

Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Jack Dilendik, Moravian College
Dr. Connie Unger, Moravian College
Mrs. Jennifer Conway, Easton Area School District

INCORPORATING STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES DURING SILENT
READING IN THE SIXTH GRADE CLASSROOM

Kimberly A. Ravese

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
2006

Copyright©2006 Kimberly A. Ravese

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study used structured reading strategies to motivate students to improve comprehension and attitudes toward reading. The students who participated in this study attended an inner city middle school in a sixth grade, proficient level language arts class. The study incorporated various interactive strategies, such as reciprocal teaching and think-alouds, to encourage student self-questioning and participation. To encourage student interest and participation, a classroom online discussion board was created using laptop computers.

Surveys focusing on reading interest and metacomprehension were administered at the onset of the study to gather information about students' involvement while reading. A classroom anthology and the novel, Number the Stars, were the primary resources needed to gain information concerning student use of the modeled strategies. Guided questioning work samples gathered during independent, small, and large group interactions, as well as written on online journal entries, provided data for the study.

A final questionnaire given at the conclusion of the study showed an increased use of reading strategies by the students to improve comprehension. The students participating in the study also showed an improved attitude toward reading in general.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank all of the students in my afternoon language arts class. Without their willingness to try new ideas and share their experiences, I could not have done this study. I hope they continue to use these strategies and grow as life long readers.

I would also like to thank my administration and colleagues for their continued support, especially our technology support teacher, Donna Kenlin. Her fresh ideas, insight, and encouragement made the use of our school district's first online discussion board possible.

The support gained from my group at Moravian has kept me going. I want to thank Colleen, Tiffany and Melissa who offered continuous encouragement. My professors at Moravian College have also been an unending source of knowledge in guiding me along this path.

My husband, Bob, and my children, Alissa, Joe, Mike, and Nick, have dealt with my moods and my nose in the computer for too long. I want to thank them for being there for me and for their never-ending patience.

Finally, I must thank my parents, Jack and Wilma Fatzinger, who met on the campus of Moravian College in the mid 1950s. They have always stood behind me in whatever I have chosen to do. Without them, I would never have

had the drive to continue over the rough spots. Thank you for being the wind
beneath my wings.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
TABLE OF FIGURES	x
RESEARCHER’S STANCE	1
Introduction.....	1
Teaching in a Sixth Grade Language Arts Block	2
Problems Begin to Surface.....	2
My Question Surfaces.....	4
Inspiring Words	6
METHODS	10
Setting.....	10
Participants.....	11
Procedure	12
Group Instruction.....	12
Independent Activity.....	14
Data Collection	15
Trustworthiness Statement.....	16
Biases	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	20

Introduction	20
Motivation to Read	20
Targeting Individual Differences	22
Background Knowledge.....	22
Decoding New Vocabulary	22
Other Significant Factors that Deter Success in Reading	24
Strategies for Success	28
Modeling Strategies in Group Settings	28
Independent Reading Time	34
Assessment of Progress.....	36
Conclusion	38
MY STORY	39
Introduction.....	39
Beginning the Strategies	39
Shifting Gears	42
The Miracle Worker.....	43
Encouraging Questions	44
Assorted Interactions	47
Reader's Theater	48
More Questioning	50
Questioning Leads to More Participation	50

Background Knowledge.....	52
Introducing Laptops	53
Discussion Boards and Reading.....	55
A Story of Survival	56
More Independent Activity	59
Do Not Disturb.....	61
New Connections	63
In Search of Answers	65
Keys to Understanding.....	67
How Do I Feel Now?	70
DATA ANALYSIS.....	72
The Collection Process	72
Gathering and Coding Data	73
Using Narrative Forms.....	76
Substantiating my work	77
In Conclusion.....	77
FINDINGS	79
WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?.....	92
REFERENCES	96
RESOURCES	100
APPENDIXES	101

A. Human Subjects Internal Review Board Consent.....	101
B. Surveys.....	102
C. Interview.....	117
D. Rapid Retrieval of Information.....	119
E. Checklist.....	121
F. Reciprocal Teaching.....	122
G. Think-Alouds.....	124
H. Buddy Journals.....	125
I. Guided Questions.....	126
J. Consent Letters.....	134

Table of Figures

BINS AND THEMES.....	73
JOURNAL ENTRY	90

Researcher's Stance

Introduction

Reading comprehension has always been an enigma to me. I was a good reader as a child, but as I progressed through adolescence my interest waned, as did my grades. Only when I became an adult and could choose from a variety of genres and authors did my reading habits finally improve. I can therefore relate to the apathetic middle school readers in my classroom. I do not want them to wait until they become adults, as I did, to enjoy reading.

Over the years, I found myself using little strategies to improve my comprehension, such as rereading text aloud that was unclear to me. I would also use a piece of paper as a bookmark to scribble down interesting and insightful quotes or questions. I found that as I became more interactive with what I read, I also expanded my genre choices beyond mystery and suspense novels. The more engaged I became with the material I read, the more confident a reader I became. My interests expanded to autobiographies, fantasies, and even science fiction.

Content area textbooks became a new challenge as I returned to college after having children. Juggling a family, work, and a full-time class load, I honed my comprehension skills needed for this non-fiction material, driven by personal incentive. Reinforcing previously self-taught metacognitive strategies, I realized the importance of forming questions as I read. What would the professor require on the final? What significant facts do I need to know? Finding main ideas and

summarizing details came easier, and I found focus as I improved as a reader.

Teaching in a Sixth Grade Language Arts Block

After graduating from college, I was thrilled at finally obtaining a teaching position and was eager to begin work in my sixth grade language arts classroom. Block scheduling would give me the freedom to incorporate novels and creative writing activities. I carefully blended the required curriculum with novels, often adding new ideas each year as I tried to fine-tune my own skills as an educator.

Each year, whether teaching fifth or sixth grade, one of my classes has always been an above level track of students. The group usually fared well academically as a whole, yet generally lacked the drive often found in my advanced level class. Many of their parents have shared the frustration with me that their children had always done so well in elementary school, only to decline in attitude and grades once they reached the middle school. I can see the apathy in the classroom with the familiar cry, "Does this count?" almost daily.

Problems Begin to Surface

Fewer students appear to be choosing to read for entertainment. Even though I have six bookshelves in my classroom, heavily stocked with high interest young adult novels, few students peruse them without prodding by me. When a book report has been assigned, or when students are told to get out a book to read during silent reading time, the classroom library area quickly fills up.

Along with this apathetic attitude in reading, responses on open-ended

reading assessments generally show curtness, lacking depth in both detail and information. Granted, this may be a developmental skill, but students can be taught strategies to compensate for weaknesses. So I began to ask myself if this were the key to improve my students' interest in reading. Would they need to become confident readers in order to become successful readers?

I began forming my question early when taking graduate level courses, when I taught social studies and language arts to fifth graders. Comprehension was a problem in both areas, made more difficult in the content of American history. All social studies textbooks are written for students who read at grade level, so if a student is reading at a lower level he or she may miss a great deal of information. I used students' textbooks primarily as a resource for the students, implementing more appropriate materials to target the different levels of students in my classroom. Interest also was an issue. If a child did not like the subject, I needed to incorporate more high interest activities.

One of the early units centered on Native Americans. In our textbook, there were only four paragraphs about Native Americans, each paragraph focusing on a different region. I used activities such as making totem poles and reading legends about the animals found on them to describe the culture of the Pacific Northwest natives. We made mini-travois and designed tipis to illustrate the nomadic lifestyle of the Plains Indians. I tried to find activities that would extend the students' reading experiences and make them more meaningful.

My Question Surfaces

Now I teach sixth graders, but only the language arts curriculum. My content area has changed, but the problem still exists. How do I grab the attention of the adolescent reader and encourage him or her to become a lifelong reader? The students who are more apt to choose to carry an independent reading book are usually found in the advanced track. These children have more consistent self-motivation and success in academics. Most of the students in the proficient track may not always choose to read independently and can often be found scrambling through bookshelves when given free time to read. If given strategies that may be employed more naturally by higher levels readers, will the average reader become a more voracious reader?

This concern surfaces whether I am teaching fifth graders or sixth graders, and whether it is about reading non-fiction or fiction. There has been consistent apathy, particularly with average readers. Do on-level students become comfortable with just getting by?

In our school, there is the upper track of advanced students who are high achievers. They are given special considerations due to their gifted IEPs. Then there is the lower track of students, who may be low achievers, but they are eligible for more services and smaller class sizes to meet their needs. Even though I teach an advanced level, a below level, and a proficient level, the focus group of students for my study is the proficient track. This middle group is usually

ineligible for any particular services to target deficiencies that may surface. If any students have problems in reading, they may not be formally classified for extra help. This in turn can precipitate a developing negative attitude toward reading at. Before problems spiral out of control, how can I encourage them to strengthen their reading skills, and enjoy it in the process?

I have a nagging need to find the root of this problem and the more I research, the more I feel the need to know. “Maintaining curiosity throughout the research process is almost a guarantee of success” (Arhar, Holly, and Kasten, 2001, p. 89). I find student responses to reading interest surveys document disinterest in the act of reading, yet most students still admit to getting excited at the anticipation of a new book. What happens between those two points to cause that change to occur? How do teachers help to stop the gradual decline of comprehension and attitude when children approach adolescence? My question has basically stayed the same throughout my entire Master’s of education classes: What will happen if I incorporate more structured activities into independent reading time?

Through my early research I have found many strategies, some familiar and some new, that will help students learn to self-monitor their comprehension during the reading process. All of these methods must be modeled to the students beforehand. Many of these ideas I have used already, such as making pre-reading predictions, journaling, and working in pairs. This is not enough. Students’

responses were often minimal, lacking any detail. The task appears to be only attempted on a superficial level, with the incentive only to complete, rather than to improve. I want to offer many avenues for my students to explore. It is a challenge to find ways to make the task of silent reading a more active experience for the child who needs an experience that is interactive and innovative.

Inspiring Words

Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 31) discuss the significance of the activities involved in learning rather than the end results. “Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.” This statement gives credence to the role of an experienced classroom teacher who tailors lessons to fit the needs of the students. So many programs have been instituted in our schools in the past based on quantitative data that focus primarily on an end result. The role of the qualitative researcher reinforces the input of the classroom teacher who bases decisions on what happens in the context of the actual learning environment. Taking my students through the actual process of learning and using this documentation gives me a real sense of empowerment on issues that effect my students first hand.

I found a study that has used email for teachers to be able to respond in a more timely fashion to students in a dialogue journal format (Kaiser, 2002). Taking it a step further, I would like to set up interactive literature discussion boards with which I can actually respond to students as they read. I can “get into

their heads” during the reading process. By including technology, it is my hope that this will increase the interest level as well as the comprehension level.

A variety of sources, such as observations, interest surveys, journal discussions, and computer discussion boards, will give a better-rounded picture of each student involved in the study. By allowing students to respond to literature through different means, strengths and weaknesses may surface that could indicate areas of progress or concern. Students will be able to collaborate in pairs, small groups, or a large group setting. They will be able to respond to what they read through journals, short answer assessments, and essays to give students a wide range of alternatives to show how they have interacted with different text. Could research show a relationship between low interest in reading and a minimal level of story comprehension? Will improvement in one area result in improvement in the other?

By integrating more interesting required literature with activities of individual choice, I would expect to increase students’ comfort level when they come upon new material. Historical fiction novels also offer a wide range of choices and reading levels to connect the content area classes. Hopefully, with a more planned and focused methodology, I will be better able to prepare my language arts students to appreciate, rather than turn away from, picking up a book to read.

“Does this form of growth create conditions for further growth, or does it

set up conditions that shut off the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions?" (Dewey, 1997, p. 36). The ultimate goal of this study is to foster a lifetime of reading, despite the backgrounds that bring each student into this classroom. Whether students will later choose to read Shakespeare or Dav Pilkey, the process should continue and not be thwarted by negative classroom experiences.

Every year I try and improve on the previous year by introducing more interesting novels, implementing improved record-keeping methods, and incorporating more effective strategies for learning. These decisions may be based on administrative changes; however, they are usually precipitated by the students' needs. "New knowledge not only better enables teachers to understand students and their world but also empowers the learners themselves" (Hubbard & Power, 1993, p. 1). What I have learned from the students each year alters my curriculum when the new school year begins. All teachers, I believe, do this on some level, because we are in a profession in which change is constant and educators must be willing to be flexible because of that. We are all researchers on some level as well, because we all document and search for answers due to our own experiences in the classroom.

Self-reflection will guide the direction that this study will ultimately take. In our busy schedules, reflection is probably the hardest step of the teaching

process to achieve after each lesson. Realistically, if there are time constraints, it is the first to go as long as our lesson plan has been accomplished. We may feel that a lesson has not gone the way we had planned and may just decide to scrap it the following year. But, to take the time to consider the reactions of the students, a questionable lesson may become more meaningful when it is tailored to the needs of the children based on thoughtful observations.

Middle school is a critical point for developing readers. Coming from elementary school, students are at a fork in their academic careers. If they continue to follow the path of negativity and apathy, there will only be frustration in their high school years. For children to know that it is acceptable for all of us to use methods to help us read and remember what we've read, hopefully, they will develop a sense of confidence as a lifelong reader.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to improve reading comprehension and attitude of sixth grade students during a fourteen-week period of time.

Comprehension and attitudes toward the reading of novels and short stories were studied to focus on improvement in these areas.

Setting

This study was carried out in a fifth and sixth grade middle school. The school is in an urban setting in eastern Pennsylvania with a population of approximately 1350 students. Ten through thirteen-year-old students from six different elementary schools, both urban and suburban environments, attend this intermediate feeder school. A wide range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are integrated on the campus. Approximately two-thirds of the students are white, with the remaining children either black, Hispanic, Indian, of Asian descent.

