation headed in the right direction, and within the next fifteen minutes we had quite a lengthy list of acceptable discussion behaviors.

Next on the agenda was the matter teaching my students *how* to connect to literature. I would be using a post-it note strategy I picked up from a book I had read by Chris Tovani. This strategy has the students use post-it notes to mark in the text where they are making connections. This makes it much easier to come back to those sections during discussion. There were five types of general connections the students could note: Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World, Vocabulary, and Question. I introduced and explained each type of connection by reading with the students the beginning of The Case of the Missing Key, a short leveled reader, and making connections as I read. As I thought out loud, I modeled for the students how I connected to this particular story. After carefully explaining my thought process and going into detail on each connection it was time for the students to give it a whirl.

I gave each student five post-it notes, one for each type of connection. As we continued to read the conclusion of the Case of the Missing Key, students used their post-its to mark connections. When finished, I had the students share some of their connections. Not surprisingly, intense discussion surrounding this story was not present, but at least the students were getting the feel for sharing their ideas and opinions. Over the next few days we would continue to work with this post-it note strategy first with a partner, and eventually with small groups.

It was time to introduce the reader's response journal, or RRJ as we would affectionately begin to call it. This was going to be one of the primary methods of assessment I would be using to monitor my students' progress. I was disappointed by the students' response to my enthusiastic introduction. No one asked any questions about the log entries. They seemed to be taking everything I said in stride without question. I would have almost been happier had they done the opposite. I would not be down for the count. I decided to forge on to explain one of the nine types of journal responses posted in the front of the students' journals. Me and the Book is akin to the Text-to-Self connections they had made previously using the post-it notes. I read aloud First Day Jitters, a story with an unpredictable ending. I asked the students to take five minutes to write a Me and the Book response in their RRJs. After only three minutes, some of them were shaking out their hands, and by the end of the five minutes, many of the students had only written one or two sentences (see Figures 1-4).

9/18/06
 Me and the book (TS)
 Sometimes I try to avoid to go
 to school and don't want to get up.
 I'm tired and my head hurts. Also
 I pull the covers over my head.
 But then my mom makes me
 get up and fall right back to sleep.
 I eat breakfast then get in the
 shower.

Figure 1. Patti's first Reader's Response Journal Entry.

Me and the book (T-s) 9/18/04

In the book there is a girl named Sara Hartwell she is a girl that is going to be a new teacher

Figure 2. Peg's first Reader's Response Journal Entry.

Me and the book (TS) 9/18/06

I didn't want to go to school the first day. My parents made me.

Figure 3. Sam's first Reader's Response Journal Entry.

Me and the Book 7/18/10 5A

When I was new here I met my principal.

Figure 4. Joe's first Reader's Response Journal Entry.

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that, "Writing should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them" (p. 118). I knew that somehow I would have to create this intrinsic need in my students with respect to their RRJs. As it stood, they were not yet seeing the benefit of writing in this type of response

format. It was merely another assignment they needed to complete. I needed to make them *want* to write in their journals. Somehow I needed to create a desire to take this notebook home every night. So over the next week, I continued to show the students examples of each of the responses from the sheet stapled into their reader's response journals. I remained enthusiastic and hopeful as we talked about how each response would be able to jumpstart a conversation during literature circle. Each example was written on chart paper and hung on the blinds for further reference. I provided plenty of opportunities for the students to practice writing in their RRJs about books we read in class during snack time and at the end of the day. I made sure that all the students had the opportunity to celebrate their ideas by sharing them aloud with the class. As a last stitch effort, I even began collecting and responding to two or three of the journals each day. It was my hope that all the effort we were pouring into these journals would help to foster that intrinsic need Vygotsky had mentioned.

Practice Makes Possible

I also wanted the kids to participate in little mock literature circles using leveled readers so I could observe how their discussion skills were developing. I used index cards with the students' names to place them into random groups to read The Case of the Missing Monkeys. They would spend the next two days reading, discussing, and responding to this mystery. It would be their first real experience with literature circle and my first real chance to watch them in action.

IF AT FIRST...

<p>How should we begin our talk? Maybe with a short book walk. Make predictions from the cover Listening to one another “Remember <u>Duck on a Bike</u>? That book from second grade we liked?” I can make a text-to text You decide what to discuss next Group 2 has a lively chat but quickly starts to get off track Sue has a lot to say but interrupts without dismay Her comments are irrelevant to the story her group just spent fifteen minutes reading through Is this what she thinks she should do? Group 2 follows what I’ve taught recollecting all their thoughts</p>	<p>Sammy’s flipping through the pages while his group continues reading I fear the skills I’ve taught them are very slowly receding That’s all you wrote says Joe to Em expecting so much more Jill’s perusing the thesaurus is what makes Allen sore His group’s having a discussion but Jill doesn’t seem to care If I can’t get these kids on track I’ll be in deep despair Group 3 just keeps on reading never stopping to discuss more instruction on this skill is certainly a must after each new chapter’s through at least <i>one</i> group knows what to do</p>
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If at first you don’t succeed....try try again

“There is nothing wrong with getting knocked down, as long as you get right back up” Muhammed Ali. And so, I would try again. I spent the next two days reviewing, reteaching, and reexplaining. We practiced connecting, discussing, and responding as a whole group until I felt certain we were ready to begin literature circles in earnest. The students were anxious to find out what their first book would be and with whom they would be working. Excitement was mounting, and on the day the books finally arrived I even heard some yes's and yeah's! Like fighters in training, we had prepared ourselves, and it was time to see if all that preparation would pay off.

Grouping Strategies

One positive outcome that results from the implementation of literature circles is an increase in students' social skills including, but not limited to, discussion skills, active listening skills, and acceptance of the ideas of other students. Because students do not exist in a vacuum, these skills are important to their development as members of a classroom community. Possessing the faculties to interact and converse appropriately with peers is a skill that is not only important during literature circles, but throughout the students' lives. It was my hope that I would witness my students using appropriate discussion skills to engage in the grand conversations referenced by Daniels (2002) with respect to literature circles. Research conducted by Holden (1993) documents evidence “That the composition of groups has a considerable effect on the quantity and

quality of pupil talk” (p. 187). It was upon this theory that my research would strongly be based. It was time to determine if the types of grouping I had chosen for literature circles would have any effect on my students’ verbal participation.

Round 1: Social Grouping
“Let’s Get Ready to Rumble” (Michael Buffer)

“Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). The chance to interact with people in their environment was upon the students. Their opportunity to demonstrate their ability to cooperate with their peers was being thrust upon them with unfathomable optimism from their teacher. With the students armed with their connecting strategies, discussion behaviors, and reader’s response journals it was time to enter the ring. After waiting for the last few copies of the books to arrive, everyone was anxious to get started with our first round of literature circles. I too had high hopes for this first round. I had a strong feeling that partnering students with group members of their choice would surely elicit plenty of verbal participation and positive interaction. According to Glenn (1996), self-selected student groups create a fun, relaxed, and safe environment where students can work cooperatively to complete assigned tasks while providing them with the feeling of having some control over their learning. However, what some

of the students would soon realize was that working with your friends does not necessarily create the best learning environment.

A Social Calamity

Sammy's Story

I don't understand why I have to keep working with this group. All they do is argue. I don't do anything. It's everyone else who argues all of the time. Mary is always bossing the group around and telling us what to do. She never lets anyone else talk. Today she even told me my prediction wasn't a good one. I thought it was. I read a lot, and I am good at figuring out what happens next. I feel like there is nothing I can do to make my group more successful. I'll try to keep everyone from arguing. I like this book because it's mysterious, but it is so easy. I could have been finished with it in one day. I am reading Eragon and The Three Musketeers. Even though my group told me not to, I have been reading ahead. I already know some of what happens so when they are discussing I get bored. I would rather be reading something else or reading the homework assignment, but my group does not want to do that. They say we have to discuss more. I think we should spend our time reading the next chapter. I do not see the point of writing in the RRJ either. I never write in mine. Well, maybe a sentence or two. My group gets mad at me when I have nothing to read. I hate this group. Mary should be put in another group or I should be able to leave. I even brought my new Magic Tree House book to share with them, but Mary said it was not time to talk about it

because that would be getting off topic. Who put her in charge? She never listens to my ideas. If have a choice of who to work with next time it is definitely *not* going to be *any* of these people.

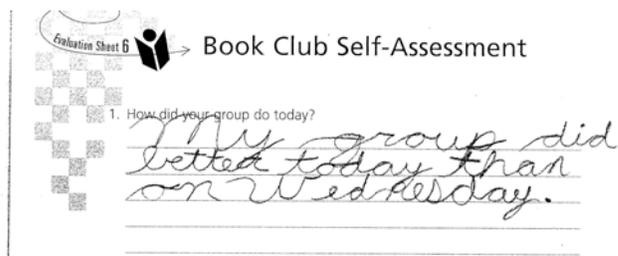
Falling on Deaf Ears

Patti's Story

I wasn't there the day my teacher assigned the group members, but I knew who I had written on the cards so I wasn't too worried. When I found out Jack was in my group though, I wasn't too happy. It turns out I had every right to be worried. No one listens to me in this group, and I'm tired of it! I have great ideas that no one will listen to. They tell me I'm stupid and put me down. Even when I try to make my ideas sound more interesting they *still* won't listen. We're always fighting. Sometimes I start the fights by not agreeing with what everybody else wants to do, but sometimes I try to break up the fights or prevent them. Most days, on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the worst, I wouldn't rate us higher than an 8. Sometimes I think we're a 20 we have such idiotic discussions. Maybe if this stinking book was a little more suspenseful. I mean it is supposed to be a mystery. The teacher is always yelling at me for not having my RRJ or anything to do during our individual work time. She says I'm wasting my time, but I don't feel like doing it now. I can do it for homework. Even if I did write in my RRJ it's not like anybody in my group would actually listen. Especially Jack. If have a choice of who to work with next time maybe I'd choose Sue, but that's it.

Mending Broken Fences

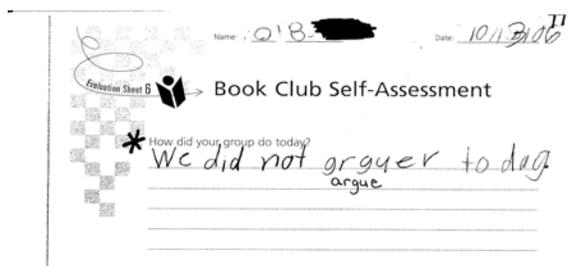
It was time for an intervention. It was time for a fish bowl. For some students, this first round of literature circles had been a one-two punch that had left them with bruised egos and an utter dislike of the entire process. Keeping in mind though that, “Every experience is a moving force” (Dewey, 1997, p. 38), I knew that these primary experiences would be beneficial. Cooperative learning allows for the purposeful interaction and dialogue of students. It is this ongoing dialogue that fosters greater communication skills, growth in listening skills, and increases the respect and acceptance of others’ opinions (Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Lloyd, 2004). I believed that using one of the groups in a fish bowl might be the way to reinforce these ideas with my students. Having been the only truly successful group thus far, Jill, Allen, Ann, and Sara were plunged into the fish bowl while the other students scrutinized their every move. They were expert teachers, demonstrating all the skills I had taught and explaining their tips for success better than I ever could. As Friere stated, “The students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (2006, p. 80). The students in the fish bowl had been the best teachers from which the other groups could have learned, and it showed in the students’ evaluations (see Figures 5-8).



Evaluation Sheet 6 → Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 My group did better today than on Wednesday.

Figure 5. Joe's group evaluation after viewing the Fishbowl.

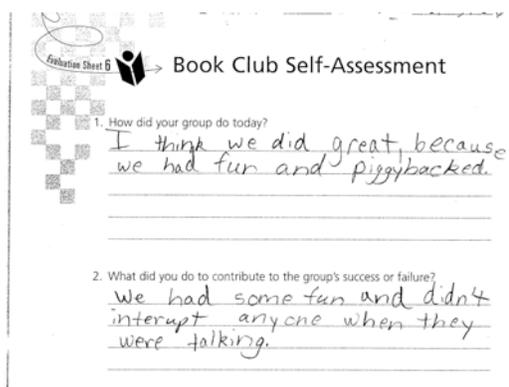


Evaluation Sheet 6 → Book Club Self-Assessment

Name: Q'B Date: 10/12/06

* How did your group do today?
 We did not argue to day

Figure 6. Sam's group evaluation after viewing the Fishbowl.



Evaluation Sheet 6 → Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 I think we did great, because we had fun and piggybacked.

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 We had some fun and didn't interrupt anyone when they were talking.