The middle school is sub-divided into teaching teams. There are eight fifth grade teams that are comprised of three core language arts teachers who also instruct the same 90 students in the content area of math, science, or social studies. There are five sixth grade teams with each teacher focusing on one content area class, such as language arts, math, social studies, or science. The sixth grade teams contain approximately 120 students. All students in both grades

are tracked, except for the fifth grade language arts classes. Special needs students are divided between the teams. Each team includes one or more classes of the following: learning support, resource room, emotional support, inclusion, or gifted instruction.

Participants

The class that was the focus of this research was comprised of 25 students on the proficient, or above, level in language arts. This particular team also has four other classes of students- advanced/ gifted, inclusion, on-level, and another proficient level. In the focus group, there are fourteen males and eleven females. Of them, eighteen students are white, three are black, and four are Hispanic There are representatives in the class from each elementary school in the district.

The academic level for placement into this group is based on fifth grade PSSA scores, report card grades, and teacher recommendation. There is a broad range of abilities in this group; from basic (on level) to proficient (above level). The primary reason for the diverse academic range is teacher recommendation. Students' work habits are part of teacher input and if it is believed that a child who has scored lower than proficient displays a strong work ethic, he or she may be placed in this group.

This particular class was selected for this study because of their broad range of abilities. Despite a general grasp of basic skills, these students often struggle with reading comprehension. They are less likely to choose a novel to

read independently for pleasure. There is often an apathetic attitude of the students in this group toward reading.

Procedure

Group Instruction

Before my study could begin, I had to be sure that it proved to be ethical and would not harm the children in any way. My students, their parents or guardians, and my administrator were given consent forms that had the approval of the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) (see Appendix A). My study was reviewed and approved by the board to preserve the safety and confidentiality of the students.

Since the study's secondary focus was reading interest, I used the Garfield Reading Attitude Test (see Appendix B), and the Reader Self-Perception Scale (see Appendix C) to note general levels and attitude of this new class of sixth grade students. An individual reading interview (see Appendix D) was also administered during the early weeks of the study to provide a broader picture of how students actually think about their reading habits.

The next step of the process involved incorporating a range of reading strategies as students read a variety of short stories. I felt that it was necessary to prepare the students by modeling strategies in small increments using short stories before they read a novel independently. Selections from the basal series began with the reading of "An Unlikely Heroine" by Susan Beth Pfeffer, a short story

from their anthology (Wind by the Sea, 1989). The Rapid Retrieval of Information (Green, 1998) method was used to focus on motivation. Students were given tasks to complete as they read independently (see Appendix E). The responses were then shared with the group. Students wrote their reactions about the story in dialogue journals, and these writing samples were gathered.

Students read ‘Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan’ by Francene Sabin, a non-fiction work, as the second choice from their anthology. The students completed a comprehension checklist (Massey, 2003) independently as they read to monitor their own use of comprehension strategies (see Appendix F). Students then wrote reactions to the story in dialogue journals. These writing samples became part of their repertoire of work.

Activities were introduced with the next story that involved small group collaboration. The class was divided into three mixed-ability groups of students. Each group used a different strategy while reading Three Strong Women by Claus Stamm from their anthology. “Group one” read the selection using “buddy journals.” They had graphic organizers with guided questions to complete while reading. These were shared upon completion with a buddy from the group, then with the class. “Group two” used “think alouds” (see Appendix G) as they read. In this strategy, the students took turns reading orally, commenting on the material, and then summarizing what they had read. “Group three” employed a reciprocal teaching method in which students readjusted previous predictions of the story

and finally summarized it after a group discussion. The reciprocal teaching method begins with the teacher modeling the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing initially. The students apply these methods by modeling them in their small groups.

“Damon and Pythias” by Fan Kissen and “Treasure in the Snow” by Mari Mc Swigan were consecutive choices, both read using a form of the “check and line” strategy (Dunn, 2000). Students marked areas of concern or insight with “postit notes” as they read. This information was later shared with the group. The students also participated in a reader’s theater as they read ‘Damon and Pythias’. Journal responses that summarized the story (Safer and Fleischman, 2005) were completed after each reading to monitor the comprehension of each student. Work samples were compared at this point to note areas of weaknesses and strengths.

Independent activity

Upon completion of the introduction of various reading strategies, students began to use these strategies independently while reading the novel Number the Stars. They were each provided with a laptop computer to use during silent reading time. As they read, the students were to question and share insights with the teacher or other students via an online discussion board on their laptops. They were given guided questions to respond to during this time, as well (see Appendix H). Students could correspond with others for help as they read independently.

Data Collection

Early collection of data included field log observations and reading attitude surveys in order to gain insight into the reading habits and feelings that my incoming class of sixth graders had. As they were introduced to new strategies, work samples, such as journal entries and students' responses to guided questions were collected to evaluate their level of participation and understanding. Field notes were gathered during this process, as well, as behaviors and reactions were recorded to note any relationships between comprehension and attitude. Classroom interactions and reactions during the reading process were noted to provide triangulation of the data.

An added dimension to the data is the ability to access dialogue from the online interactions. Each contact made during the time that the students questioned and discussed Number the Stars while on the online discussion board was recorded and became a unique part of the field log. This gives a candid view of all of the students' questions and insights, as well as the time that they spent off task.

The interest and metacomprehension surveys were given again at the end of the study to note any changes of attitude toward reading. A post-reading survey was administered for students to reflect on the study as well as to look ahead toward further reading goals.

Trustworthiness Statement

To prepare my students, their parents or guardians, and my administrator, I had given them consent forms that had the approval of the Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix I). Included in these forms was a brief description of my purpose, potential risks, procedures for anonymity, option for withdrawal at any time, contact numbers in case of concerns, and space for agreement signature. The students understood that they were the driving force behind this study. At any point during this study, children should not have felt as if they are powerless or intimidated. The data was only used to help them to find what strategies would work best for them as readers.

The students became a totally active part of this study. If at any point during this study any child wished to withdrawal, they could have done so by sharing their feelings with the teacher. They also knew that all parts of this study were confidential. Pseudonyms would be used to preserve their anonymity. Classroom discussions throughout the various activities encouraged open communication and trust with all participants. Different ideas were not discouraged, even if the outcome took the study on an alternate route. It was vital to respect the passage of time throughout the process of gathering data. Allowing isolated observations to remain isolated without noting change or consistency only could encourage generalizations. A student could have had an off day or

responses so it was necessary to use many forms of data to more accurately substantiate the acquired information.

Interactive strategies are still used in the classroom even after the study has formally ended. Students are continually encouraged to self-question and use the other strategies that were previously introduced. Activities of high interest and participation are the core to this reading class to help students continue to view reading as an integral and natural part of their individual growth.

The involvement of technology in this study was incorporated to further motivate students to participate in reading. They were encouraged to become more aware of what they were reading, making it a more meaningful process. These interactions were later printed as data for evaluation. The ability to print a hard copy of the email journal better secured the confidentiality and anonymity of the students. The journals and other work samples were kept off of the school grounds at my home.

Biases

Biases could occur from differences between desired findings in attitude and comprehension and the actual results. It was important to prevent this possibility by triangulating the data. Initially, I administered reading interest surveys to give my study direction. They also helped to give a better idea of my students needs. I then introduced new reading strategies. Problems with the strategies, students' needs, and time constraints could have occurred. Students

may have needed accommodations depending on changes that may have surfaced over the duration of the study.

A child who attained higher levels of success may have needed more challenging strategies to meet his or her needs. These children may also have been able to peer tutor those who continued to struggle with a particular activity. I incorporated the use of journals, checklists, and other forms of assessments at intervals throughout the process to note any areas of concern

Students were encouraged to work at a pace that was conducive to their success. The introduction of too many activities may have over stimulated some children causing to distract them from making progress in their reading. This can result in behavior problems that can influence the educator about the true root of any difficulties. At times there had to be an easing of the number of strategies used. The overall class personality can play a role in the choice of activities used.

I was careful to select partners and groups before the actual activities began to balance ability levels and eliminate any potential behavior problems. Small group work may become counter productive because of the behavior found in the classroom climate. Students also may not like or respond well to parts of the study or the study as a whole. It is important as an educator to reflect and learn from those differences to redirect the study based on those particular needs.

The importance of this research was not that it would be implemented to help reading comprehension alone, but the attitude as well. By pre-teen years, if

students have not had success as readers, they may further falter, particularly because of the increase of more difficult content area material. The field log was crucial at this point to note changes in behavior in order to alleviate problems as they occurred. Poor attitude can bias teachers as it often is viewed as defiance. Behavior that begins with the students not doing homework or participating in class may be the result of struggles in reading, rather than a negative response to the teacher.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Every lesson that we teach stays with our students in some way. It is our hope, as educators, that it is positive and meaningful. Students of middle school age can have complicated issues that they must deal with at this turning point in their school career. In reference to their reading skills, most adolescents have mastered the decoding necessary for fluency at this age. Therefore, their focus should be on building concepts while reading by using background knowledge and connecting that to new ideas. Successful comprehension will then depend on the reader's ability to focus attention efficiently on the text and its meaning. Readers then proceed when they feel that adequate understanding has been mastered (Swanborn & de Glopper, 2002).

Motivation to Read

Motivation and attitude are key elements in the success of the middle school age reader. However, motivation, which should be a driving force, may suffer from the lack of skills. This in turn becomes the source of discouragement for a positive reading experience. Baumann and Hooten (1999) found that fifth grade students valued reading more and became more voracious readers when novels were taught in conjunction with reading comprehension strategies.

Planned and unplanned lessons, which used journals, retellings,

interviews, and self-questioning activities, were integrated in conjunction with reading a novel carefully chosen by the teacher for its level of high interest for middle school students. There was a concerted effort to plan lessons, which equally balanced reading instruction and enjoyment of the book itself. Through the repeated use of interest surveys, it was found that students who participated in this study not only improved their comprehension, but also retained what they had learned longer (Baumann & Hooten, 1999).

Reading is usually seen as a passive experience. When students become a more active part of what they are reading, they will more likely make reading a regular part of their lives. The study by Baumann and Hooten (1999) was designed to develop students' reading comprehension strategies, but not at the risk of sacrificing the interest toward reading and books. Pugh (1988) substantiates this theory of surrounding students with "good reading" and oral reading; students will subconsciously begin to appreciate literature, simply by exposure.

Two of the prime elements that helped to contribute to the increased enjoyment of literature in the middle school students in Pugh's study (1988), included an exposure to a broad range of materials and the creation of an active learning environment. Teachers in class may often suppress students, even though it is natural for children to be gregarious at this age. As educators, we should see this as an opportunity to mesh what comes naturally in a positive way by planning lessons that can use this trait to making them learning experiences.

As we teach, we strive to improve comprehension. If interest wanes, however, so in turn does comprehension. With socialization encouraged in planned activities, it is hoped that the reading experience will become more meaningful. Balance is needed so the focus for this integration is not lost (Pugh, 1998).

Targeting Individual Differences

Background knowledge

McKeown (1992) substantiates the importance of strong background knowledge when reading, particularly with content area material. At middle school age, students are primarily contending with non-fiction text. New vocabulary and material become more challenging if students are not prepared with adequate background information. Another area of concern in using content material can be incoherence of text. In an attempt to include a large span of facts into a textbook, connections between new concepts can be lacking (McKeown, 1992).

An additional deterrent to success during reading can be less skilled readers. Setting lower standards for their comprehension of text may be due to previous failures. Properties of specific text, such as the qualities found in fiction versus non-fiction, can cause difficulty for readers, as well. The poor readers may not be as proficient at adjusting their reading strategies to fit their purposes (Swanborn & de Glopper, 2002).

Decoding New Vocabulary

Swanborn and deGlopper also found that poor readers were not as good at adjusting their reading strategies in decoding new vocabulary. They lacked the strategies necessary to self-monitor while reading, such as using context clues, in order to learn new vocabulary words from context. It was found that varying the purpose for reading affected the attainment of new vocabulary. The lowest gains in new word learning were seen in free reading, which does not require recall or direct reading to a specific feature of a text. It is not always necessary to derive meaning of unknown words from the text in order to accomplish the purpose of reading. The highest gains in new vocabulary attainment were found when students were given reading for comprehension tasks, since they knew that they would be asked about the content and its features. (Swanborn & de Glopper, 2002).

Middle school students displayed two different types of common difficulties. Some students were found to be poor at decoding and reading comprehension but exhibited proficient listening comprehension skills. Others, however, showed poor decoding, reading, and listening comprehension skills. Typically in reading instruction, decoding is the focus of early instruction rather than comprehension strategies. If comprehension strategies are not taught, this may lead to developmental stagnation in vocabulary, syntactic and inferential

abilities, and knowledge of the world (Brand-Gruwel, Aarnoutse, & Van den Bos, 1990).

Poor readers must be taught to monitor and regulate their own reading process since they often continue to read on despite their difficulties. Students who are poor in decoding skills often developed negative attitudes toward reading. Reciprocal teaching was found to help struggling readers to distinguish important from unimportant detail. They were also better able to clarify obscurities and inconsistencies in text. It was found that students trained in reciprocal teaching performed significantly better on standardized comprehension tests (Taylor, Graves, & van den Broek, 2000).

Research reported by Taylor, Graves, and van den Broek (2000), showed a 30% improvement in retention with students who had first mastered decoding skills in elementary school before learning new reading strategies on the middle school level. Causal questions introduced while reading trained students to make connections between understanding and memory. When students were encouraged to question the text during reading, it was found that their comprehension significantly increased.

Other Significant Factors that Deter Success in Reading

There are two significant factors that impede the progress of middle school students and their reading proficiency, according to Carstens (1996): cognitive disabilities or disinclination (psychological) problems. Students can be

taught strategies to help overcome these issues in reading. Activities can be introduced to aid phonemic awareness and word recognition with early readers. Intervention is necessary as students progress from the pre-literate through the early literacy phases. They have gone from learning based on communication skills into building decoding skills, when intervention in decoding is necessary. By the middle school age, skills should be established for students to be able to extract information from the text materials to aid in their reading comprehension.

Carstens (1996) found that a comprehension ceiling was achieved in some middle school students who were able to read presented words but could only gather minimal meaning from complex sentences. The students' deficiencies were often compounded by their own negative attitudes toward reading and instruction. Therefore, they may become "alliterate", or reluctant, readers. Students at this level may be tracked in middle schools and become stigmatized as low-achievers, compounding their problems. In order to alleviate the stress of this situation on the children, the author suggests the use of taped texts in conjunction with writing and reading strategies. The acknowledgement of the oral interaction while reading may be able to be integrated in another form, such as during paired reading (Carstens, 1996).

Diehl (2005) experienced the same predicament with students she deemed as "word callers", or those who went through the motions of saying the word with superficial knowledge of text support. The word callers also became more and

more disengaged with the reading process. Diehl utilized the research of Vygotsky (Diehl, 2005) to find guidance in producing strategies that could meet the needs of these students. Vygotsky believed that it was the speech used in social interaction that finally becomes internalized by the child. This makes speech a necessary factor in problem solving situations as students' progress from social to individual cognitive functioning. As children move through what he calls the "zone of proximal development", or what they are able to do with assistance, teachers should model a task then offer different levels of assistance based on student need.

The four-recursive phases that are part of this process (Diehl, 2005) move from teacher observation, student helping teacher, teacher helping student, and finally the student working independently on the task. These activities offer the chance for students to think about how they are reading and to develop strategies that could be used in a more natural setting than the Carsten (1996) model. Diehl's study also focuses on metacognition. Sixth grade students can be taught to be more aware of thinking about their reading and monitoring what they read.

"Comprehension is an intricate issue, requiring the simultaneous operation of complex strategies. These are not isolated processes but occur in a network where one person influences and is influenced by the others" (Diehl, 2005, p. 57) Successful readers not only read for a purpose, but they self-monitor what they are reading and synchronize their understanding accordingly.

When students read to learn, or use metacognitive skills, they are drawing from four areas: texts, tasks, strategies, and learner characteristics. Structures of various texts, such as in content area textbooks, call for students to organize different patterns in areas, such as reading rate. Older and more experienced readers are more aware of inconsistencies in texts and adjust their reading more than the less mature reader who does not see the impact these structures have on reading (Collins, 1994).

Tasks such as predicting while reading are more difficult with younger readers because of their lack of experience. As students grow and develop as readers, fix-up strategies become much more evident in the practices of the more successful reader. The poor readers are more likely to not summarize or self-question because of the increasing difficulty of more complex text. Learner characteristics may also vary greatly from child to child and can have a strong impact on reading comprehension. Differences in background knowledge, attitude, skills, and deficiencies in turn may become wider as students reach the middle school age.

Jitendra (2000) discusses the importance of teacher-mediated instruction in her study of students with learning disabilities. Even though teacher intervention during reading increases student use of strategies, it is not enough. In order for the transfer to student-managed independent learning to occur, there has

to be a gradual release of teacher control to increase the use of student self-monitoring, supporting the research of Diehl (2005).

Integrated in this cycle of the use of self-monitoring activities is systematic teacher observation. Found to be successful with learning support students, this careful observation process allows the teacher greater scrutiny as to when to integrate more student independence. The teacher is then tailoring his or her role of being in total control of the students' learning to minimal or no control. Results of posttests showed that students maintained performance six weeks later on selection type responses. Implications of this study may be the relatively simple integration of comprehension strategies in a small group setting.

Strategies for Success

Modeling Strategies in Group Settings

The middle school student's academic career is one of more intense reading in the content areas. This only emphasizes the need for proficient skills in reading comprehension. Another stumbling block to reading comprehension often occurs even before reading begins. Lack of interest and motivation deter many middle school children from choosing to read independently. Students' motivation will increase when they are given their own choice, but in the school setting, that is often not possible. Therefore, children must be taught reading strategies, which will encourage greater student participation.

Through the Rapid Retrieval of Information (RRI) method students set their purpose for reading. They are expected to search for information in preparation for a discussion, which will follow the silent reading time. Student interaction takes place before, during, and after reading, reinforcing the active process of reading. This strategy can be employed in both non-fiction and fiction material. Incorporating independent book choices can keep even the reluctant reader reading (Green, 1998).

Besides the reluctant reader, there are other instances in which differences need to be addressed. Careful preparation is needed for an individualized comprehension checklist. After planned modeling and development of individualized strategies, the teacher can allow students to read independently using pre-, during, and post reading methods in which students will check off attained goals. Fix-up strategies have been modeled before the period of silent reading, allowing students the responsibility of self-monitoring. Although this strategy did not focus on follow-up activities, conferencing would be needed periodically to more thoroughly monitor progress and adjust individual checklists (Massey, 2003).

Techniques used in learning support classrooms have been used to regularly measure student achievement in regular education classes. “Probes” or samples of student progress on particular skills are taken throughout the year to help teachers to drive reading instruction. The previous models using the RRI

method and comprehension checklists can help guide the teacher toward this more individualized reading plan for each child. Long-term goals can be set at the beginning of the school year concerning specific types of assessment and targeted skills. After a preliminary probe has been implemented, individualized checklists can be developed to incorporate the plans into silent reading periods (Safer, & Fleischman, 2005). This supports the previous data found in the study by Jitendra (2000) in which recursive practices were used to monitor learning support students.

Once the children have established a personal goal for independent reading, various other strategies can be utilized to strengthen comprehension on different levels of participation. One method introduced using a non-fiction text strives for an alternate form of assessment. The cloze procedure was used as another tool in checking students' comprehension. This procedure takes a summary of the story and omits chosen vocabulary words. It can be used as an alternative to the standardized test used in content area classes to locate comprehension problems (Brown-Chidsey, R., David, L., & Maya, C. 2003).

Through the construction of cloze procedures based on the Cobblestone children's historical periodical, the CBM-SR (curriculum-based measurement in silent reading) format was found to be helpful in driving instruction in the content area classroom. The format used in this procedure can provide structure, and it can be altered to give students a greater level of involvement. Children can work

in pairs or small groups to construct their own cloze assessments and test other groups of students. Due to the increased pressure to incorporate more non-fiction material into the language arts classroom, strategies must be developed to focus on comprehension in this genre. The large amount of vocabulary in non-fiction works lends the cloze assessment to be an option with a more student-directed focus (Brown-Chidsey, David, & Maya, 2003).

Another group technique, Coop-Dis-Q, or cooperative discussion and questioning, can be used with a fiction or non-fiction text. The teacher begins by reading the material aloud as students follow in their own copy. The students will discuss the text in small groups, and then sub-divide into even smaller groups. Those final groups will respond to a portion of teacher-generated questions. Students then rejoin their original group to complete the task with the teacher as facilitator of their discussion. This on-going reinforcement of the text helps students to strengthen their independent reading skills through modeling by both the teacher and by other students. Coop-Dis-Q sets an individual purpose for reading by encouragement on different levels of participation (Gauthier, 2001).

The challenge found in teaching middle school students or “readers in transition” can be found in other areas besides student ability. Interest at this level generally wanes, particularly with at-risk students. Three groups of eighth-graders with equal ability and background participated in either reciprocal teaching, using buddy journals, or with “think aloud” activities. A successful outcome was found

in all three groups. The result further reinforced the notion that interaction was the key element in maintaining interest and success in reading (Serran, 2002).

The passive stance that many students have toward reading can be interrupted in an attempt to engender more thinking during the process. This can help students to better internalize metacognitive dialogue. It has been shown that students benefit from strategies that use reciprocal teaching and embedded questioning. They would benefit further if they were allowed to pose their own questions during reading. During a study by Weir (1998), students were encouraged to mark the text while reading to construct their own questions. The strategy was first modeled by the teacher, and then used with partners. The students finally read independently to form their own questions. The entire process was then followed by a group discussion (Weir, 1998).

The result of this study was that the students were better able to discuss what they had read with a higher level of interpretation and application. Their metacognitive awareness strategies were developing as they improved their own reading comprehension. The embedded questions served to jump-start the metacognitive skills. The reinforcement of the social discourse about metacognition awareness, which followed the independent reading, may also have had a strong effect on the learner's performance than merely the questioning alone (Weir, 1998).

The issue of passivity in reading is addressed in the concept of “reader’s rudder”. Students without the reader’s rudder to keep them on course with the text lack the internalized expectations, which are needed to use for productive comprehension. After prereading activities are implemented by the teacher to prepare students to read non-fiction text, the selected reading is ‘dissected’, sentence-by-sentence. This technique, heavy in teacher and student modeling and interaction, helps students to witness the relevance of rereading and questioning while reading (Fischer, 2003).

Visual representations of text are important for students who may be lacking in background knowledge. Middle school students, who are more astute in using decoding skills, vary greatly in the background information that they come to school with. This can significantly affect the reading lesson that the teacher attempts to use to instruct the many students who come together with a huge range of experiences. The reader at risk often cannot make the connections necessary while reading if they are struggling to form pictures in their minds of what they are reading about. Illustrations in the text or movies shown in conjunction with reading have a great impact on improving comprehension (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

It may be difficult to realistically incorporate the use of movies and picture books into lessons on a daily basis. However, Hibbing et al. offer suggestions for educators. Modeling is important to show how visual representations can be used

while reading. A simple sketch accompanied by familiar vocabulary may be enough of a cue to jumpstart reading. Drawings can also be used for students to show their understanding and help them to remember important information. Sketching can be another option for students to use while reading, as a form of note taking, particular with the visual learner. It is yet another way for students to be more active readers (Hibbings & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

When students have difficulty in producing mental images of text, teachers need to see this as a breakdown of comprehension and need for intervention with a fix-up strategy. Hibbings and Rankin-Erickson (2003) developed a cycle of incorporating movie clips and discussion with reading at parallel points in the text. When background information has sufficiently been established, the students then begin to read independently. Whether providing illustrations, movies, picture books, or encouraging student questioning and sketching while reading, the need for visual imagery to aid in background knowledge is shown to strengthen reading comprehension in the struggling reader.

Independent Reading Time

We are now ready to switch focus from the small and large group activities to independent reading and comprehension monitoring. Through these interactive methods, students can now utilize what they have learned and use

these strategies for their own personal development of good reading comprehension skills.

“Check and Line” was developed for students to monitor their own comprehension while reading independently (Dunn, 2000). During reading, students become aware of their own comprehension as they: “go back”; “motivate”; and “reread” (GMR) in this process of search and reflection. After teacher modeling, students pencil check the margin of their text as they silently read, to make reference to their own comprehension. They are actually taking notes as they read, checking areas of comprehension, or lack thereof. Students become physically engaged, making the interaction more meaningful.

A difficult, yet important skill for all students is that of paraphrasing material. Mastery is pertinent with novels, yet becomes increasingly more necessary in content area classes. A four-step paraphrasing technique begins with teacher modeling and ends with complete class interaction. During the independent component, students will reread the text before their discussion, using learned skills to summarize what they have read. The wrap-up discussion will either validate what students have learned or help them to target the skills needed for personal improvement (Fisk & Hurst, 2003).

Constructing visual representations of text can also be also used to aid students in summarizing. During all three phases- pre-reading, during reading, and post reading- spatial learning strategies such as using graphic organizers

make it easier for students to retrieve content. The use of graphic devices, such as Venn Diagrams, spider maps, and KWL charts, also helps readers to organize information. These benefits, however, can be negatively affected by the time consuming nature of the task and a cognitive overload of information (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002).

Scaffolding instruction, or providing differing degrees of assistance for a learner according to his or her progress, can give students a firm base of understanding. As students attain higher levels of performance, teachers can ease up on their participation allowing them to find relevant concepts to develop their own theories and understanding. This type of instruction can help students better sort important elements of text and use what information is important to help summarize what was read (Hibbing, & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

Assessment of Progress

Assessment today in education does not always signify the end of something. Many districts are instituting programs that use on-going assessments to drive instruction rather than merely test acquired knowledge. One such program is called “4Sight”, which provides materials to monitor student progress through assessment. It is based on the eligible content gathered from state standards. Students are tested at intervals throughout the school year in order to drive instruction in preparation for PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing in the spring (Holmes, 2005).

The program initially screens children to alert classroom teachers to areas of concern in reading skills. Further assessments focus on diagnostic practices to address low to high-risk students. Progress monitoring gauges the success of the more intensive instruction. The final assessments can include the use of any high-stakes tests used by the district. The use of these programs is often instituted due to legislation to improve reading scores in the district.

Progress driven assessments may be the most highly effective practices for educators as they gather student data. Weaknesses and strengths that surface through testing enable teachers to plan and implement practices to drive classroom instruction more effectively. Not only does the 4Sight assessment program focus reading strategies, but it also prepares the students for the PSSA assessment.

It is through the possibility of reading response journals by email that may finally enable teachers to become part of the interactive process of students' independent reading experience (Kaiser, 2003). Email has been used to correspond with students after reading. Online literature discussion boards can be set up as a safe site to have active conversations with students during the actual process of reading. Teachers can share reactions, answer questions, and give directions, as students are engaged with a novel. As with the "check and line" and Coop-Dis-Q methods, students can be given a purpose to stay focused on the text and make it a continually interactive process.