Figure 7. Sara's group evaluation after viewing the Fishbowl.

Name: O14 [redacted] Date: 10/13/06
 Evaluation Sheet 6 → Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 We did awesome we also did
 fish bowl which made me proud

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 We showed the other 2 groups
 how to be a great group.

Students as Architects

Figure 8. Jill's group evaluation after viewing Fishbowl.

Unfortunately, after a few successful meetings, the students lapsed into their old, argumentative, lackluster patterns. The successful became more successful, but the strugglers continued to struggle. We were back at square one. The only problem was, we were nearing the end of this first round. A feeling of failure began to creep very slowly up my spine. How could this first round have gone so awry? Had I not done all I could to teach the students about appropriate discussion skills? Were the books not as interesting as I had originally thought? We needed a major overhaul for this second round.

Round Two: Gender Grouping

“What keeps me going is goals.” (Muhammad Ali)

At the start of this study, even before the start of this study, I had a goal. It was a goal I felt was completely attainable. It was the goal of creating an environment in which my students felt comfortable with, excited by, and enriched through literature. Perhaps that first round had slightly dampened my spirits, but it

had not doused my hopes of achieving the goal I had set for myself only a few short months ago. I could tell the students were anxious if not for some relieved to be getting a new group assignment. Although some had an experience they would not recount as completely positive in the first round, they too had not given up hope on the concept of literature circles. In fact in a few days I would begin interviewing the students and come to find out that in truth they thoroughly enjoyed literature circles and would continue to have them if given the option in the classroom.

For this second round I had decided to group the students according to their gender. According to Holden (1993), “The number of boys and girls in each group has the potential to affect the verbal participation of the students involved.” Although I was very curious to observe if this held true, I would be the first to admit that this type of grouping scenario produced a slight angst within me. I was not sure I felt comfortable segregating the two sexes. Through my research though, I found that there is support for single-gender grouping. Klebosits and Perrone (1998) conclude that “Single gender grouping allows for students to be more functional while working cooperatively to hone academic and social skills” (p. 32). Students working in same gender groups also exhibit positive group interactions, demonstrate valuable social skills, and openly express their opinions with their peers (Klebosits and Perrone, 1998).

Was this not exactly what I was hoping to see? With renewed spirits, I informed the students of their new group members. It did not take them long to realize that the groups contained the same gender. From the gentlemen of the class I felt an immediate sense of excitement. Everyone was ready and eager to start the new book. We would be concentrating on a unit about “The Fourth Grader”. Each book’s main character was indeed a fourth grader. I was confident that these stories would be easy for the students to connect to, thereby generating my much sought after discussions. Before we set out, I addressed some areas of concern with respect to the RRJs of last circle. I hoped that this little reminder of what my expectations were would get the students off on the right foot.

Fourth Grade Rats: A Closer Look

Although I was anxious to observe how all the groups would react in this new setting, I was particularly interested in the boys. With only five boys in my class, I had decided to lump them into one group. These boys, all very different, were going to be interesting to watch. I had a feeling that their personalities would create some fascinating dynamics. Meet my Fourth Grade Rats.

Jack: Eldest child of a family in which academics are placed on a very high pedestal. A member of the Student Enrichment Program since the third grade. Receives Honor Roll every marking period. Loves to read, but only about what he finds interesting. Likes to rush with his work. Not afraid to speak his mind.

Knows he's smart and has no qualms about letting other students know they're not.

Sammy: Eldest child of a family in which academics are placed on a very high pedestal. Receives Honor Roll every marking period. Devours books about anything and everything. The creative, artistic outcast of our class. Hated his last Literature Circle. Despises the RRJ. Better comprehension than any other student in my class.

Allen: Youngest child of a family where academics come after sports and fun. All around fun-loving kid. Easily influenced by stronger personalities. Likes to talk but has little to say. Tries his very best to emulate his best friend...Jack.

Joe: Youngest child of a family where all the children, including Joe, have received remedial training in the area of reading. Extreme lack of confidence. Shy beyond belief. Worries over everything. Barely said a word in his last Literature Circle. Agrees with whatever anyone else says. Never thinks on his own two feet.

John: Well rounded in all senses of the word. Everyone's friend. Always offers his assistance. Works like a plow horse. Needs just a little prompting to get going. Lacks in the comprehension department, but doesn't let it get him down.

As one can easily see, these boys all have their own very unique personality. How they would mesh to create that supportive, comfortable literary environment was something I planned on keeping a close watch over. It did not take long for me to observe two clear leaders emerge at the head of this group.

Take a wild guess. From the very first meeting, Jack and Allen were dominating the discussion. Joe continued to speak only when spoken to, Sammy continued to mumble his comments to the group, and John tried his best to keep up with these two discussion dominators. Despite the unbalance in conversation though, all the boys felt that they were doing a great job and they really liked working together.

Figure 9 shows a handwritten evaluation sheet titled "Book Club Self-Assessment". The first question is "How did your group do today?" with the handwritten answer "We did great." The second question is "What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?" with the handwritten answer "We talked so much about the story His R.R.S. [redacted] didn't even get to read". There are handwritten notes "considered considered + etc" on the right side of the page.

Figure 9. Allen's group evaluation during gender grouping.

Figure 10 shows a handwritten evaluation sheet titled "Book Club Self-Assessment". The first question is "How did your group do today?" with the handwritten answer "The boys group did great." The second question is "What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?" with the handwritten answer "We did not get to hear Devons Pre iction but we were success today."

Figure 10. Sam's group evaluation during gender grouping.

Although Jack and Allen would continue to lead the discussions, I was very happy to see that by the end of this round, both Sammy and John had begun making their presence known. Sadly, Joe was a different story. Despite attempts

by the members of his group to get him involved in the discussion he remained silent.

Allen: “You don’t really say much.”

Joe looks up at the ceiling pretending to ponder something very deeply.

Allen: “What did you think about Suds pushing the kid off the swing?”

Joe hides his face in his book and says he’s thinking but never answers.

Allen: “I’m not saying your wrong or anything.”

Again, Joe is completely without response.

Unless spoken to directly, he was happy to sit idly by and listen to everything said by everyone else. I decided to implement with Joe the use of Daniels’ role sheets. This way I could ensure that he would have *something* to use as a springboard for discussion. On the large scale though, this group was successful. Of course they had their ups and downs, but for everyone except Joe this had been a positive experience.

Interview Data

It was during this round that I conducted interviews with the students in order to gain a clearer understanding of their opinions on cooperative learning and literature circles thus far. I interviewed the students over a four-day period, interviewing three students each day at my desk while the rest of the class worked independently on literature circle assignments. This four-question interview proved to be very telling. The students’ responses helped to clarify their responses

from the pre-study surveys taken back in September. Although all of the responses to the questions were informative, it was the answers to question two that peaked the greatest interest. I think this was true because of the variation in responses. Questions one, three, and four elicited very similar responses from the class, however it was question two that received a completely different answer from each student. For some students it was evident that the personalities of their peers were the determining factor. They were interested in working with students they would consider their friends with whom they were already comfortable.

Sue: “Nice, kind, thoughtful so they don’t yell and say it’s my turn not yours.”

Sara: “Close friends because they pay attention better than others.”

Joe: “Only best friends because they talk to me.”

John: “Friends because you know more about them than new kids.”

Jill: “My friends because I work better with them.”

For other students it was clear that only peers who were “good” students would be favored as partners.

Allen: “People who cooperate with and listen to me. Students who do what they’re supposed to do and don’t mess around.”

Mary: “People who write a lot in their RRJ and actually do the reading.”

Jack: “Smart kids, kids that might be left out, someone who likes to do the things I like to do.”

For two students, gender seemed to be a contributing factor.

Patti: “Work with girls cuz we get along better. Some boys and girls might not get along.”

Peg: “Three girls and one boy.”

And as is usually the case, there were students who did not fall into any of the previously mentioned categories.

Sammy: “No idea, I just work with anybody.”

Ann: “New students, people I don’t know really good.”

As I read and reread each of their responses carefully, I thought about the performance of each student in their Literature Circles thus far.

Round Three: Ability Grouping

“Only a man who knows what it is like to be defeated can reach down to the bottom of his soul and come up with the extra ounce of power it takes to win when the match is even.” (Muhammad Ali)

With one round a complete disaster, and the second a relative success, I felt as if I *was* participating an even match. There was but one round left for me to come out a champion. I had experienced the defeat Muhammad Ali mentioned, but I knew my students and I had the power to be successful. We had the power to make literature circles work the way we wanted and needed them to. According to Friere, “Knowledge emerges only through the invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (2006, p. 72). With disappointment

still lingering in the back of my mind, I pushed onward ready to re-invent my class and myself. I had chosen poetry as the medium with which my students would be working. For the majority of them it would be the first time they would work with poetry in such an in depth fashion. We were going to learn the elements, read countless works by various poets, and create original works in a multitude of forms.

The use of ability grouping with students has been a topic of debate in education for many years. Contrasting findings from both qualitative and quantitative research has provided teachers with data documenting the successes and failures of each grouping practice. Although I had never been a strong proponent for ability grouping, I decided that for my last round of literature circles I would see if this type of grouping scenario had any affect on the students' level of verbal participation. I had my own preconceived notions about how the students would perform this time around. There was just something in the back of my mind that knew working with peers of their same ability would put the students who had yet to become fully engaged in the literature circle experience at ease. My research would contest such a concept.

The use of homogeneous ability grouping has received criticism from some researchers suggesting that this type of tracking is not beneficial to all students and in fact has the possibility to be detrimental to some. Wheelock (1992) writes that homogeneous ability grouping primarily benefits the students

who are of higher academic ability, while the students grouped in lower ability groupings fall into a pattern of working at a much slower pace. This particular type of grouping creates inequalities in the type of instruction and interactions students in the very same classroom experience. Similarly, Oakes (1985) contends that students in low and middle ability levels of tracking are not given the same learning opportunities as students of high academic ability. I completely disagree with this last statement. Despite their academic ability, I would be providing my students with the same learning opportunities. My expectations would remain the same for all, high. I strongly agreed with Friere when he wrote, “At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know” (2006, p. 90). I was convinced that it did not matter whether the students were of high or low academic ability. They would work together for the benefit of the entire group.

Prior to announcing the last grouping scenario, I had arranged the students’ desks in triads. Unbeknownst to them, their seatmates would be their next partners on this journey. After a few days of the new seating arrangement, we began the final round. Knowing that my students’ knowledge of poetry was respectfully based upon Dr. Seuss and some catchy little nursery rhymes, I thought an interesting way to introduce this final round would be to ask each student to jot down in their journals their thoughts on poetry. I asked each student

to quickly scribble what they thought when I said the word poetry. I turned their responses into a pastiche and hung it on chart paper at the front of the room (see Figure 11).

I was not surprised by the responses. In fact, they had given me a renewed sense of enthusiasm. We would be starting from a blank canvas with respect to this genre. After announcing to the class that poetry would be our focus for this final round of literature circle, they were informed of their group members. “You’ll be working with your seat mates,” I announced. I was met with no overwhelming response.

~POETRY~

A short piece of writing that is about feelings and rhyming words

There has to be a few rhyming words and it has to be short not long

A LITTLE FUNNY

usually something you write that has rhyming words and tells a short story

Can be funny, short, serious long...make them whatever you want

express your feelings

A short piece of writing that usually rhymes and tells a story

A story that isn't so long with some rhyming words

Like a story that's about something...it can have a couple of rhyming words

Something that is sometimes short, sometimes rhymes and tells a story

A short piece of writing that rhymes and tells a story

A short story with a lot of rhyming words

Something that happened to you or be about somewhere you went

A descriptive group of words that can go horizontally or vertically

It can be happy or sad

It can be every shape or size

~POETRY~

Figure 11. Pastiche of student responses to the question, "What is poetry?"

Knowing my students' past experience with poetry was very limited, I planned to start with the basics. Our first task would be to learn to identify some of the key elements of poetry. Not only was this a section of my curriculum I was required to cover, but something with which my students were completely unfamiliar. For them, a good poem rhymed and was short. Never had it even crossed their minds that there were actual methods to writing poetry. Over the next few days, we would discuss poetic elements such as personification, onomatopoeia, imagery, rhyme scheme, repetition, the use of sense words and word play. For each element I chose a poem that contained numerous examples, we would read the poem, and then I had the students write some original examples of their own (see Figures 12-14).