Conclusion

The importance of this research is in the careful planning and utilization of strategies that focus on the reading process. It is not enough to hand a child a book and expect him to read and respond to comprehension questions. These skills must be developed and monitored. Reading should be acknowledged as a process with time for reflection and consideration over what has been read. Students should realize that it is acceptable to question and make notes while reading. All of these strategies help students to validate the importance of the entire process.

My Story

Introduction

I am met with a sea of blank stares. I had given the afternoon language arts block of sixth graders two different reading interest surveys and an interview over the course of several days in early September. Was it necessary to survey the students in written form, or were the vacant looks sufficient to evaluate reading interest?

I would break this ice by posing thoughtful questions to get them excited about reading. Or so I thought. I asked the students if they ever thought about their own thought processes as they read. What did they do when they did not understand what they read? Slowly volunteers raised their hands. Some stated that they reread, others said they looked for context clues, and still a few others admitted to reading merely to finish the accompanying worksheet.

Beginning the Strategies

The second week of school was a time for learning the strengths and weaknesses of in-coming sixth graders. The use of small group activities that I had been planning would not only give me the opportunity to model new strategies, but it would also help me to learn more about my students. I would be able to see how they interact with each other after modeling the “think-alouds”, buddy journals, and reciprocal teaching methods. After spending forty minutes demonstrating the use of each technique, I divided the class into smaller groups.

Each group would read the same selection in our anthology, practicing their newly acquired skills using one of the three demonstrated methods.

This plan appeared so clear and concise on paper, yet when I gave the “go ahead”, I suddenly wanted to rip my hair out! They were not paying attention to the task. Many students were not even talking to members of their own group. I realized that I needed to regroup and find a new approach for getting these kids started fresh tomorrow. They will never be able to use these strategies independently if they haven’t mastered them beforehand.

I decided to do a “fish bowl” activity. I would model the strategies beforehand again, but this time the actual groups would participate with the rest of the class watching. The students grabbed their chairs and formed a huge oval that hugged the walls of our classroom. Each reading group took turns dragging their chairs into the center of the “fish bowl”. They would become the fish as the remaining students studied the activity.

The stress slowly melted from the faces of the children as they were walked through the procedures of their particular activities. As we prepared to begin the actual reading of the selected piece, the students became more animated and verbal in their discussions. More volunteers were able to explain the strategies that they would be using. It was a feeling of validation when I saw a greater number of smiling faces confronting me, rather than the perplexed looks

that I had been met with the day before. Tomorrow, we will actually begin using these models. I am anxious to see how this plays out.

The next day I talked to the children for a few minutes as a whole group to review what they had seen in the fish bowl the day before. I asked if there were any questions. There was little response. Okay, I guess it was time to begin. The students grabbed their pencils, books, and guidelines sheets and shuffled into their designated groups. The think-aloud and reciprocal teaching groups, which were expected to be more openly interactive, quickly became very chatty. In the midst of their enthusiasm, they often needed reminders to reduce the volume and focus of their conversations. As I circled the groups like a shark, silently observing the activity around me, I began to sense evidence of discussions about the assigned text.

In one of the reciprocal teaching groups, Jay was describing what he predicted the story might be about. Ely read his prediction, as the rest of his group looked at the picture that he was describing from the book. Nancy chimed in that the women in the story may not have been taken seriously for their strength because of their gender. They all wrote their predictions, stopping at intervals to discuss their responses. The group that utilized the reciprocal teaching method adhered closely to their plan of using specified jobs and questions as they read.

It seemed difficult for the think-aloud group to decide when to stop and question or even if they **should** stop and question. During my observations of the

two groups that were involved in the think-alouds, I only heard one question during the reading time. The buddy journal participants, who were reading independently to prepare to share with their partners, were sluggish in the completion of their tasks. The more active groups made it difficult for them to concentrate. They were allowed to relocate in the class to a quieter area, if needed. Despite my feeling that these strategies are important for students to learn, the introduction of so much new activity at one time may be overkill.

Shifting Gears

Occasionally, we did not have time for the planned lesson. Assemblies, school-wide testing, and field trips frequently alter schedules. Time must also be set aside to teach skills to prepare for PSSA testing. We did not have time to learn new strategies because on this occasion there was school library orientation. The students were attentive in the library, particularly during the presentation about the online services. This left us with little time for book selection, so we returned to the classroom to discuss an upcoming project. I have concern already about the interest level of this group. I need to circulate through the room more than I do in other classes because this group is very social. I have moved seats already to avert the temptation to talk. I must say that they do participate when they are engaged, so I guess the key is to keep them active.

During a lesson of an author's various purposes for writing different forms of texts, we cited several examples of styles from our basal series. Walt had

volunteered to read a passage, however it was difficult for Walt to even pronounce words such as “centers”, “stating”, and “employees.” How could he grasp the concept of an author’s purpose if he could not read the passage? I am concerned about Walt in many areas of language arts. He seems to be struggling already, particularly in his responses to reading.

The Miracle Worker

The students are independently reading a biography in their basal readers about Helen Keller. I introduced a comprehension checklist to them beforehand and told them to complete it during or after their reading of the story. After a few minutes into the assignment, I noticed a flurry of off task behavior. Walt quickly glanced over at Rich’s page number and back to his own book. Mary is paging through her text, and then backs to the page where she’d left off. She’s looking across the desk at Jackson, who’s pointing to his book. She writes something down on a paper then points to her own book. Craig, who sits near Mary, looks at me, then at Mary, and finally at his own text.

While walking around the room, I saw Alan working on another activity. He said he had finished everything about the story. I have some concerns about Alan. He is very bright and gives thoughtful answers, but often seems to be distracted. He has difficulty getting along with other students. He has asked to have his seat moved already and bickers with other students no matter whose

group he works in. I hope that this is only a snapshot and not a complete picture of the classroom activity during this reading assignment.

The next phase in the lesson included a viewing of a movie about Helen Keller. During this time, there was not a sound in the room. The students watched “The Miracle Worker”, the original movie starring Patty Duke. The character of Helen Keller mesmerized them. They asked questions: How did her brother die? Where were Annie’s parents? They looked forward to watching a little more of the video each day.

I have been assessing them using various methods over the course of this story. I want to see what effect the movie may have on the students’ understanding of Helen Keller’s life. After watching the movie, we spent a few minutes discussing it. Dave said that he didn’t like the ending of the movie because it left him with too many questions. He wanted to see a sequel so they would be answered. It was interesting that the story in the book did not stir the need for a sequel to address unanswered questions.

Encouraging Questions

In order to encourage student participation in new ways, I decided to read to them for a few minutes before class each day. The book, The Dark-Thirty, is a collection of African American ghost tales. I wanted to choose something that would encourage them to listen more carefully, perhaps to solve the mystery that each tale holds. The students were to write predictions and summaries in their

journals of the short stories as I read. I also encouraged them to write if they felt the inspiration or need to remember an idea or if they have a question. No one wrote anything during the reading of the story, only when I prompted the class to summarize. I wondered what went on in their minds as I read. They seemed to be paying attention, but it was very difficult to get a conversation going.

The first tale that I was preparing to read, “The Woman in the Snow”, was a ghost story that paralleled the story of Rosa Parks. We discussed predictions. After reading, Caren said that the bus driver in the story was prejudiced and wouldn’t have let the woman on the bus even if she gave him her gold ring. Alan responded that it didn’t matter if the bus driver was black or white; it was how he felt that was important. I thought that his answer was insightful and thought perhaps that his remark would encourage a few other comments. This is a culturally diverse group of children. I was surprised that there wasn’t more response to the issue of prejudice.

The next day we finished our discussion of “The Woman in the Snow”. I asked them to complete their summaries of this story in their journals, and then we would share them. The story uses flashbacks to tie in the role of the ghost and the reasons why she kept returning to haunt the same bus. I was surprised to hear from a number of students who had not made the connection with the use of flashbacks from twenty-five years ago to the present. This was a huge part of the story. Other responses also did not seem to acknowledge the role of the ghost in

the story. Many students seemed to take the novel quite literally and had difficulty understanding the author's use of flashbacks in the story.

Another way in which teachers can question students during their reading is through the use of worksheets. I do not always feel comfortable in giving students worksheets to assess their reading skills, but with the focus on PSSA testing, we are feeling pressure to hit all of the areas of eligible content that we are required to teach. I had given them a worksheet to do with passages and questions to predict outcomes. I tied this in with the predicting that we had done with the stories of The Dark Thirty. I guess I feel that I am justified in using worksheets if I make it a more interactive experience.

Students were to underline clues from the passages on the worksheet to show where they had found evidence of their predictions. The students were all on task during this assignment as I circulated throughout the room. As students began to ask me what they should do when they were finished, I decided to initiate a discussion since we were at that point. We then had a discussion about their responses on the sheet. The responses were all on target as hands shot up during this activity. I do not know if it is the predictable structure of the worksheet that seems to give students comfort. Do they feel that they know my expectations if there is a worksheet to go along with them? Why is it so much harder for children to form their own questions while reading? Is it the defined

structure that is lacking? Or have we training them to give us a “canned” response?

Assorted Interactions

The students were given independent working time to prewrite some ideas for their personal narratives. This language arts block gives teachers an opportunity to intertwine reading and writing activities. At present, I am watching the many interactions that are occurring in my classroom as my students write. Kristen turns toward Dave, mouthing words across the span between their tables. Dirk looks across at Jackson’s paper often. Jackson has made eye contact with him, and now they are talking not writing. Walt does not appear to have started to write, even after ten minutes. He looks around the room at the other students. I must get in my shark mode and circle the waters again.

After a few minutes of more productive free writing time, I had the students take out their journals. They were to copy a quote from the board written by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Our chief want in life is somebody who will make us do what we can.” I found it in my teacher’s manual in the section about Helen Keller. It referred to the relationship between Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan. The reactions were sparse, but the general consensus was that we all need someone, like a parent, in our lives to encourage us. The biography about Helen Keller stirred up a curiosity in many of the students because of her unique personality and struggles. The students began to relate her story to their own lives.

In their journals students shared what they had learned about this very special relationship.

9/23/05 *Dear Mrs. Ravese,*

I read a biography about Helen Keller and I'd like to tell you about it. I learned from Helen Keller your still a regular person, and people will take time out their day to care for someone who's not their child. Even about Helen Keller was blind. She's an influence to a lot of people. Some people who don't have anything wrong with them still might look up to her. Anne who could relate to Helen's feelings and felt what Helen was going through. She's also a hero to mostly teachers but to some kid's too.

Reader's Theater

I decided to have the students read a play from their text to give them a chance to interact more during reading. Most students also enjoy “performing” stories, and it gives me an opportunity to check their oral fluency. This lesson would take a few days, as we would spend time with prereading activities before our drama begins.

We first discussed new vocabulary from the play, “Damon and Pythias,” then predicted a story line based on illustrations from the title page. Jackson suggested that the setting was ancient Greece because of the togas that the characters wore. The students were instructed to read the story silently before we read the play. This would give them time to write a brief summary and choose a

part they would like to read from the dialogue. There was a great deal of excitement in preparation for this activity because of the higher level of participation involved.

The following day the class was a flurry of activity. They all wanted to know if we were reading the play. There were requests for parts, particularly the lead roles of Damon and Pythias. Not everyone was as willing to participate. Deanna never participates and chose not to today. Crain was only willing to do the sound effects. Should children who decide not to join in be given some type of role? Both of those students struggle with their oral reading. Maybe the next reader's theater story will be at a point in the school year in which they feel more comfortable with what we are doing. They also may have more confidence to want to join in with the group.

We read through the play several times allowing different students to choose different roles. After the reader's theater had concluded, we spent time in a large group to share what we had read. Even though the level of participation was so much greater in our reading of "Damon and Pythias" than it has been at any other time this year, the students were still very slow to talk about the content of what we had read. Caren was able to give a concise synopsis of the story, but no one else raised his or her hand to share information. The class seems so hesitant to discuss books. They often need to be prompted with direct questions or given more time to review the story.

More Questioning

Today is a new day in the oral reading from The Dark-Thirty. I was reading the story, “The Chicken Coop Monster”, and we shared predictions, summaries, and questions as I read. I gave the students a few minutes to regroup to prepare to share the main ideas that we had been discussing from the story. The main character, which was afraid of monsters, finally faced her fears when she was confronted by a surprise. This was the point at which I had previously stopped my reading in order to build suspense in anticipation of the character’s personal confrontation. I allowed the children time to write journal predictions about what would happen next.

Most students felt that the real monster in the coop was an animal, such as an owl, that was capable of causing a sudden outburst of activity. Charles was the only student that thought that the main character was really confronting her fears as she approached the old chicken coop. A question that I posed to myself after this interaction was: “How much does maturity affect the higher level thinking skills that we require from our students during discussion of our reading?” Even though the students appeared to be very interested in the story, how meaningful was it if they were not able to internalize its key concepts?

Questioning Leads to More Participation

I was beginning to get frustrated, mainly because I wanted to see more student involvement during discussions. Despite the slight scent of student

interest wafting through the classroom, I wanted an aroma. I wanted there to be an understanding that permeated the environment. The class would be starting a new story in their textbook, “Treasure in the Snow”, and I wanted to incorporate a more meaningful experience into silent reading time.

During my class that same night, my professor suggested that I try to require an amount of participation from my students through the use of “post-it” notes. I had been using these messages for students to mark places of interest and insight in their reading. A few were sharing comments, but not enough were noted that constituted a confirmed discussion. She suggested that I require each child to note three areas: vocabulary, comprehension, and insights- during their reading to share with the group upon completion of the story.

The next day, I distributed the post-its again. I told the students that they were to finish the story independently, each completing a requirement of three responses during his or her reading. I asked the class if they knew the reasons why I wanted them to use these notes and, thankfully, I received the same litany that I had been preaching since the first day of school: to question, to clarify, to comment, and to share. Story guided questions from the literature guide (see Appendix I) were planned for completion after the students finished the post-it activity. I would like to see if students were responding to the text with richer responses after this type of interactive assignment.

The room was silent as the children worked intently, a rainbow of post-it notes protruding from their basal readers. When everyone had finished reading, I told the group that they were to pick out the note that they thought was most important. The students took turns sharing the comment that they had carefully selected. I was pleased with the level of their responses. Prompts from fellow students seemed to be less intimidating than when they came from me. Chuck gave a thoughtful answer to Tom's question about the reason for the children to hide gold under the snowmen. He said that they wouldn't be suspected because they were doing what children did normally- play. This was an inference that many students hadn't shown the ability to do up to this point.

Background Knowledge

I wanted to bridge the information from the story, "Treasure in the Snow", that is set during World War II, to the novel that the group would be soon reading, Number the Stars. I wanted the students to know more about the Holocaust in particular. I started orally reading the novel, The Big Lie, at the onset of each class. Interest in this novel is always very high when I share it with my students. It is a true story about a child survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.

The questions and responses that surface during and after this short novel are very inspiring for me. I can feel my students' curiosity. They are not only amazed at the horror of the concentration camps, but they seem mesmerized by

the poignancy of the author's words. They posed insightful questions about the selection process used by Dr. Mengele, and focused their interest on concern for the children. There was a very different level of interest between my reading of this novel and the short stories of The Dark-Thirty.

There are concepts, such as the mass murder found in the concentration camps, that are so far removed from the lifestyles of my students. I would think that they would be better able to connect with the children in the ghost stories rather than the real stories of those that died during the Holocaust. All kids experience typical fears, such as "closet monsters", but not mass murder. What is it that makes the difference in the interest level of the students as I read the different books? Maybe it is the attention span of the students. The Big Lie gets right to the gory point. Students do not need to be challenged to infer.

To help the students make further connections in their reading, I incorporated research topics focusing on the Holocaust time period. I distributed note cards and guidelines for research, outlining, and organizing information into draft form. I gave the students each a folder to keep all of their data in. The students were each issued a laptop computer and instructed to peruse the bookmark selections in order to gather information for their topic.

Introducing Laptops

Students began working in pairs to gather information. Although they worked cooperatively, they are responsible for their own final product. This was a

time period set aside for preparation and question posing for the children and me. There is a lot to organize with note cards and resources. But, there is a high level of interest and interaction. Even though this particular activity is not a pivotal part of my study, it may provide valuable information concerning the children's ability to read and find pertinent information on their topic. The use of the laptop is preferable to using reference books, which can be more cumbersome to find specific facts for sixth grade students.

The class is very quiet as they are searching the bookmarked websites for their data. As I mingle among the desks of students pouring over their computers, I notice the progress, or lack of, on the note cards that lie before the students. After two periods of computer time, Craig has only Mussolini's birth date written on one of his note cards. Craig's reading progress is of concern; his test scores are generally low. He also has difficulty in accurately responding to questions about comprehension during class discussions.

Wade appears to be struggling with distinguishing between a source card and a note card. He was told to write down his website as a source, but he did not seem to understand what that meant. And then there is Jacob. The face of his laptop has not changed in twenty minutes. How can I expect students to research sources that college students use if they are barely reading novels at their own grade level?

Discussion Boards and Reading

Mrs. K., our school's technology guru, came into our room to introduce the discussion board program, or "ichat", to the students. There has been a high level of anticipation about starting this laptop activity. I believe that the students really think that this is the only part of my study. They do not really see the other activities as being learning experiences, probably because they are already vaguely familiar with some of them.

Mrs. K. distributed the computers to the students and led them through the process of establishing their classroom "chatroom". You could hear a pin drop as the children's ears channeled Mrs. K.'s words while their eyes stood transfixed on their screens. When they finally were able to communicate online, there was frenetic chatter. It was as if when each child began to type in their conversations, the same words suddenly blurted from their mouths simultaneously.

"I said, 'Boo!'" squealed Jackson. He just couldn't contain himself enough to control his mouth as he typed the words.

Mrs. K. gently reminded them that the conversations were part of the discussion board. It was important to note that we both reminded the students that all of their conversations would be documented once they had typed them. The bottom line was- no fooling around, guys. We really want to know what you're thinking as you read. All of their conversations could be viewed at any time by the teacher, so they were to remain on task.

A Story of Survival

With laptops warm and ready to go, we prepared ourselves for our school district's first online book discussion board. As a group, we first began reading the novel, Number the Stars, together and discussed the first part of chapter one. I then assigned the students to read the remainder of the first chapter independently. As they read, they were encouraged to question and comment about what they were reading to me or to their other classmates. Upon completion of the chapter, the students were to write a brief summary of what they had read.

The period flew by. I had a great deal of contacts on my ichtat, interestingly the questions all very similar: "Why couldn't they afford butter and sugar?" "Why did some of the letters (Danish) have a line through them?" and "What does 'impassive' mean?" I noticed that even though the students were working independently, they all had parallel thought processes. These were exciting responses, and I was thrilled with the level of participation. However, I was beginning to feel the underlying presence of off-task behavior.

Off-task behavior of sixth graders usually begins with a glance. If I quickly scan the room, scattered pairs of eyes dart from me to the laptops in front of them. Those pairs of eyes then connect with each other. No matter what type of medium children are using, there is always the temptation to pass notes, even online. I felt like an evil spy for I knew that I would immediately be able to check their conversations in the database. Rather than jump to that option immediately, I

decided to first contact those students, who I felt were unfocused, by ichtat to check their progress, just to let them know that I was still hovering about. That seemed to give them enough incentive to get back to work.

Later, I wanted to see if the active participation would carry over into our group discussions. Dave shared a thorough summary with the class, but others, apparently satisfied with his response, declined further participation. So, I decided to share my ichtat findings with the class. I told them that I found it to be very interesting that the many contacts that I had from them were very similar in content. Their eyes suddenly clung to mine; their ears perked keenly to my words. Those that corresponded with me seemed to be fascinated that as a class, they were on the same track. So that may mean that those that hadn't contacted me could have had similar thoughts as well.

A hand spiked into the air. Anna, with a coy look in her eyes, piped," I wanted to know what a kroner meant!" She made a connection and felt comfortable in sharing it with the class. Maybe this would segue to a new comfort level in reading interaction.

As we continued reading the novel, students were beginning to pull away from the pack as levels began to separate. I had to incorporate additional activities and focal points for those that were moving at a faster pace beyond their classmates. My ichtat contacts were becoming more numerous, yet interestingly consistent in nature. Students requested aid with the same vocabulary words and

concepts in the book. The Danish culture was also very foreign to them, despite the introduction of background information that I had tried to weave into my lessons.

I needed to make periodic checks to get an overall feeling of what the students were experiencing. Despite the ability to contact individuals, tying ideas together was vital, particularly with the students whose focus was questionable. It was also necessary to pull in the background knowledge that we were learning to help bridge new concepts. The main character in Number the Stars was a Danish Christian child who had to help get her Jewish best friend to safety from the Nazi occupation. I asked my students whether they would save a friend from the Nazis, considering all of the risks and dangers involved.

Kristen did not even raise her hand. “Yes, I would!” she exploded. It was just so spontaneous. But, no one else responded.

I wondered if the others even understood the question. Dave noted how dangerous the Nazis were. More hands went up as we began to tie in the story of The Big Lie, a short novel that I had read to them earlier. Tom chimed in that the Nazis shot children and the weak if they had fallen when on a path from one camp to another. The development of background knowledge was critical toward a fuller understanding of this novel. Students were better able to empathize with the Nazi threat from having read this novel beforehand and researching World War II. At this point, I also pondered about my many colleagues who felt that children at

the middle school level, particularly in this proficient track, were totally capable of independently reading a novel such as Number the Stars without any type of interaction like this.

More Independent Activity

I wanted to incorporate guided questions with the students' reading during the next independent laptop session. I handed out a sheet containing questions for the first four chapters. A brief summary written by each child was to be part of this activity. Some of the questions could be answered before reading since these questions had been part of a previous class discussion. The students were told that they could use their laptops to communicate on the discussion board for help, but not to communicate to ask for answers to questions directly. Guidance from others was the reason for classroom contacts today.

The students were immediately on task with this activity. Once they were logged onto the ichat program, they needed no redirection. It was very exciting to see them involved in this activity with books and laptops open. There were a few that concerned me, however. Jay, Walt, and Eric seemed to be typing more than they were reading.

After the students left the room, I decided to peruse some of the ichat conversations on the database that had been recorded so far. I can only read one student's responses with other individuals at a time. I typed in names such as Walt, Eric, and Jay, who did not appear to be spending as much time on task as

others. I found that many of their contacts did include pertinent questions, such those about new vocabulary words. However, there was a great deal of idle chatter. Comments such as “bye” and “hi, were unnecessary and overused by these students.

The students seemed to be doing what they do any other time during class, disturbing others during an independent activity, yet they were now about to do it online. Despite the high interest involvement using laptop computers, many were still off-task. I would need to talk to them during the next session before they got to work. This behavior is often taking others away from their focus. Jay still has to be redirected as his eyes often wander to the monitors of his neighbors.

The next day, as the children filtered into the classroom, I instructed them to grab their novels and the laptops, and get their computers up and running. As they prepared for the activity, I talked to them about the fact that I had reviewed some of their online conversations from the last session after they were dismissed. It was as if my room was full of deer, and I was one giant headlight. I alleviated their panic by adding that I was generally pleased with what I had seen- real questions about the novel. However, I did add that many unnecessary comments, such as “hey” and “whuz up?” were found as well. In an attempt to use this need for idle comments in my favor, I asked the class how they could make remarks besides questions to their classmates.

Kristen simply stated, “ We could make comments about things we like.”

Several other ideas were tossed around, such as noting parts or characters they did not like. We then ended our discussion and began our reading. Eric contacted me to ask if he could help Dylan get started since he missed the whole first week of our discussion board. I agreed because I thought that Eric knew what he was doing with the computer, despite his often off-task behavior. I also thought that it would be good for Eric to help another students because his work is often of poor quality and the use of the computer may give him the feeling of greater success.

Do Not Disturb

I was not the only person who was getting perturbed with the need for some students to have more redirection. We had been working for roughly ten minutes independently when Jay contacted me. He asked me why Kim had a red light by her name on the ichat site. I told him to continue reading, not to worry about it. Shortly, Eric contacted me with the same question. I then told him what I had told Jacob. I then realized that Kim had chosen to put a “do not disturb” notice by her name. She had left early, sick, the day before, and she felt that she needed some time to catch up. Soon I saw a red light by Eric’s name. I was hoping that he chose this option for the same reason. But, with his past performance, I really wasn’t sure.

Since we had gone to the book fair earlier in the week, I wanted to give the students more time to read today. I knew that as we journeyed further into the

novel, the twenty-five students were at as many different points in the story. I continued to plan new guided questions and activities for each level that the students reached. I wanted them to continue to stay active with their reading and responding.

Barb:

This is soooooo cool! We are so lucky to get to use laptops. I can talk to my friends and Mrs. Ravese'll never know. She says she's gonna check our messages, but she won't check EVERYTHING! I want to im Nancy to see "Whuz up?"

sb@EAMS-Lab4-10: hey

bn@EAMS-Lab4-18: hey was^

sb@EAMS-Lab4-10: notin u

sb@EAMS-Lab4-10: you there

bn@EAMS-Lab4-18: nothing what did you want?

sb@EAMS-Lab4-10: where does this story take place

bn@EAMS-Lab4-18: in denmark

bn@EAMS-Lab4-18: hello you there

sb@EAMS-Lab4-10: sorry

Nancy:

I gotta start reading this book. I want to check in with my friends, but I should read a little bit first. That email from Barb, she really doesn't want anything special. When I ask her what she wants, she just wants to know the setting. Well, we already talked about it in class. Doesn't she listen? She's always writing notes to Kim, no wonder! I get the book about Anne-Marie and how she's trying to help Ellen and everything, but some of those words are just confusing me. Like, what's a kroner? The way they talk about it makes it sound like some kind of money. I'll double-check with Kim. Not Barb, she won't know.

bn@EAMS-Lab4-02: do you know what a kroner is?

fk@EAMS-Lab4-12: its just like money but danish money

bn@EAMS-Lab4-02: oh I thought so

Kim:

There's Nancy's bubble on my monitor. Cool! I wonder what she wants. She can't figure out what a kroner is? I thought she was so smart? Her grades are better than mine, so what's she asking me for? I'm turnin' my "Do not disturb" light on. Eric's getting on my nerves. He just keeps sayin' "hi".

Nancy:

I've been reading for a while now. I'm even starting to like this book. It's kind of interesting how these kids are in the war and everything. It's so dangerous, it's cool. They're getting ready to smuggle these Jewish people out of Denmark in a boat and Peter puts something in the baby's mouth. I don't understand this. It couldn't be food. I don't think the baby's sick. I guess it could be medicine but the book didn't say anything about the baby being sick or anything like that. I'm just gonna ask Mrs. Ravese.

bn@EAMS-Lab2-09: I don't know what peter gives the baby and I can't ask any one so what do I do?????????????????????

ravesek@eamsravesek: Can you describe to me what is happening in the book?

ravesek@eamsravesek: What does it sound like he may be doing?

benitez@EAMS-Lab2-09: well the ladie says that she won't cry so is he giving her something to not make her wake up

ravesek@eamsravesek: You're exactly right! If the baby cries they can't smuggle them out. He would draw attention to everyone. He gave the baby- something to make it sleep.