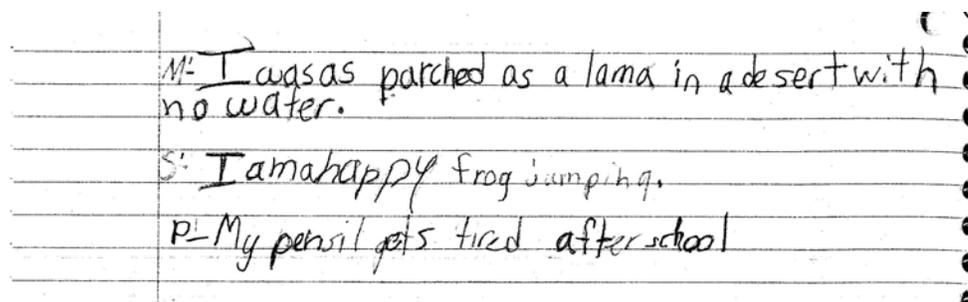


Figure 12. Patti's Poetic Element Examples

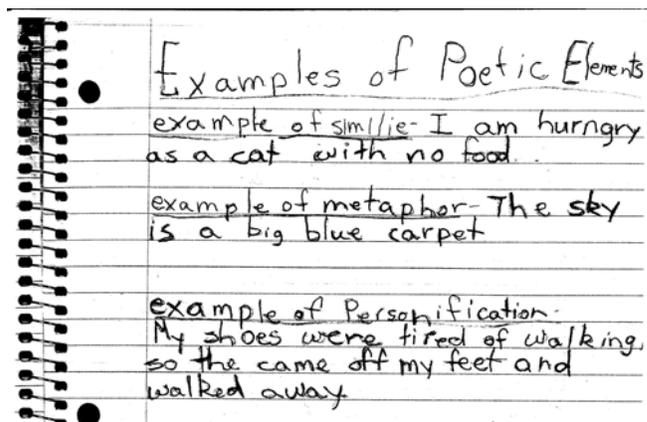


Figure 13. Sara's Poetic Elements Examples

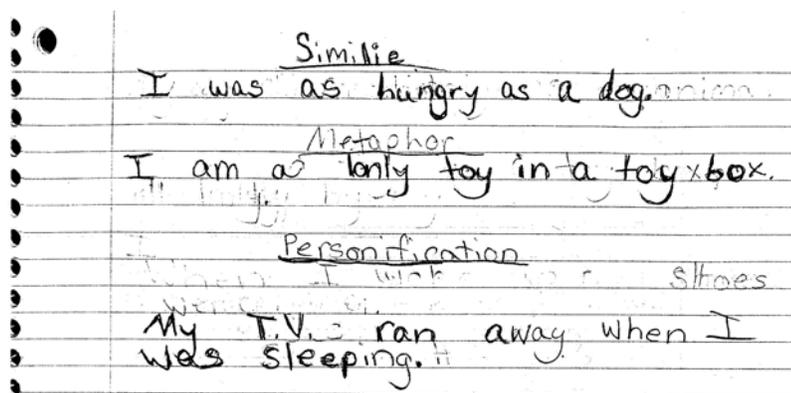


Figure 14. Jack's Poetic Elements Examples

We would also study numerous forms of poetry including Haiku, couplets, triplets, quatrains, cinquains, diamantes, and shape poems. We were even fortunate enough to have a poet, Eloise Bruce, visit our class and write an imagery poem with us (see Figures 15-18).

] **My Body is Something All**
] **Together by [REDACTED]**
] As I write my name it's made out of
] waves that have just been made. They
] are crashing down on the ocean.
] I am a dress dancing on the dance floor.
] I did the Conga, Macarena and just had
] a blast.
] My ears are little pink convertibles.
] They are speeding down the road
] waiting for me to get in.
] My hair is Spaghetti with sauce and
] some cheese. It's sitting in a bowl
] waiting for me to eat it.
] I am a beautiful summer day where it's
] not too hot or cold. I'm a warm summer
] day. I feel warm but not too hot. I'm
] burning if you get too close!
] My feet are a scooter and are
] scootering down the hill. They are
] screeching to a stop.

Figure 18. Jill's Imagery Poem

It was time to see if these new groups would elicit the kind of verbal participation from *all* the students I had been waiting to hear. The students would be working with peers of the same ability level in the area of language arts. Authors such as Wheelock (1992) and Oakes (1985) contend that homogeneous ability grouping has the potential to create differences in the type of learning opportunities presented and only benefit students of higher ability. I disagreed, thinking that this type of environment had the potential to put the students at ease, possibly allowing them to cast aside their insecurities and recognize their potential both as readers and speakers. Possessing the faculties to interact and converse appropriately with peers is a skill that is not only important during

literature circles, but throughout the students' entire lives. Cooperative learning with any ability level allows for the purposeful interaction and dialogue of students. It is this ongoing dialogue that fosters greater communication skills, growth in listening skills, and increases the respect and acceptance of others' opinions (Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Lloyd, 2004). Knowing that it is the inherent nature of literature circles to create a community where the students work toward the greater goal of understanding for all, I was hard pressed to believe that having students of same ability working together would alter that nature.

Although I would continue to observe all of my students, this round I had a particular interest in those students who, in their previous group settings, had seemed to blend into the shadows. I needed to pay close attention to Joe, Peg, and Sammy. I needed to see a change in their demeanor. In short, I needed them to talk!

"B" is for Believing

Two of the students I was most concerned with this round were in the same group, the low-ability group. Joe and Peg had demonstrated little to no ability to engage in a literature discussion with their peers in the last two settings, but I believed they were capable. Although they both struggle with comprehension and are painfully shy, I believed they could be an asset to any discussion providing a point of view yet to be heard. Over the next few days I would soon observe that what I had hoped for these two was no longer a dream

but a reality. The change in these two students' attitudes was obvious during the very first observation. As I observed Group B on December 6, 2006, it was hard to contain my excitement. Joe was more relaxed than I had ever seen him. He was openly involved in the discussion laughing and offering opinions on the poems his group had read. His responses were silly and shallow, and he had a habit of laughing after everything he said. However by the end of the ten-minute observation period, Joe had responded seven times. This was only half of Sue's verbal participation rate, but with respect to his previous performance, it was a huge step forward. Could it be he was actually enjoying himself? This surely seemed to be the case. The same was true for Peg. Although she was still hesitant to begin conversation on her own, she was eagerly jumping in and piggy backing with Joe and Sue. I would continue to see this shift in attitude and performance throughout the rest of the study. Joe and Peg became increasingly sure of themselves. They became confident participators who voiced their misunderstandings and opinions without hesitation. It seemed they had finally found their niche.

"B" is for Breakthrough

Sue is reading one of the assigned poems aloud to her group

Joe: "I don't get why her lips are burning."

Sue: "Well she's been at the beach all day."

Joe: "Yeah but when I'm at the beach my lips aren't burning."

Sue: “Maybe it’s like her lips are sunburned. You know like when you get sunburn your skin feels really hot?”

Joe: “Yeah.”

The group reads *Sledding* aloud.

Joe: There’s hardly any rhyming in this poem. I like short poems.”

Peg: “Did you kind of like Fog?”

Sue: “No, I thought it was short and a little boring”

To the outside eye, this conversation may have seemed extremely basic and low level, but to someone who had seen these students remaining silent for the past few weeks, the sound of their voices was like music to my ears. Joe and Peg’s verbal participation had more than doubled from their previous literature circles. They had shown extremely positive gains in their social skills and ability to interact with others in a literary discussion.

I hadn’t forgotten about Sammy. He too would begin to emerge as a student with a lot to say. After Sammy’s first group observation, he had a verbal participation rate of 15 times/10 minutes, equal to that of both his other group members. After looking back at his response rate during his first group setting, I could see definite progress.

There was also evidence of a change in Sammy’s attitude toward literature circles altogether. The comments he was providing on his self/group evaluation sheets were a one hundred and eighty degree reversal from his evaluations from

the prior groups. In fact, all the students were showing improvement, and even more pleasing the groups were getting along fabulously. Gone were the argumentative attitudes from the first two rounds. Equally absent was the domination of conversation I had seen.

We wrapped up this entire unit on poetry with a wonderful Poetry Café held on February 6, 2007. The students had worked so hard to memorize a favorite poem and also to create numerous original works. We invited everyone's families to a night where all of this hard work could be celebrated. Fun was had by all. The students had done an amazing job, and I could tell that the parents were impressed.

So was I. We had come so far. I heard the final chime of the bell signifying the conclusion of the final round. This match had come to a close, but there would be many more in my future. I was ready for the next opponent.

DATA ANALYSIS

The point at which data collection ends and data analysis begins can be an overwhelmingly anxious time. When I looked at the substantial amount of data I had collected over the past four months, I felt an immediate sense of panic. How could I possibly take what was contained inside these two three-inch binders that were bursting at the seams and synthesize it into information that was easily readable by the public, information that actually made sense to other people? Indeed it would prove to be a challenge, but one that when completed would leave me with a feeling of unparalleled accomplishment.

The first step was to code my field logs, a challenge in itself. The process of coding is one that truly has a cyclical nature. The coding and re-coding of a field log begins with the very first piece of data that is placed inside. It is a constant and ongoing search for recurring ideas and concepts present in the data. I would code my log many times, each time finding new ideas emerging and adding to old ones. Next I created an alphabetized list of these codes (Appendix Q) with corresponding page numbers where examples of each code could be located. This would assist me later when I needed to quickly be able to locate specific information in my immense log.

Next, I began placing these codes into bins. These bins would contain codes that I felt were connected in some way. Each bin was given a title to better

identify the information contained within. The bins were organized into a graphic organizer (see Figure 19). These code filled bins would eventually lead me to recognize the emergent themes present in my study. It would be these themes that would allow me to report the findings of my study. I continually sought out recurring themes, which provided me with a path for my research to follow (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

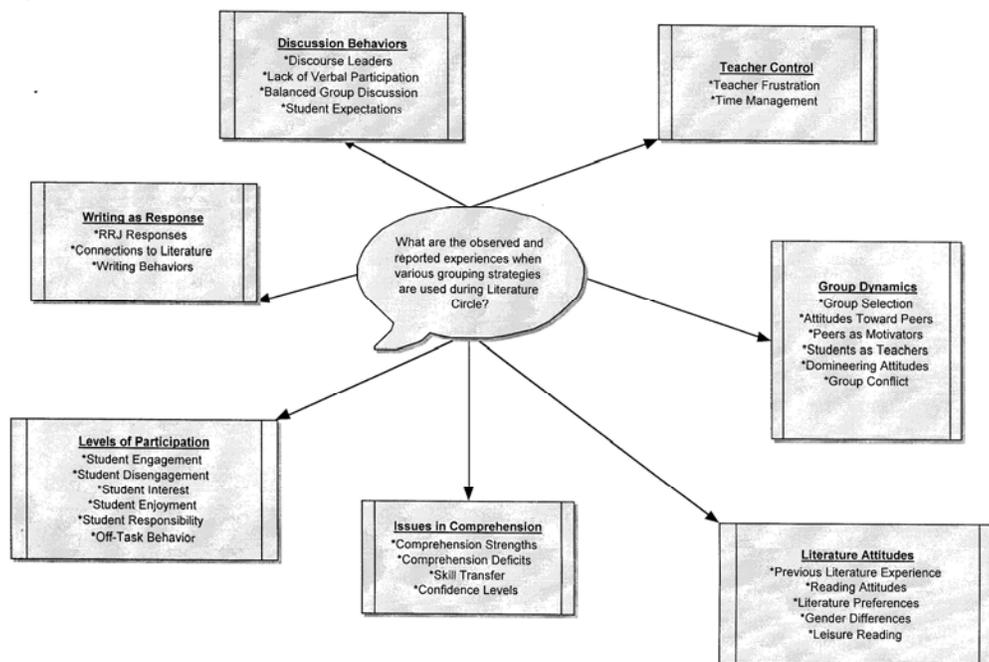


Figure 19. Graphic organizer of codes listed in bins.

Both the pre- and post-study surveys I gave the students were analyzed by creating tables to synthesize the students' responses (see Tables 1-4). Each question was labeled with a letter, and the number of students who responded to

each number on the scale was totaled. Looking at the completed tables allowed me to draft some generalized statements about my students' overall attitudes and opinions with respect to literature circles and cooperative learning.

Table 1
Literature Circle Survey Results, Pre-Study

Question	5	4	3	2	1
A	6	5	1	X	X
B	3	6	1	X	2
C	3	1	6	X	2
D	8	1	1	X	2
E	5	X	3	1	3
F	3	6	2	1	X
G	2	3	3	3	1
H	5	4	2	X	1

Note. The following statements are generalizations based on the students' responses to the survey questions.