Mrs. Ravese:

I really am pleased with the way that some of these children are working through their ideas instead of skirting over them. Nancy is a smart kiddo. I wonder, though, if she didn't have the opportunity and encouragement to share ideas through her reading- she probably would just continue to read without taking the time to ask for help. How many of these other students, particularly those who may not have the reading ability that Nancy has, get lost trying to wade through new concept after new concept until they finally get turned off to reading all together?

New Connections

I continued to receive the same type of contacts that I had been, which had basically consisted of questioning- where to find needed information and how to

figure out the meaning of a word. Suddenly, one day somewhere along chapter eight, Jackson contacted me about a part that he liked in the novel. He was the first child to simply send an insight rather than to ask for help. He wrote about a part that he thought was interesting. The girls, who were the main characters, portrayed a silly, childlike side, smack dab in the middle of the Holocaust. This grabbed his attention.

Anna's speech balloon burst onto my computer monitor. The message pleaded for assistance with yet another vocabulary word. I tried to guide her to find the answer, but she still seemed very unsure of this particular segment of the chapter. I began to realize that she was really struggling on a section that she probably would have normally skirted over. I questioned myself about the number of times that others in the class had done the same on a daily basis. It was time for another talk.

I reeled the group in to discuss reading goals. Since the majority of the students had already completed most of their guided questions, I asked, "Do any of you realize that you read without trying to figure out things that you don't understand? I watch you as you read and many of you flip back and forth as you read to see how many pages you have left to read. Do you read to finish the assignment or do you read to understand?" The students looked at me as though I had a third eyeball centered on my forehead. No one had ever brought this to their attention before.

“I skip to go back over when I’m done. Because it might help with the rest of the sentence,” proudly replied Eric.

“Do you mean ‘context clues’?” I asked.

His face lit up. “Yeah, yeah!” he chimed.

“I don’t do this,” touted Dave quite sheepishly,” but maybe they want to finish and get it done.”

Many students mouthed, “Yeah!” in a staccato response.

Chuck’s hand shot up. “When I’m ready, I go back over it if I don’t understand it the first time and then I try and figure it out.” This comment really paved the way on the subject of metacognitive strategies. Hopefully, through this brief period of discussion, students have given their classmates some helpful hints to use next time they read.

In Search of Answers

As the students were waiting for their computers to warm up, Anna approached my desk with the sheet of guided questions. “I don’t understand these.” She held up the sheet with three questions circled on her paper. I told her where to find the first answer and to return to her seat and let me know when she needed more help. I was surprised that she was so far behind the others. Anna usually contacted me quite often during reading to ask questions when she needed help with the novel.

At this point, most students were on the fifth chapter and had approached me about this section in which the mother, Inge, was finally called by her first name. Three students asked me if Inge was also the mother. They hadn't used context clues to determine that. The accompanying sentences clearly had described her as the mother. Maybe it is because it is an unfamiliar Danish name and it just threw the students off of their focus. Some students may not even realize that it is a name rather than a Danish word for something.

Jackson contacted me with a simple statement. "I can relate to Anne-Marie because something like that happened to my sister." I was very hesitant on how best to approach this because the main character's sister had been killed in an automobile accident. I simply asked him how he could relate. He went on to explain that she was hit by a pickup truck, but she was okay. She was still in therapy. I was glad that I was beginning to receive conversations about connections, rather than just questions. The students may be taking this activity to another level, which is my intent.

I made a simple checklist for the students to self-monitor their activities while online. They were to acknowledge in writing each contact made, whether it was to me or to another students. They were to make a separate notation for a contact that was a question or an insight. I used Jackson's contact from Friday as a model, but did not refer to him by name or specifics about the personal

connection that he shared. I reiterated my instructions as I asked for any questions.

Jackson raised his hand and said, “It’s okay, Mrs. Ravese. I can tell what happened.” I was caught off guard because I did not know if he would be willing to share his personal experience. I told him that it was not necessary. In retrospect, I probably could have let him share his personal connection since he really seemed to want to talk about it. Maybe I was just uncomfortable about the topic myself. Possibly I would start off tomorrow with this discussion.

I returned to my desk and logged onto the discussion board. Activity was fairly non-existent on my screen, when suddenly it was covered with a rash of student dialogue. I quickly began to respond to the students, many having similar questions about vocabulary words. Getting caught up in all this attention only brought me back to reality. Duh! The checklist! That’s why I was getting so many contacts from students, even from those that I had rarely heard from. The room was as silent as a snowfall as I slowly scanned the room. Given this additional task, the students appeared more focused on their goal of self-monitoring their own activity during silent reading time.

Keys to Understanding

Art can be a fun and telling way for students to express how they view events in the novels they read. I distributed blank postcards to the students for a chance for them to express their understanding through the eyes of the story’s

characters. The point of this activity is to write and illustrate a postcard to another story character about the events as they witness them. Code words were to be incorporated into the messages as they were used during the Holocaust. For example, the word “cigarettes” referred to the Jews who were being smuggled out of Denmark. Making this connection was a key understanding in this novel.

Tom raised his hand, “I don’t understand what cigarettes have to do with this code.” I was very surprised that Tom had not made this connection and was very literal in his interpretation.

We took a few minutes as a group to discuss the story, which we would soon be completing. I noticed that the more vocal students, such as Tom and Kristen, were confused about the use of codes. I wanted to clarify some “gray” areas with the class before we continued any longer with independent assignments. I felt that if the better readers had concepts that they did not understand, the lower readers would totally be lost if we did not take more time to regroup.

I wrote columns on the board, and the students shared details from each chapter from this ending section of the book. Jackson contributed his view that Anne-Marie’s Great-Aunt Birte died. In the novel, “Great-Aunt Birte” is yet another code. “She” is part of a funeral, which was only planned to smuggle Jews out of Denmark. Jackson, an average reader, had not realized this during his reading, or after our discussion on codes.

Chuck's thoughts took the conversation away from codes and in the direction of compassion. He noted a part of the story, which occurred during the smuggling of Jews off of the coast of Denmark. What had grabbed his attention was that the mother told the children not to talk to anyone or to do anything that would draw attention to the girls.

Jackson then added, "In the beginning of the story the girls were playing and acting like themselves, but they got stopped by the soldiers. They were afraid." He had noticed the change in the girls. The war had greatly affected their ability to act as children.

This transformation had parallels to the students in my study; however, my revolution was about reading strategies, not war. In September, their attitudes toward reading were very casual and carefree, really with no control over their own understanding: like children at play. As my class continued learning the various strategies and activities that I had introduced to them, they began to grasp the idea that they could determine their own success, or destiny, as readers. They were maturing as they began to realize that decisions that they made along their journey would greatly affect their desired outcome.

How do I feel now?

"I've been telling my family and friends what happend in the book." (Caren)

"...I think reading got more interesting." (Caren)

"...I reread something if I don't understand it...I learned to ask questions if I don't understand something in my reading." (Tom)

" I look at reading as being a fun activity now. " (Tom)

"Taking my time has become very helpful to me when trying to become a better reader."(Kim)

" I thought that I was a really bad reader but now I read a lot even when I'm out of school...take your time when reading and to read aloud to help you read better and that reading is Fun! " (Kim)

"I used to hate reading now I love it! " (Deanna)

"I have been writing down notes on a sheet of paper....I can use context clues instead of a dictionary." (Barb)

" I use to think reading was boring, but now I like it because I am reading different kinds of books." (Barb)

" I can read better...I still think that it is a waste of my time." (Jay)

"I read it over until I find the answer or use context clues...to understand the words." (Craig)

"In this beginning I didn't like to read very much but now I do...(I am most proud) ...to understand all of the words you are reading." (Craig)

"Sometimes you never get to read the book you want to..." (Craig)

"In the beginning of the year I was not understanding some of the books I read. (Now I am) understanding the book more to get the point of the story." (Rich)

"Doing a worksheet sometimes gets me confused." (Rich)

"(I am) reading thoroughly to make sure I get all of the details." (Chuck)

"Books aren't all that bad in fact, they can be interesting." (Chuck)

Data Analysis

The nature of the study incorporated reading comprehension and attitude of middle school students. Initially, reading surveys were used to evaluate my students' interest and their use of metacognitive strategies while reading. These different types of evaluations would address the kinds of interactions that the students were presently using during their silent reading time.

The Collection Process

I gathered a variety of data to substantiate my work (Wolcott, 2001). The work samples included responses to small group activities in the form of short summaries and group evaluations. The students were assessed during independent reading through the use of guided reading questions and after reading with the use of close-ended tests and creative writings. Journal entries also became an important part in student response, as they gave the students the opportunity to respond to me honestly and immediately as they worked. The use of students' work and field log observations were important in creating a triangulation of data

An additional level of information that was gathered was through the use of the online discussion board. As students corresponded with me and other classmates about their reading, all conversations were recorded on the school's database. I was able to participate in and view other conversations and have them automatically documented as we typed our responses to each other.

Gathering and Coding Data

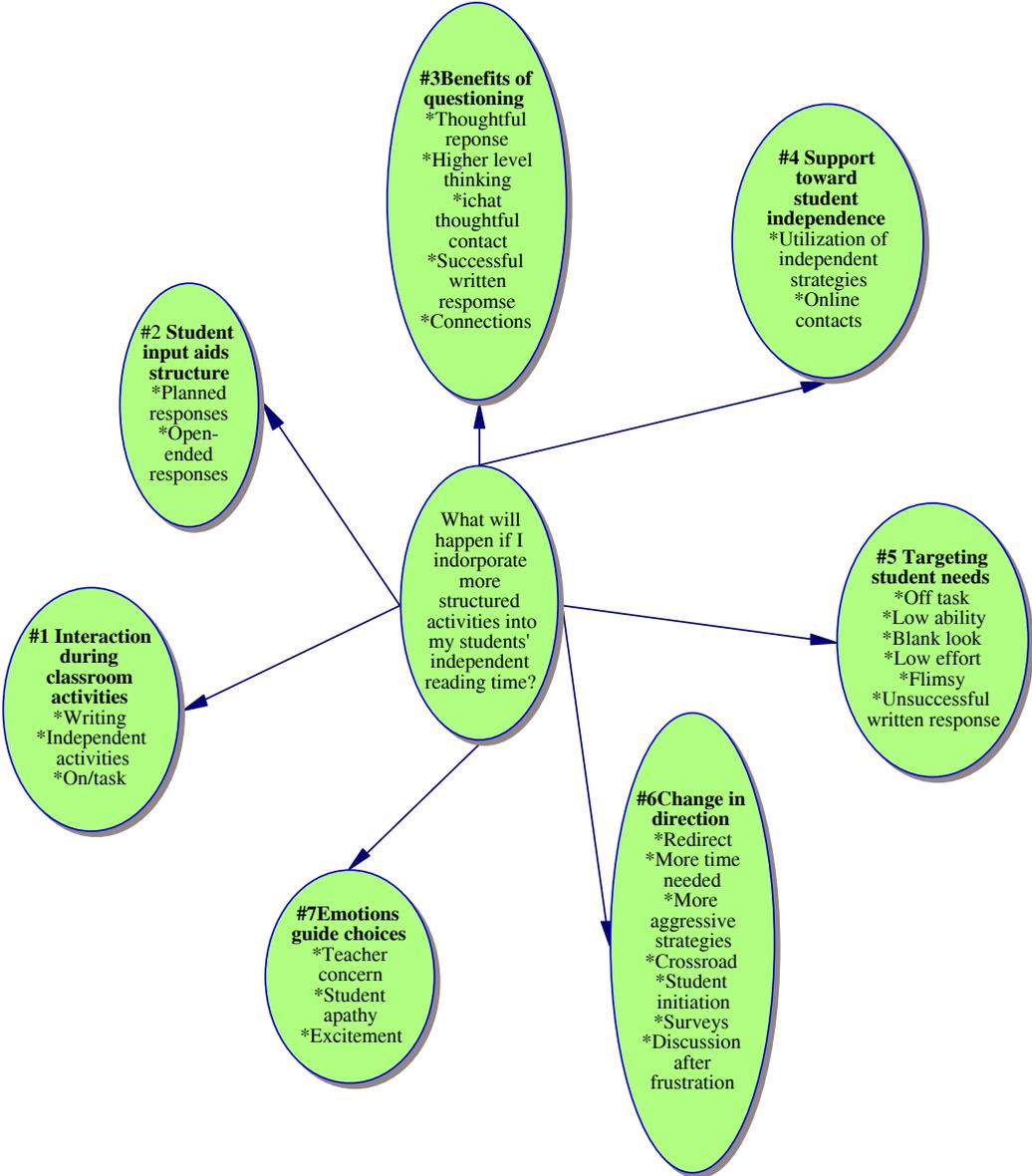
As I introduced various reading strategies, and the students began utilizing them during small group and independent activities, I noted these interactions in my field log daily. Specific dates and times were noted as I described classroom activity. Each numbered page was further organized by numbering individual lines to make the final task of coding more efficient. Work samples were simultaneously gathered from journals, guided questions, checklists, and small group activities. Key observations would be recorded in the margins of all student feedback in the form of coding (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997).

The compiled data were gathered and organized by using one or two word codes to note particular patterns in reading habits, activities, relationships, and any other observed behaviors. Any evidence of improvement of attitude and reading comprehension was noted. The codes were then sorted into bins, which indicated similar categories (Ahrar, Holly, & Kasten). Separating and analyzing the data showed any emergence of themes in behaviors. Any association between attitude and comprehension was noted as I created a table, which organized the codes and bins. The table also revealed related codes that had emerged.

The bins of related information then became part of a graphic organizer to better view each step and the relationships that had developed. I wrote theme statements to organize the categorized data and to get an overall picture of the

phases that my study has taken me through (MacLean & Mohr). These theme statements also showed the emergence of sub-questions that blossomed as the study progressed.

Bins and Themes



(Fig. 1)

#1 As I organized my data, I first considered the dynamics of the classroom. Student interactions, from independent through large group activities had been important in determining what kinds of activities had been used. The level of on-task behavior was noted in the field log whether the students was working alone, with a partner, or participating in a group discussion.

#2 If there was a lapse observed in student understanding, I needed to incorporate strategies that could help. Students often worked at their own pace using the methods that would best fit their own needs in a more differentiated form of instruction.

#3 During the course of the study, I noticed that many students did not ask questions about their reading. Whether they did not take the time or they just did not know how to monitor their own understanding through questions, I felt the need to focus on modeling more effective teacher practices.

#4 This intentional support would cause the student to stop and reflect more carefully on the content of what was being read. More planned responses could also help students to develop higher level thinking skills and the opportunity to make connections as they read.

#5 As we continued to practice these strategies in groups, students were gradually given more independent tasks to complete. The support would gradually lessen as they chose their own strategies based on their individual needs. The use

of the on-line discussion board was now part of the daily independent reading period, as students made contacts for assistance on an as need basis.

#6 Often it was necessary to intervene on an individual, small group, or whole class level. As contacts from students showed a lack of understanding in an area, I targeted that student or students through discussion or another form of support to help them continue successfully. Redirection or recursive strategies were often incorporated into the lesson based on student need.

#7 The final theme which emerged was that of emotions. A range of feelings from apathy and frustration to excitement and curiosity spotted the responses from the students. Attitude toward reading was an important piece in this study because it helped to guide its direction.

These themes will be further reviewed in the findings section.

Using Narrative Forms

Using narrative forms during reflection of data can provide a way to describe the experience of the study through the eyes of the participants (Ely, 1997). Since an innovative part of my study was the use of an online discussion board, I wanted to weave some of these conversations into a layered story. I was able to read the conversations that students shared with me and other classmates as they were recorded on the database. I wanted the story to show the viewpoints that evolved during the students' conversations. By alternating stories with actual

dialogue, I became engrossed with what they seemed to experience as they shared what they read with others.

The final piece in the compilation of data was the use of an after-reading survey in which the students would share feedback about their journey. I decided to take a sampling of the quotes to use to develop a pastiche. The use of different font styles and sizes were used to portray a variation between a serious and bold “academic” font with a light and playful “attitude” font. I chose a third, more standard, font to show the dialogue, which I perceived as neutral, or unwavering stance.

Substantiating my work

The insights of educational theorists, such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Lisa Delpit, and Lev Vygotsky became part of additional reading that I did to help support my own actions in the classroom. Reflection became a critical piece to the study and the memos that I compiled upon reading different viewpoints helped me to substantiate my own journey. The issues that may surface in the classroom are further clarified in the readings of these theorists (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul 1997).

In conclusion

The active process that I used in my study proved to be positive. Through the surveys, students’ work samples, field notes, and narrative forms, I was able to better validate the need for greater interactive procedures during silent reading

time. By allowing myself to learn through the needs of my own students, I will continue to incorporate interactive strategies in my classroom during silent reading time.

Findings

My goal for this study was to find productive and enjoyable ways to encourage my sixth grade language arts students to become lifelong readers. At an age when many adolescents become apathetic toward school, in particular reading, I strove to research ideas that I could implement which would be realistic for students to use in any content area, as well as for enjoyment purposes. I wanted my students to choose to read more because they not only felt successful with it, but because they enjoyed it, too.

The findings in this study were centered on what the results would be if I incorporated more structure into my students' silent reading time. I chose to integrate strategies that would help students to become more active participants during reading. Methods such as think-alouds, reciprocal questioning, and comprehension checklists were introduced in class and used during all reading activities.

Over the course of the study, themes began to surface, which showed increased student interaction through questioning. Students developed questions through independent journaling and in small and large group activities. The process was not linear, as other themes showed that recursive strategies and redirection were often needed to scaffold learning. Concepts often had to be clarified, such as adding information to strengthen background knowledge about the Holocaust, in order for students to continue reading. Students also had to

revisit what they had read to find context clues to help them define unfamiliar vocabulary.

The use of the online discussion board reinforced the interaction during academics by using a high interest medium to encourage greater student enjoyment. They used the laptop computers as an aid to find answers as they read independently. This ability gave students a new and innovative way to react to their reading. These themes that emerged are discussed below.

Interaction, whether through conversation or journaling, provides assistance with clarifying unknown words or concepts.

The focus of my study was to encourage students to become more interactive with text materials in order to heighten their comprehension and interest in reading. Students seldom see reading as an interactive experience, unless it is done in a small or large group setting. Often accustomed to worksheets and tests, they respond to teachers in a manner they think the teachers want to hear. The purpose of their reading may not be for themselves but for someone else. They may not develop skills that help them to become independent readers because they become dependent on the end result rather than the process it takes to get there (Freire, 1997).

The students in my study were often very hesitant to discuss what they had read. When told to summarize a story, it may have been difficult for them to begin to know where to get started. They seemed unsure about themselves and needed

further encouragement through discussion and on-going questioning. In responses that I had read in reading interest surveys that were given in the beginning of the school year, many students expressed an aversion to worksheets, yet they seemed dependent on them for their structure. When given independent tasks, students often needed continuous prodding and encouragement to successfully complete them.

In an attempt to transition them from this dependence, I gradually introduced and modeled reading strategies and activities that my students would eventually be able to use independently. During the initial phase, students were taught to self-question through class discussions and journaling. Dave, who participated in the think-aloud group, observed that, “Working in groups will help me to understand what I am reading. It also helps me read slower so I don’t miss anything.”

Using the strategies was helping the students to focus on the task at hand. This is supported by the research by Gauthier (2001) in which the Coop-Dis-Q method of cooperative discussion and questioning is used. With the teacher modeling strategies and small groups investigating the text, students are more focused on the task of reading. The constant reinforcement of the text helps students to strengthen their independent reading skills.

Student input assists in further planning and promotes an atmosphere of teacher and student partnership in learning.

Lisa Delpit (2002) stresses the importance of students' interests being connected to an enriching curriculum. Students are more likely to internalize lessons that not only have importance but are designed in a way in which the language of school reaches them. As educators, we often demean our students by diluting a curriculum in order to make it easier to understand to a wider range of students.

Reading is not a "one size fits all" activity. Students read at different rates due to varying ability and interest levels. The basis for my study was to include many options for all students, in materials, and strategies, in order to accommodate the diverse population. Through the course of the study, various strategies had been modeled to the class as a whole, such as marking the text while reading and self-questioning methods. Not every activity benefited every student. The culminating discussion board activity encouraged students to use the particular method or methods that worked best for them.

Students were given a list of guided questions to complete while participating with others online during the reading of Number the Stars. They worked at different speeds and were encouraged to contact others if they needed help. Instructions were given beforehand so children would ask for help in finding answers, not in asking for answers from others. Students were to encourage their

peers to help them find where the answers could be and how to use clues in the text. They became more adept in helping each other to use the methods that had been modeled as they became more familiar with them.

Periodic checklists were employed for the students to self-monitor their reading activity. Initially, they used a checklist to evaluate their use of pre-, during, and post-reading strategies. During the online discussion board segment, students were to note on the checklist the amount and type of contacts made while reading their novels. Their comments helped me to further direct the areas of teaching that I most needed to focus on.

When reviewing the online dialogue, it was apparent that vocabulary was often the purpose to contact someone for help. Occasional responses on the checklists were added to show other connections that students were making. Rich, for example, noted that a concept in the novel reminded him of “a saying in the book that sounded like something in ss (Social Studies).” Outside connections showed me that there was understanding as new concepts were learned.

Questioning by students is a key to successful reading comprehension.

Support for Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) was found in the connections that students were able to make because of their interactions through the learning process. When students are given the freedom to discuss, question, and work collaboratively with their peers, they could further develop and strengthen a base for additional learning to occur.

Daily independent reading time in my classroom became an opportunity for students to become more involved in their own learning.

Students were to incorporate the use of questioning into their daily independent reading time. Self-stick notes were used to mark sections of concern as they read. Dialogue journals also became part of this process. They were encouraged to respond daily about their reading, whether in their journals or on the online discussion board. The use of the computer while reading gave the students the ability to immediately share their novel.

A post-reading attitude survey was used for students to respond to about how their reading habits and attitudes have changed over the course of the study. When asked to describe some of the ways that they now used to respond to reading, Tom wrote, "I usually take notes when I read to help me understand it better."

Kim also noted that she wrote summaries about chapters as she read, "...and words that I didn't really know to help me understand the book more."

Kristen showed progress in both attitude and comprehension in her responses. "Now I like to read," she wrote. When asked about what she has learned that she is most proud of, she stated, "understanding whats going on."

"I use to think reading was boring, but now I like it because I am reading different kinds of books," added Barb.

Probably the quote that warms a teacher's heart the most was from Derek.

“I like to read more challenging books than 100 pages.”

The use of an online discussion board provided support for the students during the process of silent reading.

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development encompasses the range at which the child tests at an independent level through to his or her ability when working in collaboration with an adult or capable peers. A student's maturation level affects his zone of proximal development, for that can determine his individual capacity to flourish before others who may have the same actual developmental, or independent level.

In my study, children worked through their tasks in silent reading independently, yet were still able to collaborate with the teacher or classmates through the use of an online discussion board. This provided them with the support they may have needed to move further on through the novel if any unknown words or concepts may have needed further clarification. With this assistance, they were provided with the ability to gain more understanding as they moved through the storyline.

Often students do not have sufficient background knowledge about new concepts found in their reading and further assistance is needed. If clarification does not happen as they read, students may become more confused as they continue. During the use of the discussion board, students made contacts for help to explain behaviors of characters or to share an observation about an unfamiliar

culture. This opportunity allowed them to continue reading only after gaining a greater understanding of the text.

Many students contacted me as they read Number the Stars, which is a novel set in Denmark during World War II. Concerns about unfamiliar words, such as kroner, were numerous as students waded through the text. Other questions blossomed about practices that occurred as a result of the setting. “What does Peter give the baby when she is sleeping?” typed Nancy. They needed to know that the baby had to be given a sedative in order to smuggle her to safety. That knowledge was necessary for students to know in order for them to continue to read.

Recursive strategies were necessary for students to use while reading to address needs on an individual basis.

Written responses from the students in this study were the primary sources for the data collection. Even when students were conversing through the laptop computers while reading, the dialogue was purely in written form. The children were given the opportunity to explore various other ways to respond to their reading through their writing. They wrote in journals, either through prompts or in dialogue format. The students also responded to guided questions through long and short answer formats. Assessment of their writing was mainly in checking text comprehension.

The development in children's writing progresses as they gradually add meaning to signs and symbols in forming understanding through words. This process, however, is not necessarily linear. It may regress, or even disappear, before it progresses in a child. Despite the changes that occur in the development of writing, the entire process is one in which these changes will eventually produce a higher, more sophisticated form of written language (Vygotsky, 1978).

Students had to show an ability to communicate clearly through their writing. They were able to see, often immediately when online, if their writing was not clear to me. This experience allowed the students to experiment with their writing as they responded to the novel.

Nancy had to play around with her ideas through her typing. "i don't know what peter gives the baby and i can't ask any one so what do i do?"

I replied, "Can you describe to me what is happening in the book? What does it sound like he may be doing?"

"well the ladie says that she won't cry so is he giving her something to not make her wake up," she typed.

I excitedly wrote back. "You're exactly right! If the baby cries they can't smuggle them out. He would draw attention to everyone. He gave the baby- something to make it sleep." The ability to communicate during the process of independent reading allowed Nancy to reach her own understanding of an important part of the novel.

Redirection was necessary for success in the classroom when the need arose based on a lack of student understanding.

Students often want immediate, tangible results in response to their work. They have become accustomed to the classroom routine that takes them from learning a new unit, to getting tested on the content of that unit. If a concept is not clear, there usually is no second chance. The learning is for the test, not the long-term. In the school environment, children have become ingrained with immediate results of their work, rather than becoming flexible in their learning and being assessed in a qualitative manner. Through constant assessment during discussions and dialogue journals, students in my study were given constant feedback in order to direct their own learning.

Writing in the classroom has gone through a revolutionary transformation as it is now being taught as a process, taking students from prewriting to the sharing of a final piece. Reading in the classroom has not been that defined by the use of a process. Students in my classroom often flip back and forth through the pages of their textbooks to check on the amount of pages remaining in their reading. The majority of the students involved in the study admitted that they did not ask questions while reading. That provided me with more proof that I needed to incorporate “reading activity” on a daily basis.

Instances had arisen during the course of the study in which change was necessary for success to occur. Discussions were formed after confusion over

concepts surfaced and needed further clarification. Students often needed more background knowledge before independently reading a novel set during the Holocaust. Sparse written responses also needed further conferencing to encourage students to provide more clarification and detail. I had to be aware of these instances in order to redirect my lessons so I would not lose my students.

After many sessions of modeling these strategies, students began to clarify information to help each other.

“do you know were de frie danske is,” typed Caren.

Nancy responded, “yeah why”

“because that is the qusion i need”

“look on page seven that is where it is.”

“ok thank you”

“no problem”

Since interaction influenced the quality of student work, it was an important part of the independent reading process.