- The majority of students agreed that choosing the book makes reading more interesting.
- The majority of students agreed that talking about a book with classmates is fun.
- The majority of students were indifferent to writing in journals for increased comprehension.
- The majority of students thought it should be the teacher's job to choose homework assignments.
- Students were split evenly when deciding whether reading alone or in a group was more enjoyable.
- The majority of students agreed that students can make up questions as good as a teacher's questions.

- Students were across the board in their knowledge of literature circles
- The majority of students agreed that they like hearing what their classmates have read

Table 2

Cooperative Learning Survey Results, Pre-Study

Question	5	4	3	2	1
A	6	2	2	2	X
B	5	1	4	1	X
C	1	2	X	4	5
D	5	4	2	1	X
E	X	1	2	2	7
F	6	2	2	1	1
G	4	1	2	2	3
H	X	X	1	3	8
I	X	1	3	1	7
J	1	3	4	2	2

Note. The following statements are generalizations based on the students' responses to the survey questions.

- The majority of students thought working in groups makes learning easier.
- Students thought it was easier to work with their friends than with others. or had no opinion
- The majority of students did not think the leader of the group should do all the talking.
- Students agreed that working in a group gives everyone a better chance to participate.
- The majority of students disagreed that there can only be one leader per group.
- The majority of students felt they are good at working with others.
- Students' responses were varied with respect to how groups should be picked.
- The majority of students disagreed that smart kids finish first.
- The majority of students disagreed that students of various levels should not have to work together.

- Student responses varied with respect to being nervous when it is time to pick groups however the majority was indifferent.

Table 3

Literature Circle Survey Results, Post-Study

Question	5	4	3	2	1
A	5	2	3	1	1
B	6	3	1	1	1
C	2	3	2	4	1
D	3	1	2	1	5
E	3	1	2	X	6
F	5	4	2	X	1
G	9	X	2	1	X
H	8	2	1	X	1

Note. The following statements are generalizations based on the students' responses to the survey questions. Statements appearing in bold indicate a change in overall response from the pre-study results.

- The majority of students agreed that choosing the book makes reading more interesting.
- The majority of students agreed that talking about a book with classmates is fun.
- **An equal number of students agreed and disagreed that writing in a journal increases comprehension.**
- **Students felt that it was not the teacher's job to choose homework assignments.**
- **The majority of students agreed that reading in a group was more enjoyable than reading by themselves.**
- The majority of students agreed that students can make up questions as good as the teacher's.
- **The majority of students agreed that they know what literature circles are.**

- The majority of students agreed that they like hearing what their classmates have read.

Table 4
Cooperative Learning Survey Results, Post-Study

Question	5	4	3	2	1
A	7	1	3	1	X
B	6	2	3	1	X
C	X	X	1	3	8
D	9	2	1	X	X
E	1	X	X	2	9
F	8	3	X	X	1
G	2	X	5	1	4
H	1	1	1	2	7
I	X	X	3	2	7
J	3	3	2	X	4

Note. The following statements are generalizations based on the students' responses to the survey questions. Statements appearing in bold indicate a change in overall response from the pre-study results.

- The majority of students thought working in groups makes learning easier.
- Students thought it was easier to work with their friends than with others.
- The majority of the students did not think the leader of a group should do all the talking.
- Students agreed that working in a group gives everyone a chance to participate.
- The majority of students disagreed that there can only be one leader per group.
- The majority of students feel they are good at working with others.

- The majority of students disagreed that smart kids finish first.
- The majority of students disagreed that students of various levels should not have to work together.
- **Students were split almost evenly with respect to being nervous when it is time to pick groups.**
- **The majority of students disagreed that it is better when groups are picked randomly.**

I utilized the verbal participation charts and the observational skills checklists to analyze the rate of verbal participation students exhibited throughout the course of the study. I created a table that listed their total number of verbal responses during each round of literature circle (see Table 5). This allowed me to document any differences in the students' verbal participation in accordance with the varying grouping strategies.

Table 5
Verbal Participation Totals

Student	Social Grouping	Gender Grouping	Ability Grouping
Jill	58	37	31
Patti	54	68	35
Sue	67	75	36
Sara	44	77	30
Allen	40	65	22
Mary	99	54	31
Peg	20	4	26
Joe	33	7	28
Sam	60	20	42
John	62	17	17
Ann	45	60	29
Jack	48	64	41

Note. Totals in bold print indicate each student's highest rate of participation

I used the students' self/group evaluation sheets to analyze changes in attitude toward peers and the literature circle experience. I retained and compared

each student's evaluation sheets, from the first to the last, to document positive or negative comments about the students' group performance. These sheets coupled with the verbal participation charts afforded me two lenses through which to look at the students' overall performance in each group setting.

I analyzed the students' index card responses regarding the classmates they wished to work with by creating a sociogram (see Figure 20).

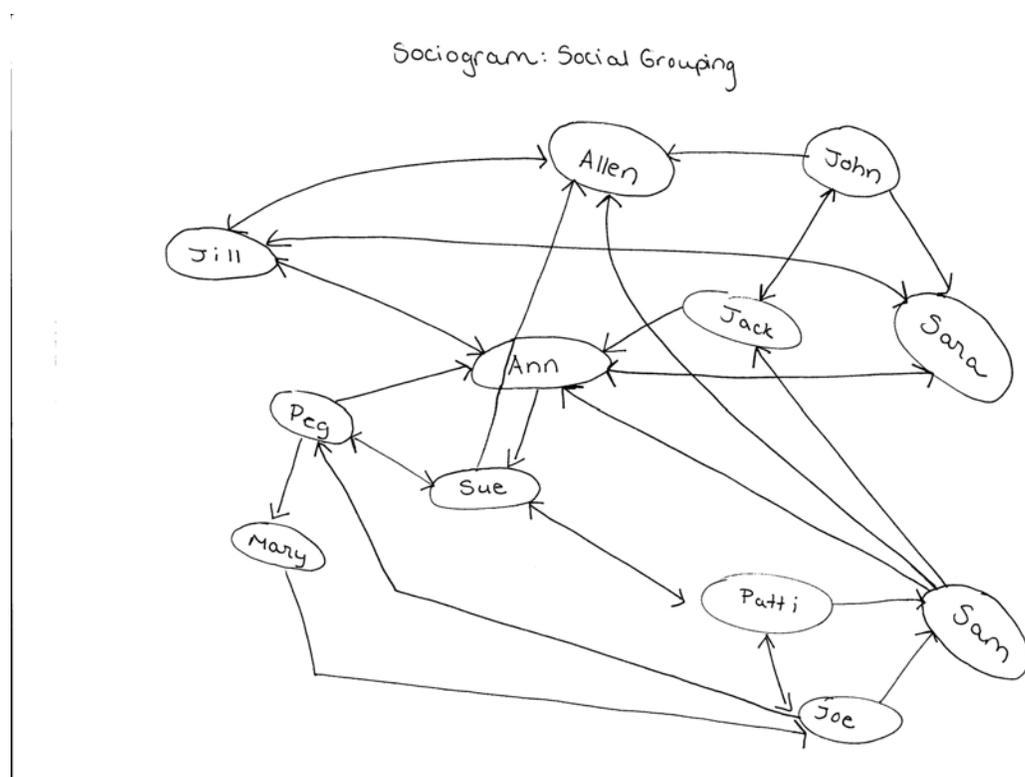


Figure 20. Sociogram devised from students' index card responses.

This sociogram created a visual representation of the students' choices for social grouping. By studying this diagram, I was able to see which students had chosen each other, which students had chosen a peer who did not choose them in

return, which students were very popular, which students were not chosen by any of their peers etc. Not only was this document helpful in creating the groups for the first round of literature circles, but also as a tool for identifying the social dynamics present in my classroom at the beginning of the study.

I also created a pie graph in order to analyze the responses my students gave when asked which group setting they had enjoyed most (see Figure 21). This too created a visual image that easily represented the data I had obtained at the close of the study.

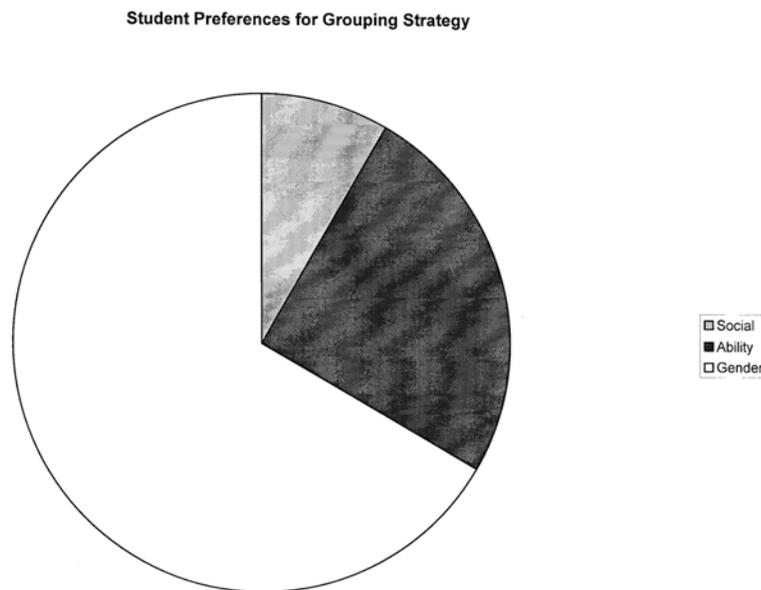


Figure 21. Student Grouping Preferences

The methods I would use to analyze my data allowed me to triangulate my findings, thereby increasing the study's validity. Each piece of data was like a small link I would use to create a larger chain when all the links came together. The analysis of this chain would open my eyes to the important findings my study had yielded. I knew that these findings would not only be important to me, but to other educators, both now and in the future.

FINDINGS

“But observation is not enough. We have to understand the significance of what we see, hear, and touch (Dewey, 1997, p. 68).

My goal for this study was to determine if altering the grouping strategies during literature circles would have any effect, positive or negative, on the rate of student verbal participation. I strove to research ideas that could be implemented in the hopes of creating a supportive literary community within my classroom walls. I wanted my students to cast aside their inhibitions and open up to their classmates, sharing their opinions, confusions, and revelations. At the conclusion of this study, I found what I believed to be an answer to my original question, as well as a slew of new questions. In order for me to extract the greatest benefit from these themes, I needed to, as Dewey states, “understand the significance” of what I had seen.

At the onset of this study, I found myself harboring many preconceived notions about the possible outcomes literature circles would have for my students and me. In a setting where the teacher is also the student, there is so much more to be learned than if only one role remains occupied. Being a teacher who wanted the very best for my students, I found it only natural that I had high hopes for the methods of this study to create a community of learners who worked together and supported one another. However, being a researcher, I understood the importance of separating myself from my role as teacher. I needed a focused lens through

which I could examine the data I had collected over the past few months. Perhaps I would find that my high expectations had been met. There was the distinct possibility, however, that themes had emerged that had nary crossed my mind. I needed to remind myself that all data, whether it supported my original theories or not, was important to my study. The data I had collected from so many different angles would allow me to synthesize, triangulate, and eventually extract important themes for this study.

Theme 1: Student Verbal Participation

The level and type of discussion behaviors students demonstrated during literature circle were affected by the type of grouping strategy used to place them into literature circles. “People adapt their speech according to the person they are talking to and the point behind the talk. These are social rather than purely linguistic constraints” (Stubbs, 2002, p. 74). I took this quote from Delpit’s collection of essays and found that it fit particularly well with this theme. The primary goal of this study was to determine whether or not the type of group a student was placed into had any effect on his or her verbal participation during literature circle. What I found through analyzing the verbal participation charts and the observation skills checklists was that, indeed, the type of group does have an effect on the students’ participation (see Table 5).

Table 5
Verbal Participation Totals

Student	Social Grouping	Gender Grouping	Ability Grouping
Jill	58	37	31
Patti	54	68	35
Sue	67	75	36
Sara	44	77	30
Allen	40	65	22
Mary	99	54	31
Peg	20	4	26
Joe	33	7	28
Sam	60	20	42
John	62	17	17
Ann	45	60	29
Jack	48	64	41

Note. Totals in bold denote the student's highest rate of verbal participation.

I should be clearer, however, when making this statement. For some students in my class, their rate of verbal participation during discussion remained fairly constant from the onset of the study to the close. These students were always ready, willing, and excited to share their ideas and opinions with others. However, for other students, they had clearly demonstrated that they were willing enough to share their ideas only in situations in which they felt comfortable.

Jill, Mary, Joe, Sam and John presented a higher level of verbal participation during the social grouping than in the other two settings. The same was true of gender grouping for Patti, Sue, Sara, Allen, Ann and Jack. Only one student, Peg, demonstrated her highest level of verbal participation during the ability grouping portion of the study. This finding offers support for the negative effects ability based grouping can have on students. However, when comparing

the students' rate of verbal participation in each group setting with their self/group evaluation forms and their overall group preference (see Figure 21), it is clear that there is a discrepancy between their preference for each setting and their rate of participation. Seven of the twelve participants preferred working in a setting other than the one in which they had their highest rate of verbal participation. Similarly, students such as Sam, Sara, and Mary had their highest verbal participation rates in settings they negatively commented about on their self/group evaluations (see Figures 22, 23, and 24).

The image shows a handwritten evaluation form titled "Book Club Self-Assessment". At the top left, it says "Evaluation Sheet 6" with a small icon of a person reading. The form has three numbered questions with handwritten answers in cursive. The first question asks "How did your group do today?" and the answer is "There is a lot of arguing bad". The second question asks "What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?" and the answer is "I didn't do anything, their the ones who argue." The third question asks "What can you do to make your group more successful tomorrow?" and the answer is "No, their is nothing I can do." There is a handwritten note "Group Conflict" written vertically on the right side of the form.

Evaluation Sheet 6 → Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 There is a lot of arguing bad

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I didn't do anything, their the ones who argue.

3. What can you do to make your group more successful tomorrow?
 No, their is nothing I can do.

Group Conflict

Figure 22. Sam's Group Evaluation

Evaluation Sheet 6  Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 Terribal !!!!!!!

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 Keep stopping the group from discussing! Group Conflict

3. What can you do to make your group more successful tomorrow?
 Dis kus Lots More and don't argue.

Figure 23. Mary's Group Evaluation

Evaluation Sheet 6  Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?
 I think we did pretty ok Because on a scale of 1-10 we being the worst we were an 8. I did not like how our group fought alot. Group Conflict

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I refused to read because I thought it was for homework. So tecnicly I started to fight.

3. What can you do to make your group more successful tomorrow?
 I can try to break up fights and hcp prevent them

Figure 24. Sara's Group Evaluation

Theme 2: Increases in Comprehension

Student comprehension increased when students were placed in literature circles for reading instruction. I came across this theory when conducting my

literature review and this finding indeed presented itself in the data of my study. The research I read supported the concept of literature circles increasing the students' ability to create connections between their own lives and texts, "to move from literal text-based conversations to purposefully reflecting and looking at texts from more than one perspective" (Long & Gove, 2004, p. 359), to verbalize the content, to listen to other modes of thinking, to monitor their own reading, and to raise their own questions and construct meaning for what they read by using prior knowledge (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Keegan & Shrake, 1991; Stien & Beed, 2004; Burns, 1998, Jewell & Pratt, 1999).

Through writing Me and the Book responses in their reader's response journals, I was able to document the students' aptitude at making connections between texts and their own life experiences. I was also able to observe such connections during discussion through my participant observations. A very important code that emerged in my field log was connections to literature. By noting every instance where the students made a connection between their own lives and a piece of literature they were reading, I was able to monitor their ability to perform this important comprehension skill. I documented growth in this area of comprehension by turning back to my log to read over my observations from the first few days of the study where I had introduced the post-it note strategy and the ideas of text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections. At this time it was very difficult to get the students to make these types of connections. They

were not using the post-it notes in the way intended, and they were missing the benefits of their usage.

However, as the students began working in their literature circles, their connections began to come more readily. The students were finding ways to connect texts and other media to what they were reading (see Figures 25, 26, 27, and 28).

September 26, 2006 Case of the Missing Monkeys		Page # <u>9</u>
1	When ... shared character map, the rest of	N/R
2	his group (3) reminded him about the	<i>Students as teachers</i>
3	requirements for doing a map in the RRJ	
4		
5	Group 1 connected this story to The Case of	N/R
6	the Missing Peanuts from last week.	
7		
8	"That was a good book." <i>Student interest</i>	N/R
9		
10	"We're having a discussion and you're	Students expect to be listened to when they
11	looking at the thesaurus." <i>connections to</i>	are talking. <i>student expectations</i>
12		
13	to ... "Remember when we read	N/R
14	Duck on a Bike in second grade?" <i>literature</i>	
15		
16	... made a text to text connection with	I did not even think ... was paying
17	Case of the Missing Peanuts which sparked	attention to this story considering earlier he
18	a good discussion among group members	did not seem to have on bit of interest. <i>student engagement</i>
19		

Figure 25. Field Log Example of Text to Text Connection

10/10/06 meeting Day		Page # <u>43</u>
1	... brings new Magic Tree House book	47 Nice to see students sharing what they
2	to Literature Circle with him. <i>connections to</i>	48 are reading outside of class with their
3		49 peers
4		50
5	AR nicking dirt from beneath his	51 Off task behavior is uncommon for AR

Figure 26. Field Log Example of Text to Text Connection

13		59	he is really getting wrapped up in this	<i>student engagement</i>
14		60	story.	
15	<i>connections in literature</i>	61		
16	talking about the game CLUE –	62	Making connections to personal life	
17	this story is like a puzzle	63	experiences	
18		64		

Figure 27. Field Log Example of Text to Media Connection

8				<i>comprehension strengths</i>
9	makes a text to text connection between		Great connection—the other two girls had	
10	Beezus and Ramona Quimby and Peter and		also read the Ramona series books and were	
11	Fudge Hatcher		able to piggyback on Emily's text to	
12			text—they made a lot of good comparisons	
13			between these two sets of siblings	
14				

Figure 28. Field Log Example of Text to Text Connection

An excellent example of this ability to connect texts occurred on November 8, 2006 when Patti, who was reading Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing, was able to connect the relationship between the two brothers in this story with the relationship between Ramona and Beezus Quimby from the Ramona series books by Beverly Cleary. This was not only a wonderful connection, but also a springboard for a lengthy discussion. They were becoming much more capable at making connections between their own life experiences and what they were reading as well (see Figures 29, 30, and 31).

58

Me and the Book (TS)

She's afraid that the students wouldn't like her and won't listen to her. She said her head hurt and she was going to cry so she wouldn't have to go. I'm always nervous the first day like I freak is and I say I don't want to go either. I said on my first day that the kids wouldn't like me or anything. Every time I go in my school my first day I'm worried and then I make friends and then I'm fine and I go on.

Figure 29. Ann's Connection

Me and the book (TS)

Sometimes I try to avoid to go to school and don't want to get up. I'm tired and my head hurts. Also I pull the covers over my head. But then my mom makes me. I get up and fall right back to sleep. I eat breakfast then get in the shower.

Figure 30. Patti's Connection

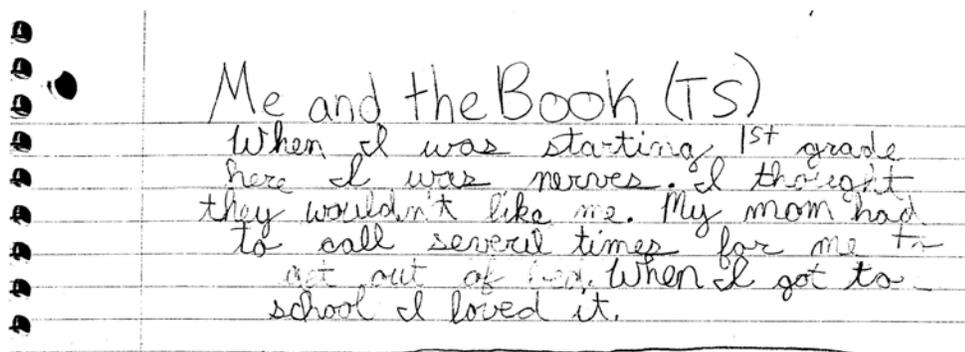


Figure 31. Jill's Connection

Another means by which literature circles provided an opportunity to increase comprehension was through peer teaching. By working with one another, the students adopted the role of teacher. In an almost reciprocal teaching situation, this type of metacognitive behavior had helped to increase the student's comprehension as well as the comprehension of the peers they were assisting. Slavin and Stevens (1995) called this type of interaction a "cognitive apprenticeship" in which students work with peers who are at various levels of mastery for particular skills (p. 242). It is the students themselves who provide the support and guidance to one another for all to attain mastery of said skill. The peer apprenticeship becomes an important and powerful support for both successful and struggling students.

In all three of the group settings, I had been able to observe through my field log notes and the observational skills checklists students clarifying confusing sections of text for their peers. One particular example of this idea of "students as teachers" occurred on October 13, 2006 during a fish bowl demonstration. The

students who were reading Mystery Behind the Wall had been asked to show the other two groups what their literature circle looked and sounded like. During this demonstration, Allen was having significant difficulty comprehending the connection between the name of a store in the book, what the store sold, and a character's name. One of his circle members, Jill, clarified this for him by explaining the connection between a wren being a bird, the Wren Shop selling birds, and the character's name being Jennie Wren. Allen's response of, "Ohhhhh, now I get it!" clearly showed how both students' comprehension had increased through the opportunity to converse with others about a text (see Figure 32).

October 13, 2006	Mystery Behind the Wall	Page # 73
1	This group is in the fish bowl today.	I think this is really going to help the other students understand what a successful literature circle looks and sounds like
2		
3		
4		
5	The members are looking right at each other when they speak and sitting knee to knee.	Textbook literature circle behaviors—Daniels would be proud!
6		
7		
8	They use text to cite important things in the story.	Great comprehension skill
9		
10		
11	Start their discussion by sharing their RRJs	They don't just read their entries and move on, they take a few minutes to discuss each one
12		
13		
14		
15	They were a little nervous at first, but quickly got into the swing of things.	N/R
16		
17		
18	They make a lot of predictions and challenge each other to think deeper	None of the members in this group except anything the other members say without some kind of reasoning. This is a great discussion skill
19		
20		
21		
22		
23	. . . is not making the connection that the store is called The Wren Shop because it sells birds. JB explains that a wren is a kind of bird. . . "Ohhhhhh, now I get it"	This was a total AHA moment. The whole story was changed for . . . once . . . helped him make the connection between Jennie Wren and the Wren Shop.
24		
25		
26		
27		
28	The members were able to give the other groups a lot of positive suggestions for their literature circles	These kids did a wonderful job of explaining to the other two groups what they think helps make their group so successful
29		
30		
31		
32	"Just have fun with it" . . .	N/R
33		
34	"Everyone has to listen to everyone else"	N/R
35		
36	"You can't talk over each other" . . .	N/R
37		
38		

Figure 32. Fishbowl Observation

The students' responses to question two of the self/group evaluations also demonstrated their ability to strengthen their own comprehension as well as that of their peers by taking on the role of teacher. On numerous occasions the

students responded by explaining that they had helped their group members understand better by answering their questions or clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary (see Figures 33, 34, and 35.)

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I helped them understand it
 and answer their questions.

Figure 33. Example of Students as Teachers

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I helped them with things they
 didn't understand. I also helped
 understand words. *Students as
 teachers*

Figure 34. Example of Students as Teachers

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I help answer and confusing
 questions. *Students as
 teachers*

Figure 35. Example of Students as Teachers

Their ability to generate thought provoking questions and rich discussion about a text had also increased. Whereas twenty-five minutes started out as an overwhelmingly long period of time for them to find things to discuss, by the

close of the study, the students were asking me for more time to spend with their group members. For me, this highlighted their growth as readers. They no longer needed me to provide them with questions or possible discussion topics; they had an abundant supply of their own. They were asking the type of questions Daniels refers to as “fat” questions; questions that cannot be answered with a simple one word answer (see Figures 36, 37, and 38).

4			
5		, was questioning the title British Warm.	The group had a great conversation about this poem and what the title had to do with the content. They did not know what a hot water bottle was, and even after I told them that's what kind of bottle the poem was written about they were still very confused by how the bottle could be all the things listed in the poem. They came up with some good ideas though while they were discussing
6		He said he's not sure why the poet used this	
7		title, but he recognizes that the poem is all	
8		opposites	
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16		“Why are they asking us if he's fuzzy if they	We haven't discussed the role of word play in poetry yet, so I can see why . would be asking this question
17		just told us he was?” about Fuzzy	
18		Wuzzy	
19			

Figure 36. Example of “Fat” Questions

30			
31		“Why would whales get seasick at school?”	The group made an interesting comparison of school children and whales. They identified the whales in the school like children in a school
32			
33		“I think it means it's like when we get the	
34		flu”	
35			

Figure 37. Example of “Fat” Questions

	December 12, 2006	Group C	Page # _____
1		The group starts off by reading Tiger and	This turned out to be a very in depth conversation about tigers. This poem had a few challenging vocabulary words (tenacious, voracious) that the students were able to surmise through their discussion about real tigers. I laughed out loud at the idea of deteething tigers, but I thought it was clever of _____ to mention
2		discussing wild tigers vs. zoo tigers...leads	
3		to a conversation about Philadelphia Zoo	
4			
5			
6			
7		“Do you think tigers are declawed?”	
8		“What about deteething them?”	
9		turns into a conversation about cat claws	
10			
11		“School of Fish is a play on words. It’s like	Excellent identification of a poetic element. Even though other students recognized the connection between fish and students, _____ was the only student to identify it as word play. It’s a difficult element to recognize. For me it demonstrated _____ higher order thinking skills. <i>Skill transfer</i>
12		fish at school.”	
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19		_____ is always the one starting up new topics	Although _____ and _____ are perfectly capable of generating conversation on their own, it is _____ who always picks up the conversation when one topic seems to be exhausted. He usually starts things off with a question which pulls the other two in <i>Discourse leader</i>
20		for discussion	
22			
23			
24			
25			

Figure 38. Example of “Fat” Question

The fact that the majority of the examples of “fat” questions came toward the end of my log also indicated to me growth in the students’ ability to create these types of questions. There were few if no examples in the beginning of my log where I could document students asking why and how questions. Their questions were very straightforward and the answers could usually be found within the pages of the book they were reading. Some students like Peg and Ann began jotting down in their RRJs the questions they thought to ask their group members the next time they met. When I, the teacher, stepped back and allowed

the students to be in charge of their own learning, they gladly stepped up and worked to make sure that their group's members were all on the same page.

I also used grades from three book reports the students completed during this time as a method for documenting growth in the area of reading comprehension. I used the book reports I had my students write about their summer read in comparison with the book jacket and PowerPoint book reports they completed during literature circle to authenticate growth in their ability to comprehend what they have read. I put the grades for each of the book reports into a table to better view the data across these three projects (see Table 6).

Table 6
Book Report Grades Marking Period 1

Student	Summer Read	Book Jacket	PowerPoint
Jill	80	85	88
Patti	80	63	81
Sue	60	75	81
Sara	40	75	81
Allen	80	90	88
Mary	100	75	81
Peg	80	70	81
Joe	60	83	81
Sam	100	85	81
Ann	60	95	100
John	60	75	88
Jack	100	95	94

Note. Shaded boxes indicate an increase in the student's grade from the previous book report.

Because the summer read book report was based on a book the students had read individually over their summer break, and the other two reports would be

using a book they had read during literature circle, and since the three reports would span the entire first marking period, I felt that this would be an accurate measure of the students' comprehension. As is evident from the table, eight of the twelve students, a 66% increase, scored higher on their book jacket report from their first literature circle than they had on their summer read report. The PowerPoint book report from the second round of literature circles again yielded higher scores for the majority of the students.

These grades, in addition to the students' other scores on items such as theme and selection tests from our Houghton Mifflin reading series, supported my belief that, through having the opportunity to work together cooperatively to study literature, students would be proficient in the area of reading. These assessments test for specific skills such as making inferences, comparing/contrasting, sequencing, locating main idea and supporting details, determining the author's viewpoint, story structure, cause/effect etc. Ten out of twelve, or 83%, of the students received an A or a B for their first marking period grade. (see Table 7).

Table 7
Marking Period One Grades

Student	<i>Quiz: 9/15/06</i>	<i>Quiz: 9/29/06</i>	<i>Quiz: 10/10/06</i>	<i>Quiz: 10/18/06</i>	<i>Quiz: 11/6/06</i>	<i>M.P. Average</i>
Jill	85	100	100	Absent	80	93A
Patti	75	100	100	100	100	87B
Sara	75	80	100	80	60	73C
Sue	70	80	100	100	80	80B
Mary	100	100	100	100	100	93A
Peg	65	40	100	80	60	81B
Ann	65	100	100	100	80	91A
Jack	85	80	100	Absent	100	90A
Allen	75	100	80	100	100	92A
Joe	55	80	100	100	60	62D
John	80	100	100	100	80	92A
Sam	75	100	100	80	Absent	84B

Theme 3: Attitudes Toward Literature

Students' attitudes toward literature and reading were positively influenced through the use of literature circles in the classroom. Likewise, student motivation for reading was also positively influenced through the use of literature circles. Students involved in literature circles learn to value literacy and literature, and talk about books and reading both in and out of school (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). I noticed in my students an increase in their desire to read or be

read to. They became very involved in the books we read during snack and asked for more reading time during class as on September 21, 2006 when Patti expressed her desire to keep reading Sahara Special, our first read aloud of the year. On that same day, after finishing Sahara Special and introducing our next read aloud Ida B., Jack asked me when we were going to get a chance to start Ida B. since we had run out of time during snack/read aloud that day (see Figure 39).

September 21, 2006

Page # 6

1 "I wish we could keep reading."

2
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45
46

Like the other students, I can tell I really connected with this story. I wonder if it is because she is fatherless like the main character. Maybe she will take away some of Sahara's confidence from the end of the book. I hope she chooses to find and read more books by this author.

N/R

This book is eliciting much more enthusiasm and excitement for writing/responding than the previous two. Considering those two were from the student anthology, I am thinking that might mean my students enjoy novels more than what is presented in their text? It could also be because I read Sahara Special aloud.

N/R

YES! Even if it was only a few students at least they are excited about getting started with the circles. I hope the enthusiasm lasts once we get started in a few weeks.

N/R

chooses character map for his journal response even though I asked them to use that as a last resort.

Everyone is writing feverishly in their Reader's Response Journals for the connection to Sahara Special.

checking the examples of responses hung on the blinds as she writes her own response.

When I said we were finally ready to start literature circles I heard some "yeahs".

asks me when we are going to read more of Ida B, since we did not get to it for snack/read aloud today.

Student Enjoyment

Teacher Frustration

Writing Behaviors Student Interest

Student Interest

Literature Preferences

Student Interest

Figure 39. Field Log Observation: September 21, 2006

I also observed students reading ahead in their literature circle books (see Figures 40, 41, and 42).

10/9/06 Individual Work Day Page # 29

<p>1 "I accidentally read two chapters." 2 to no one inparticular. 3 4</p>	<p>45 This was no accident. likes to do his 46 own thing. I am not surprised he took it 47 upon himself to read ahead. 48</p>
---	--

Figure 40. Student Motivation for Reading

10/12/06 Individual Work Day Page # - 62

<p>1 is reading ahead – I can tell from the 2 number of pages he has read already 3</p>	<p>47 N/R 48 49</p>
---	---

Figure 41. Student Motivation for Reading

<p>27 28 reading the conclusion of the book-I 29 told him this was going to make the next 14 30 days pretty boring—he went back and reread 31 chapters 1-2 32 33</p>	<p>I'm glad is interested enough in this book to read the ending to see what happens, but I know that he is going to be bored of his mind for the rest of this circle if he keeps reading ahead</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Student interest</i> <i>Student engagement</i></p>
--	---

Figure 42. Student Motivation for Reading

Although this could have been viewed in a negative manner, I found it to be somewhat positive. These students knew that they were going to have to read the material again with their group members, but they were so engrossed in the reading that they had to keep going. This was often the case with Sam who has

difficulty putting a book down once he has picked it up. Likewise, I would catch students reading their leisure chapter book instead of completing their end of day work. Again, this is something perhaps a teacher would find fault with, but within the context of my study, I documented it as proof that the students were really getting interested in reading. When announcing an individual work day on October 19, 2006, I was met with, “Yes!” from Sue, a student who struggles greatly with comprehension and rarely reads during her free time. The students were handing in their book reports early and were excited to have the opportunity to work on their literature circle assignments (see Figures 43, 44, and 45).

November 6, 2006	Page # <u>137</u>
1 Four book reports came in today –early	44 Excellent! I think this report was easy
2	45 because the kids really enjoyed the book so
3	46 it would be easy to try and persuade
4	47 someone else to read it.
5	48
6 and , say “Yes” when I	49 Not really what I consider the most fun part
7 mention literature circles individual work	50 of literature circles, but I’m glad they
8 day.	51 appreciate the time to prepare.
9	52
10	53 N/R
11 All students are reading during prep time	54
12	55 N/R
13 is reading and writing simultaneously	56
14	57

*Student
interest*

Figure 43. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature

10/19/06 Individual Work Day

Page # 88

1 I said it's time for individual work day
 2 and said "Yes!"
 3
 4
 5
 6

47 I am glad is showing enthusiasm for
 48 having time to prepare for literature
 49 circle but from what I have read in her
 50 RRJ she does not write much that is
 51 substantial
 52

Student interest

Figure 44. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature

October 18, 2006

Mystery Behind the Wall

Page # 84

1 "I hope we do lit circles again. I like when
 2 we talk about it." ---
 3
 4
 5
 6

comprehension is a little weak
 so I think she likes having the opportunity to
 talk to other kids about what she's read. It
 probably clarifies a lot of things she doesn't
 understand.

Student enjoyment

Figure 45. Positive Attitudes Toward Literature

Incidents such as this provided support for the concept of literature circles increasing the students' desire to read. Students like John, Sara, and Sam were reading and telling me about books for our 100 Readers' Club. The class developed a specific interest in reading Boxcar Children Mysteries, which they were all reading during our first literature circle. Some students such as Jill, Ann, and Sara even chose to pick out multiple copies of Boxcar Mysteries and read them together. I thought this was an amazing thing to observe. The students had basically created their own literature circles. "Allowing students to choose the text that they have the highest interest in, the assignments, and the type of written response they would complete helped to increase motivation and enthusiasm for reading" (Jewell & Pratt, 1999).

Theme 4: Group Dynamics

The group dynamics present among students in literature circles affected the amount of verbal participation the students demonstrated. Although primarily a reading instruction strategy, literature circles require students to develop and practice the use of appropriate social skills. Because students do not exist in a vacuum, these skills are important to their development as members of a classroom community. Possessing the faculties to interact and converse appropriately with peers is a skill that is not only important during literature circles, but throughout the students' lives. The personalities and characteristics students bring with them to literature circle have a strong impact on the overall performance of the entire group. A prime example occurred during the second round of literature circles with the students reading Fourth Grade Rats. Jack and Allen's very forward, aggressive, and take charge personalities caused Sam to become disengaged from his group. Although his evaluations never reflected any negative feelings harbored toward these boys, the drop in his verbal participation from his first group setting was obvious. Jack and Allen's tendency to cut Sam off during discussion or discount his ideas led to Sam's disengagement from the group. His verbal participation rate decreased by 40 (see Figure 46).

November 3, 2006	Fourth Grade Rats	Page # 124
1 First meeting for gender grouping	N/R	
2 3 The first 10 minutes or so were basically a 4 conversation between . . . and 5 6 7	These boys are having a great discussion about the book. It's a shame the other three aren't involved. They are asking each other questions and challenging each other to think about important story events	<i>Discourse Leaders</i>
8 9 The members did a lot of predicting using 10 the book's cover	They were really only trying to figure out which boy was Suds and which boy was Joey	
11 12 13 When asked a question, . . . says 14 "Hmmm, let's see" but never gave a 15 response	I was hoping . . . tendency to clam up would change when he was working with a different group but I guess not. He is still holding back when it comes to verbal participation. He just stares up at the ceiling waiting for the other kids to move on to someone else	<i>Confidence levels Lack of verbal participation</i>
16 17 . . . is acting like he's thinking of something 18 to say—tapping his head with folder—never 19 says anything	N/R	
20 . . . had to tell A . . . to share his RRJ	I'm going to have a one on one with . . . about his RRJ so we don't have a repeat of last circle	<i>RRJ student responsibility</i>
21 22 . . . does not have an entry to share from 23 RRJ	. . . has a lot of interesting things to say, but I'm not sure why he doesn't speak a little more clearly. It's almost like he wants to say something but doesn't exactly want anyone to hear him. Like he's saying it for himself	
24 25 26 27 . . . mumbles any comments he makes to the 28 group	This didn't really surprise me for . . . and . . ., but . . . was very verbal in his last group	<i>Discussion behaviors</i>
29 30 31 32 33 34 . . . and . . . hardly participated in this 35 discussion—their rate of participation is less 36 than 1/3 of . . . and . . . 37 38		

Figure 46. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Rats

Another example where I saw the group dynamics have an effect on a student's verbal participation was in the case of Mary. In the social grouping setting, Mary was extremely dominant in her circle. Her verbal participation rate of 99 was the highest of any student at any time during the study. After rereading my field log notes and observations of her group, it was clear that one of the reasons for her very high verbal rate was the fact that she rarely let anyone else talk. She was lacking the willingness to accept her group members as individuals who possess worthwhile opinions. This willingness often leads to the deeper valuing of the ideas of others even outside the context of the classroom. (Stien & Beed, 2004). Comments such as, "We did terrible because Mary is bossing the group around." and "I did nothing, Mary is the one leading the group to failure." taken from her group members' evaluation sheets indicated that Mary was causing some serious group conflict. With her verbal participation rate being almost 30 points higher than any of the other members, it was clear that she was not giving everyone the same chance to speak.

After studying the information in Table 5, I noted a significant drop in Mary's verbal participation rate over the next two group settings. Her scores of 54 in gender grouping and 31 in ability grouping made me question what had changed. I turned again to my field log notes. I concluded that the three boys Mary had worked with in the first setting did not seem to challenge her when she dominated the discussion; however, the girls she was working with in the gender

setting did not let her overtake their circle. These girls kept right up with her. On November 7, 2006 I observed this group during their literature circle. I noticed that the girls were always interrupting each other when speaking. This was not occurring in a negative way, however. It was the kind of interrupting that occurs when a genuine conversation takes place. The interchange of ideas and opinions was coming from all the group's members, not just Mary. Mary's verbal participation rates for this meeting were about equal with those of her group members. The personalities and characteristics of these girls had caused Mary to take a step to the side and allow other people to share their thoughts as well (see Figure 47).

November 7, 2006	Fourth Grade Celebrity	Page # 140
1	did not know what the word beige	44 Great example of students as teachers.
2	meant or how to pronounce it. The group	45 Figuring out this word and then why it was
3	worked to figure this out.	46 used took a while but they plugged away
4		47 until everyone understood.
5		48
6	There are lots of maybe this maybe that in	49 N/R
7	this group.	50
8		51
9		52 Each one was the boss in their last group.
10	and keep cutting each other off	53 This time with someone else vying for the
11	when they are speaking.	54 position it won't be so easy.
12		55
13	"This book is confusing" an	56 suggestion to bring it to group made
14		57 me happy. She reminded these girls that it's
15	"Just bring it to group"	58 ok to be confused. That's why they come
16		59 together to help each other understand. I do
17	"They probably want us to do critical	60 not know where got the idea of critical
18	thinking."	61 thinking but good for her!
19		62
20	This book requires them to make a lot of	63 N/R
21	inferences and it's challenging them.	64
22		65
23	did not respond to last night's reading	66 No wonder she doesn't have a lot to say.
24	in her RRJ.	67 Going to have to get her to start showing me
25		68 response every day.
26	responded 32 times.	69
27		70
28	responded 1 time.	71 These numbers prove that is either
29		72 way out of her element or is just not
30	responded 29 times.	73 comfortable working with this group of
31		74 girls. She was silent the entire time. She may
32	responded 33 times.	75 as well have not even been there. It made me
33		76 feel very sad for her.
34		77
35		78
36		
37		
38		
39		
40		
41		
42		
43		

Figure 47. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Celebrity

The group conflict that was present among the students in their circles often caused arguments to ensue and feelings to be hurt. This led to a breakdown in communication and verbal participation. Contrastingly, the attitudes of some students helped to create a supportive environment in which the group's members

were able to bolster each other and work for a greater understanding of all. Through analyzing the students' self/group evaluations, I was able to ascertain which students worked successfully together. The rate of verbal participation during discussion was greater when the overall group dynamic was a positive, supportive one as compared with a dynamic in which there was evident group conflict.

An interesting finding that presented itself during the first round of literature circles with respect to group dynamics was that, although students chose to work with their group members for this first round, two of the three groups exhibited significant group conflict. The use of a sociogram allowed me to arrange students in groups with students of their choice; however, they soon realized that this does not always create the easiest learning situation. Following up with a question on the student interview about the type of peers students enjoy working with allowed me to further document students' feelings toward particular personalities of classmates.

Theme 5: Making Connections to Literature

Student ability to respond and react to literature through written response was either strengthened or remained the same while using a reader's response journal. No student's ability to respond in this way was weakened through the use of this method of response. The experience of writing in a daily reading journal was a unique and individual one for each student. Although it was my original

intention and desire to utilize the reader's response journal as a means of strengthening my students' abilities to react and respond to literature, I observed that not all students used the RRJ to its greatest potential. Their responses in the beginning were terse and, for some, remained as such throughout the study.

According to Vygotsky, "Writing must be 'relevant to life'" (1978, p. 118). This, I believe, was where I went wrong with some of my students. I failed to make the RRJ something they needed. For some, there was no relevance outside of the fact that it was yet another assignment for which they would receive a grade. Patti and Sam were two students who struggled with the concept of the RRJ. Although they are both good writers perfectly capable of creating a thoughtful response, theirs were often no more than a couple sentences, if written at all. Sam would continue this behavior throughout the entire study despite warnings about it affecting his grade. It began to affect the relationships he had with his group members as their frustration mounted with his lack of response.

There were, however, a few students who used the RRJ just as I had intended. Their responses reflected their ability to make connections between literature and their own lives, respond and react to a piece of literature, and generate thoughtful questions (see Figures 48 and 49).

I don't like how the person says words aren't really what they are. The words aren't even that long. They made more work for them selves, I think they were being lazy. There is a lot of rhyme. I do like their rhymes. I think that he felt very lonely. I see personification. It was my heart dances with the daffodils. Hearts can't dance but can beat and daffodils dance either. But can flow in the air. I think William Wordsworth is a pretty good poem writer.

Figure 48. Allen's RRJ Response

I think it makes me feel like I'm feeling the breeze and the poem has a simile in the first line and in the first stanza and one in the second stanza on the first line. I think the poem is about someone who is dancing in the breeze. The mood was a cheerful and happiness. I know because it said in the 3rd stanza the 2nd and 4th line is said ... Out-did the sparkling waves in glee (happiness) and in such a jocund (cheerful) company. He came in the last stanza. later he realizes that his heart was filled with pleasure.

Figure 49. Peg's RRJ Response

Although I did not observe that the more experience and practice students had with writing in their RRJ helped them improve their ability to respond to

literature in this written format, I was pleased with the outcome of the majority of students using the reader's response journal as a method of reacting to literature in various writing formats.

Theme 6: Attitudes Toward Peers

The group dynamics present among students in literature circles contributed to the development of positive or negative attitudes toward peers in the classroom setting. Unfortunately, not all students work well together. Perceptions of peers academic ability and level of responsibility can be affected by their performance during literature circle. Students who neglect to complete the assignments and offer little to the group's discussion catch a bad rap as someone who students do *not* want in their group. Once in place, these feelings toward and about peers can continue to present themselves throughout the school year, thereby affecting later grouping scenarios.

The current relationship between Sam and the rest of his classmates is a chief example of this sixth theme. In both the social and gender grouping situations, Sam created for himself a persona of "the slacker". There are many instances in my log where I was able to observe the discord within a group that contained and surrounded this student (see Appendix R). In his first circle, Sam never agreed with the direction his group wished to take. The frustration level of his group members was evident in their self/group evaluations (see Figures 50, 51, and 52).

1. How did your group do today?
 Our group was not very good today.

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I said he wants to join another group for lit circle and argue a lot well all most.

Group Conflict

Figure 50. John's Self/Group Evaluation

1. How did your group do today?
 My group did good but, did not want to read out of his RRJ. He said instead of reading once he read 4 times instead of writing in his RRJ.

Figure 51. Joe's Self/Group Evaluation

1. How did your group do today?
 Terrible !!!!!!

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?
 I kept stopping the group from discussing!

Group Conflict

Figure 52. Mary's Self/Group Evaluation

This dislike for Sam's unwillingness to use his RRJ and participate in group discussions carried over into his next group setting as well. On November

8, 2006, I overheard a conversation among the members of Sam's group while I was observing another group of students. The conversation made clear that these students were not pleased with Sam's performance. It seemed that Sam had not written in his RRJ again and the members of his group were starting to get fed up (see Figure 53).

20		
22	"You're not thinking, you're writing" . . . to	I overheard these comments while I was watching Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. Seems like I . . . did not write in his journal again and the members of his group are starting to get fed up. . . was pretty harsh, but he's right on the money. doesn't think writing in his RRJ is important enough to warrant his time. I hope this makes . . . think twice about doing his assignment tonight
23		
24	"You're too busy making paper people to do	
25	what you need to do like write in your RRJ"	
26	"to"	
27		
28	"s group is really getting on his case	
29	about not writing in his RRJ	
30		

*Group conflict
student expectations
writing behaviors
student*

Figure 53. Field Log Observation: Fourth Grade Rats

Now with the study being over, this stigma of Sam being the type of student who is argumentative and careless with his work still follows him around. When it is time for groups, I can hear the students who have to work with Sam complain, and the look on their faces says it all. They do not want to work with a student like Sam.

On the opposite side of this coin were the students who were viewed very positively by their peers during literature circle. These were the students who were always in the top three when students were asked on their end-of-book self-assessments with whom they would like to work in their next group. After the first round of literature circles, Sara and Ann were on ten out of the twelve top three lists. Sam, was on one. The students who kept on top of their assignments

and were an active participant in the discussion were much more likely to be favored when the next opportunity for group work presented itself.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effects various grouping strategies had on students' verbal participation during literature circles. Findings for this and many other questions have been found through conducting this teacher action research study. The development of new questions follows the natural progression of action research. New ideas for my next action research study have already formed and await their turn to be examined.

NEXT STEPS

Although I found this study to be very successful based on the knowledge I gained as a teacher researcher, there are certainly alterations that could have been made to strengthen the outcome. I feel that implementing Daniels' (2000) role sheets at the start of the study and continuing their use throughout would have been of a greater benefit to my study than to only implement them with students who struggled with verbal participation. Another revision I would have made to this study would have been to personally respond to the students' Reader's Response Journals every other day as a way to increase the importance of the journals. I feel that a constant communication between teacher and student would only strengthen the desire to respond in this particular written format. Although I did this for a short time, I believe that continuing this process throughout the study would have increased the students' response to this journal.

Since the study has ended, we have continued to utilize literature circles as one of our main forms of reading instruction. We had returned to using the prescribed student anthologies from Houghton Mifflin, but since December we have read two more novels. Returning to textbook literature circle philosophy, I have already altered my method of group formation by grouping the students according to book choice. I provide the students with three or four choices and ask them to rank them in order of interest. This allows me to group the students with peers who are also interested in the same piece of literature. This method of

grouping has worked well, however I do not feel at this time that it has been any more successful than the three previous methods of grouping. The students' rate of verbal participation has remained fairly constant, and they are enjoying the opportunity to work with one another.

The future definitely holds many more rounds of literature circle for this year's class and all of my future classes. I am interested in looking into the concept of various genres affecting the verbal participation and student attitudes toward literature circles. Other possibilities for future action research studies include altering the format of the reader's response journal, using literature circles with the student anthology, and using literature circles as part of a guided reading approach to reading.

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Appendix A

Principal Consent Form

August 30, 2006

Dear Dr. _____,

I am currently working toward the completion of a Master's of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. The courses involved help me stay in touch with the most effective ways of teaching in order to provide the best learning experience for my students. For example, I have studied a great deal of research that supports the use of literature circles as a means of improving reading instruction in the classroom. Likewise, I have researched numerous studies on the affect different types of grouping have on cooperative learning. As a requisite for my thesis, Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The focus of my study will be to bring these two types of research together to examine the impact of various grouping strategies on my students' literature circle experience. Through the implementation of literature circles, I hope to instill in my students a love of literature and reading. I am also looking forward to gaining a deeper understanding of the working dynamics present in elementary literature circles in an attempt to enhance my students' literary experiences. This study will take place from September 5, 2006 to December 23, 2006.

I will be gathering information to support my study through student interviews, surveys, skill checklists, student self-evaluations, audio and videotaped student literature circles and observation. All students will have the opportunity to provide feedback to me through these methods. All children in my classroom will be participating in literature circles as the primary form of literature instruction. However, participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the child's grade in any way. Any child may withdraw from the study at any time without academic penalty. I will only use information collected from students who have permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. All of the students' names as well as other staff members and our school name will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and a number key. No names will be included on self-evaluations or other means of data collection. Audio and videotaped literature circle discussions will be utilized in the classroom only as a self-evaluative tool with the students. All research materials will be kept in a secure location at my home. All data gathered during the study will be destroyed by myself at the conclusion of my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research at any time, please feel free to contact me, Christina Pierzga, through the school at (908) 454-5000 ext. 223. I may also be contacted via email at pierzga@c@hotmail.com. My faculty advisor through Moravian College is Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales. She can be contacted through Moravian College, Education Department, at (610) 625-7958 or through email at crzales@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,



Miss Christina Pierzga

Appendix A continued
Principal Consent Form

I have been made fully aware of the intentions surrounding Miss Pierzga's action research thesis study and am granting permission for said study to take place beginning September 5, 2006 and concluding December 23, 2006.

Principal Consent: _____

Date: 9/1/06 _____

Appendix B HSIRB Consent Letter



MORAVIAN COLLEGE

August 2, 2006

Christina L. Pierzga
801 Lee Avenue
Alpha, NJ 08865

Dear Christina L. Pierzga

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "To what extent will grouping students homogeneously versus heterogeneously have an observable and reportable effect on students' verbal/auditory participation during literature circle discussion?" Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415

Appendix C Parent Consent Form

September 5, 2006

Dear Parents or Guardians,

I am currently working toward the completion of a Master's of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. The courses involved help me stay in touch with the most effective ways of teaching in order to provide the best learning experience for your child. For example, I have studied a great deal of research that supports the use of literature circles as a means of improving reading instruction in the classroom. Likewise, I have researched numerous studies on the affect different types of grouping have on cooperative learning. As a requisite for my thesis, Moravian's program requires that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. The focus of my study will be to bring these two types of research together to examine the impact of various grouping strategies on your child's literature circle experience. Through the implementation of literature circles, I hope to instill in your child a love of literature and reading. I am also looking forward to gaining a deeper understanding of the working dynamics present in elementary literature circles in an attempt to enhance your child's literary experiences. This study will take place from September 5, 2006 to December 23, 2006.

I will be gathering information to support my study through student interviews, surveys, skill checklists, student self-evaluations, audio and videotaped student literature circles and observation. All students will have the opportunity to provide feedback to me through these methods. All children in my classroom will be participating in literature circles as the primary form of literature instruction. However, participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the child's grade in any way. Any child may withdraw from the study at any time without academic penalty. Please notify me by phone or in writing if your child wishes to withdraw from the study. I will only use information collected from students who have permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. All of the students' names as well as other staff members and our school name will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and a number key. No names will be included on self-evaluations or other means of data collection. Audio and videotaped literature circle discussions will be utilized in the classroom only as a self-evaluative tool with the students. All research materials will be kept in a secure location at my home. All data gathered during the study will be destroyed by myself at the conclusion of my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research at any time, please feel free to contact Dr. Kildow or me, Christina Pierzga, through the school at (908) 454-5000. I may also be contacted via email at pierzgac@hotmail.com. My faculty advisor through Moravian College is Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales. She can be contacted through Moravian College, Education Department, at (610) 625-7958 or through email at crzales@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,


Miss Pierzga

Appendix C continued
Parent Consent

I have been made fully aware of the intentions surrounding Miss Pierzga's action research thesis study and am granting permission for the participation of my child in said study beginning September 6, 2006 and concluding December 23, 2006.

Parent Consent: _____

Date: 9/6/06 _____

Appendix D

Cooperative Learning Survey

Cooperative Learning Survey

****Directions: Circle the number that best explains how you feel about the statement. Circling a 5 means you very strongly agree with the statement and circling a 1 means you do not agree at all.**

Working in groups makes learning easier.

5 4 3 2 1
very strongly agree do not agree at all

It is easier to work with a group of my friends than with students I am not friends with.

5 4 3 2 1
very strongly agree do not agree at all

The leader of the group should do most of the talking.

5 4 3 2 1
very strongly agree do not agree at all

Working in a group gives everybody a chance to participate.

5 4 3 2 1
very strongly agree do not agree at all

There can only be one leader when students are working in a group.

5 4 3 2 1
very strongly agree do not agree at all

I am good at working with other students.

Appendix F Acceptable Journal Responses

Date: _____

Think Sheet 6



What Can I Do in My Reading Log?

Me & the Book

Sometimes what I read makes me think about my own life. I can write about an event or a character in a book that reminds me of my life. I need to tell what is in the book and what it reminds me of in my life.

Sequence

Sometimes it's important to remember story events in the order they happened. I can make a sequence chart, map, or list of these events and tell why I think the sequence is important.

Summary

Sometimes it might be important for me to summarize all or part of the story. I can write a summary and then tell why I decided to summarize this particular part.

Feelings

Sometimes a book makes me feel a certain way. I can write about that feeling and tell why the book makes me feel that way. I can also write about what the characters in the book might be feeling.

Character Map

I can draw a map of a character in the story. I can include personality traits, descriptions, actions, and anything else I think is interesting about that character.

Intertextuality

Sometimes what I read makes me think about another work—a book I've read or a movie I've seen. I can tell what other work this story reminds me of and why.

Prediction

I can think about the story so far and predict what I think will happen next. I can predict a whole book, the next chapter, or how the story might end.

Appendix G

Sociogram Script

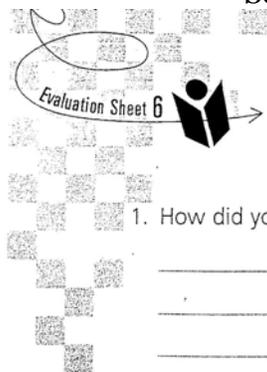
Sociogram Script for Students

Teacher: We are going to be doing some group work this year, and I would like to know who you would be interested in working with. I'm not promising that everyone will be able to work with their first choice, but I will do my best to have you work with someone on your list. I'd like you to write down three people you would like to do group work with. The first person you list should be the person you most want to work with and so on for numbers 2 and 3. No one else will see this information but me, so be as honest as you can.

Sample Index Card

	Student ID Number
1.	
2.	
3.	

Appendix I Self/Group Evaluation Form



Evaluation Sheet 6



Book Club Self-Assessment

1. How did your group do today?

2. What did you do to contribute to the group's success or failure?

3. What can you do to make your group more successful tomorrow?

Appendix J Observation Skills Checklist

Unit: _____ Date: _____

Evaluation Sheet 1



Book Club Rubric

Rubric	Group Members					Group Rating	Examples/Notes
Stays on topic							
Makes intertextual connections							
Shares ideas related to topic							
Asks appropriate questions							
Listens to discussion							
Builds on ideas							
Maintains smooth conversation							
Supports ideas with evidence							
Demonstrates comprehension							

Appendix K

Verbal Participation Chart-Regular

Verbal Participation Chart

Group Name: _____

Student	Asks a Question	Piggybacks on an Idea	Starts Discussion by Sharing

Appendix L
Verbal Participation Chart-Poetry

Verbal Participation Chart

Group Name: _____

Student	Asks a Question	Piggybacks on an Idea	Starts Discussion by Sharing	Identifies Poetic Element

Appendix M Book Jacket Report Form

Book Jacket Report

Boys and Girls,

Over the past few days, we have been learning about the mystery genre of literature. We have read a mystery in our anthology, and as I mentioned to you earlier, I am going to ask you to read a mystery book of your choice and do a book report on that book to present to the rest of the class. This book report will be a little different than the usual however. You will be creating a book jacket for your mystery! Here are directions for your project.....HAVE FUN!

DIRECTIONS

- ★ Fold the piece of paper Miss Pierzga gave you in half. Next take the ends and fold them in about six to eight inches like the book jacket of a hard cover book.
- ★ On the cover, draw an illustration for your report (this can be any picture you want that will describe the story...but it CANNOT come from the cover of your mystery).
- ★ On the inside front flap, write a description of the main character from your mystery. This might be the detective, suspect, or victim
- ★ On the inside back flap write a description of the setting and problem. Remember, the setting includes time and place. The problem is what is trying to be solved by the end of the book.
- ★ On the back of your jacket, write a summary of your mystery. Remember, a summary is a way to shrink up your story. Only include the important events.....no nitty gritty details!

Appendix N Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. *Why do you think teachers sometimes use group work in the classroom?*
2. *What kind of people do you like to work with in groups?*
3. *What does a good literature circle look/sound like? Describe what happens in a successful literature circle?*
4. *If you had your choice, would you rather use the anthology or literature circles for the subject of reading in the classroom? Why?*

Appendix O PowerPoint Book Report

Power Point Book Report

Who: You and your group members

What: Create a Power Point presentation 10 slides long to show the rest of your classmates

When: The final project date is to be announced at a later date (we'll figure it out as we go!)

Where: In the classroom and in the computer lab

Why: So other students who did not read your book will know if they would enjoy it or not

DIRECTIONS

- With your group, fill in the graphic organizer: make sure everyone has the same things written in!
 - For the **Events** section, choose **two** events from the beginning, **two** events from the middle, and **two** events from the end of your book that you think were important.
 - For the **Setting** section, write down **all** the main settings where your story takes place (there could be more than one!)
 - For the **Problem** section, try to think of the biggest problem that is throughout the entire book. There may be a new problem in each chapter, but you're looking for the **BIG** problem.

Appendix O Continued PowerPoint Book Report

- For the **Main Characters** section, choose only characters that appear in every chapter. The other characters are called *supporting* characters.
 - For the **Theme** section, try to think of what the author is trying to teach you, or a lesson they would like you to learn from reading the book.
- Your slide show should have a **title page** that has the name and author of your book.
 - Your slide show should have a slide that has **all** of your group members' names on it. It should go at the **end** of your presentation.
 - The Problem, Main Characters, Setting, and Theme boxes should all have their own slide

Main Characters
• Hope
• Frannie

Problem
Hope needs to
save the
restaurant

- The Beginning Events, Middle Events, and Ending Events should all have their own slide

Be Creative

Appendix P Coffee House Invite

COFFEE HOUSE POETRY

What better way to show what we've been learning about poetry for the past few weeks than to share our knowledge with others! Our class is going to host the first ever Coffee House Poetry Night for family and friends. Each of you will be choosing your favorite poem and creating some of your own to read at the poetry night. Family and friends will be invited to enjoy some treats and listen to some powerful poetry.

In choosing your poem, please make sure you choose one that speaks to you, one that you really make a connection with. In writing your own poems to share, you can choose any of the formats we have learned about (including shape poems).

I know I am very excited to host such a wonderful event, and I hope you are too! This will be a time of celebration for all the reading we've been doing and a fantastic way to start our winter break!

Appendix Q

Alphabetized Coding Index

Field Log Code	Field Log Page Numbers
Attitudes Toward Peers	1, 7, 12, 67, 79, 178
Balanced Group Discussion	84, 138, 162
Comprehension Deficits	5, 138, 176, 177
Comprehension Strengths	43, 73, 75, 145, 157
Confidence Levels	80, 101, 124, 157
Connections to Literature	9, 43, 176
Discourse Leaders	27, 48, 101, 124, 157
Discussion Behaviors	3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 19, 73, 124, 140, 160
Domineering Attitudes	43, 75, 120, 177, 178
Gender Differences	5
Group Conflict	7, 17, 19, 27, 35, 50, 56, 75, 77, 83, 89, 91, 96, 122, 145, 177, 178
Group Selection	10, 11
Lack of Verbal Participation	75, 80, 86, 101, 124, 140, 157, 160
Leisure Reading	4, 10
Literature Preferences	6, 8
Off-Task Behavior	7, 31, 33, 34, 43, 81, 86
Peers as Motivators	159
Previous Literature Experiences	2
Reader's Response Journal Responses	5, 10, 11, 29, 62, 88, 124, 140, 156, 157, 162
Reading Attitudes	4, 61
Skill Transfer	3, 138
Student Disengagement	3, 29, 62, 80, 82, 86, 87, 156, 159, 160, 177
Student Engagement	10, 61, 62
Student Enjoyment	6, 84, 85, 152
Student Expectations	7, 9, 25, 48, 69, 73, 84, 85, 94, 131, 145, 148, 157

Appendix Q Continued
Alphabetized Coding Index

Student Interest	4, 6, 9, 12, 67, 80, 88, 137, 160, 162
Student Responsibility	113, 124
Students as Teachers	5, 9, 24, 25, 71, 72, 73, 95, 140
Teacher Frustration	5, 6, 7, 12, 29, 61, 67, 86, 88
Time Management	3, 8, 12, 93
Writing Behaviors	5, 6, 29, 30, 80, 111, 145, 159

**This chart reflects codes and paginated field log data up to and including December 19, 2006.