It was imperative during the course of my study to keep student interaction as its key component. When students worked independently, they either had a laptop or a journal to use as they worked through their guided questions. Dialogue journaling became an important medium that allowed students to express themselves without fear of being assessed. The students were given the freedom to write and discuss what they felt because their focus was on understanding of

what they had read. The support system of student and teacher collaboration during reading showed the students that we all had a stake in the success of their reading (see Figure 2).

The benefits that occurred from the use of laptop computers in the classroom included student enthusiasm and enjoyment during reading, which could therefore transfer into other subject areas.

“Every experience is a moving force.” (Dewey, 1997, p.38) Dewey states that the only value in the experience is where it takes the learner. My study was based on teaching my sixth grade students new strategies that will help take them on the journey to become life long readers. If they have not had success in reading in the past, I wanted to encourage them from where they were when the school year began so they would have this experience as a positive reading encounter. Many children lose their momentum when reaching the middle school years because difficulty in content increases. Frustration and apathy can easily become part of the reading experience. I decided to use laptop computers in the classroom in order to involve a medium, which is “high interest” for students.

Technology has become an important part of the classroom experience. Using computers in school gives students a greater incentive to participate. The ability to work with others during an online discussion board time allowed middle school students to socialize, yet toward productive means. This positive

environment of learning reinforced what they had learned, and the practices could be carried out into other content area classes.

An inspiring transition was seen in Deanna. She is bilingual and has been inconsistent in her display of participation and ability. Surveys early in the year showed low responses in the Garfield Attitude Survey. In particular, her academic reading score showed negative responses to reading done in school. A pre- and post-reader perception scale showed that, not only did she feel better about her reading at the end of the study, but she also felt that she needed less help while reading than before the study. In the post-reading attitude survey, her reply to how her ideas about reading have changed since the beginning of the school year was simply, “ I used to hate reading now I love it.”

The post-reading attitude survey brought other surprises to me. You cannot always get an accurate beat on how adolescents are interacting with an “unpopular” activity such as reading. In the beginning of the year, Tom responded even lower than Deanna in the Garfield survey, despite being a much more proficient reader. Tom’s final comment about his feelings about reading was, “I look at reading as being a fun activity now.”

Where Do I Go From Here?

I believe that I chose to become a teacher, in part, because each new school year held the promise of beginnings. Spring was not the traditional harbinger of new life for me. I found that the promise of blank composition books and fresh lead pencils was even more exciting. With each new group of students came the prospect of change and growth. Every year I continue to alter and tweak the curriculum from the year before.

Reading comprehension is at the core of understanding as students progress through their middle and high school experiences. I have always felt the need to include more creative strategies into my lessons in order to hold the interest of the adolescent reader. This research has given me the ability to further develop more productive and innovative learning experiences for my students. Even though I have been encouraged by the increased participation of my students during reading during the course of the study, the greater number of students that are choosing to read for enjoyment further excites me. They seem more confident as they raise their hands to participate in class. The positive feelings about reading truly go hand in hand with a more interactive class time.

As I look ahead toward next year, I plan on using many of the methods that I have acquired over the course of my study, as well as those used in previous years. I will continue to begin each school year with surveys that focus on reading

interest and metacomprehension strategies. This will give me a sense of direction with my new students. I would also like to spend more time in discussing the responses with my students because that may also give them a more focused sense of direction.

Work samples, traditionally for me, have included standard basal work sheets. I find myself fazing these out over the years as I develop my own forms of guided questions for the students to complete as they work. I will continue to use this practice, possibly creating standard forms that could be used with any type of novel.

Journaling has proven to be an effective student work sample. Students can respond in a journal at any time during the lesson, and they feel less intimidated by the lack of a traditional assessment from doing so. It can be very easy to overlook this strategy, as teachers often feel pressured to gather samples that are more summative in nature. Reflections, despite their depth as an evaluative method, are more time-consuming and subjective to assess. I would like to incorporate a regular time of reflection on a daily basis, so my students and I would already have that time set aside. A time for reflection would be part of the regular lesson plan.

Building off of that idea, I would like to set my own time aside for reflection. While feverishly researching and writing, it became very easy to stray from rereading notes and writing my own reflections. Later, reading those notes,

proved to be very instrumental in not only writing my thesis but also in redirecting my teaching practices. Often times I found behaviors and patterns that needed to be addressed. These issues would surely be overlooked if it were not for the field note data.

I have been using the majority of the strategies from my study, such as think-alouds and reciprocal teaching, for many years. It is the need to make these ideas innovative that has been the driving force in improving reading comprehension in sixth graders. As interest wanes quickly in students of this age, tying technology into the use of these strategies has proven to encourage participation.

An additional benefit in using computers during reading is the compilation of data. Everyone who is logged onto the classroom discussion board will have their conversation preserved in the database. When I converse with a student, all of the other classroom dialogue, including mine, becomes stored for later perusal. As an educator, this gives me the ability to keep abreast of progress, or lack of, in all of my students through their conversations, or online journals. Even if I am not presently online with students, I can contact a child at any time.

I would like to have laptops available for students to use on a daily basis, for I feel very strongly about their effectiveness in my classroom during my study. With the increasing number of computers being used in the classroom, further research into its use could help to substantiate the implementation of one to one

initiatives in the future. In a closer step toward this possibility, our technology coordinator would like to use this study as a positive use of laptops for a school-wide initiative. The availability for this level of data for educators to use on a daily basis would give us a panoramic view of our students' behaviors during silent reading time in all content areas.

References

- Arhar, J. M., Holly, M.L., & Kasten, W. C. (2001). *Action research for teachers: Traveling the Yellow Brick Road*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Baumann, J. F., & Hooten, H. (1999, September). Teaching comprehension through literature: A teacher-research project to develop fifth graders. *Reading Teacher*, 53, 14-17.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*, Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brand-Gruwel, S., Aarnoutse, C. A. J., & Van den Bos, K. P. (1998). Improving text comprehension strategies in reading and listening settings. *Learning and Instruction*, 8, 63-81.
- Brown-Chidsey, R., David, L., & Maya, C. (2003). Sources of variance in curriculum-based measures of silent reading. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40, 363-377.
- Carstens, A. C. (1996). *Differentiation in student responses to literature based on auditory versus visual exposure* (Tech. Rep. No. 143) Institute for Education and Social Policy: New York University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED415524)

- Chang, K., Sung, Y., & Chen, I. (2002). The effect of concept mapping to enhance text comprehension and summarization. *Journal of Experimental Education, 71*, 5-23.
- Delpit, L. (2002). *The skin that we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and Education*, New York: Touchstone. (Original Work. 1938).
- Diehl, H. L. (2005, September). Snapshots of our journey of thoughtful literacy. *Reading Teacher, 59*, 56-69.
- Dunn, J. (2000). Reading in the content areas: Unlocking the secrets and making them work. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*, 3, 168.
- Fischer, C. (2003). Revisiting the reader's rudder: A comprehension strategy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 47*, 248-256.
- Fisk, C. & Hurst, B. (2003, October). Paraphrasing for comprehension. *Reading Teacher, 57*, 182-185.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (M.B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970).
- Gauthier, L. R. (2001, March). Coop-Dis-Q: A reading comprehension strategy. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 36*, 217-221.
- Green, M. (1998). Rapid retrieval of information: Reading aloud with purpose. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 41*, 306-308.

- Hibbing, A. N. & Rankin-Erickson, J. L. (2003, May). A picture is worth a thousand words: Using visual images to improve comprehension for middle school struggling readers. *Reading Teacher, 56*, 58-70.
- Holmes, G. C., (2005), *Assessing to learn: Pennsylvania benchmark initiative*. Harrisburg: PaTTAN.
- Hubbard, R. S. & Power, B. M. (1993). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Jenkins, J. R., Fuch, L. S., van den Broel, Pl, Espin, C., & Deno, S. L. (2003). Accuracy and fluency in list and context reading of skilled and RD groups: absolute and relative performance levels. *Learning Disabilities: Research & Practice, 18*, 237-245.
- Jitendra, A. K., Hoppes, M. K., & Xin, Y. P. (2000). Enhancing main idea comprehension for students with learning problems: The role of a summarizing strategy and self-monitoring instruction. *Journal of Special Education, 34*, 13,
- Kaiser, C. (2003). *Reading Response Journals via Email*. Unpublished master's thesis, Chestnut Hill College, Pennsylvania. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED475214)
- Massey, D. D. (2003, September). A comprehension checklist: What if it doesn't make sense?: *Reading Teacher, 57*, 81-85.
- McKeown, M.G., Beck, I.L., Sinatra, G. M., & Loxterman, J.A. (1997). The

contribution of prior knowledge and coherent text to comprehension.

Reading Research Quarterly, 27, 79-93.

Pugh, S.L. (1988). *Teaching children to appreciate literature*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED). Washington, DC (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EDD00036)

Safer, N. & Fleischman, S. (2005, February) How student progress monitoring improves instruction . *Educational Leadership*, 62, 81-83.

Serran, G. (220). *Improving reading comprehension: A comparative study of metacognitive strategies*. Unpublished master's thesis, Kean University, New Jersey. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED463550)

Swanborn, M. S. L. & de Glopper, K. (2002). Impact of reading purpose on incidental word learning from context. *Language Learning*, 52, 92-117.

Taylor, B. M., Graves, M.F., & van den Broek, P.,(Ed). *Reading for meaning: fostering comprehension in the middle grades. Language and Literacy Series*. International Reading Association, Newark, Delaware.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weir, C. (1998). Using embedded questions to jumpstart metacognition in middle school remedial readers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 41, 458.

Resources

Fedorko, F.J. (n.d.). *Developing Strategic Readers: Before Reading Strategies*.

East Stroudsburg University of PA.

Fountas, I. C. and Pinnell, G. (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-*

6. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Jordan, K. (1993). *A Literature Unit for Number the Stars*, Huntington Beach,

CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc.

Kaiser, C. (2003). *Reading response journals via email*. Unpublished Master's

thesis, Chestnut Hill College, Pennsylvania, (ERIC Document

Reproduction Service No. ED475214).

Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the Stars*, New York: Bantam Doubleday.

Massey, D.D. (2003, September). A comprehension checklist: What if it doesn't

make sense? *Reading Teacher*, 57, 81-85.

Mowery, S. (1995). *Self-reflective Tools*. Michigan Department of Education:

Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Wind by the Sea (1st ed.). (1989) Needham, MA: Silver Burdett & Ginn.

Appendix A

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

September 14,
2005Kimberly A.
Ravese 127
Jonathan Drive
Easton, PA
18045

Dear Kimberly A. Ravese

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has approved your proposal: Incorporating structured activities during silent reading. 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.

A hard copy of this letter will be sent to you through U.S. mail shortly. If you do not receive the letter by the time you need to begin gathering data, please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, please retain at least one copy of the approval letter for your files. Good luck with the rest of your research.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415 (voice)
medwh02@moravian.edu

Appendix B

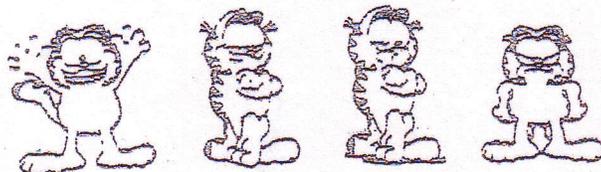
Name _____

Grade _____

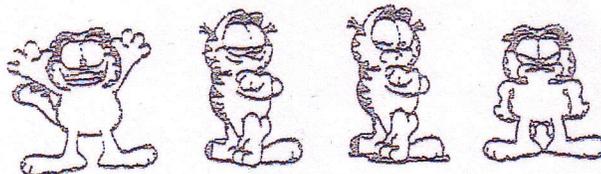
Date _____

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

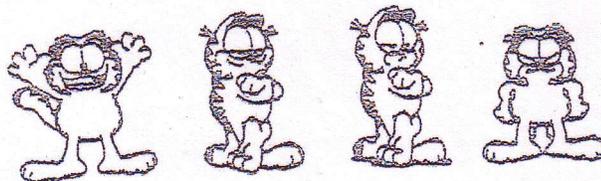
1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



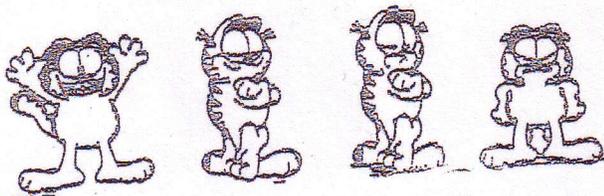
2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?



4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?

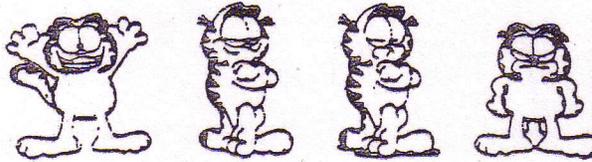


CARFIELD reprinted by permission of LFS, Inc.

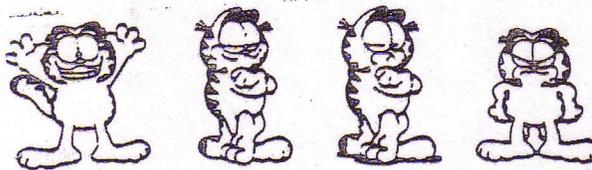
to, Ed. Interviews and Attitude Surveys
 eloping Strategie Readers;
 fore Reading Strategies

Appendix B1

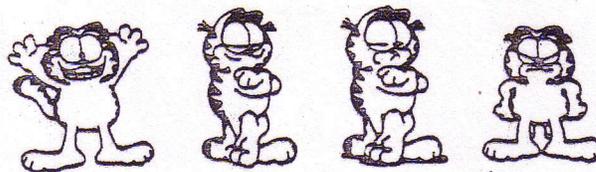
5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?



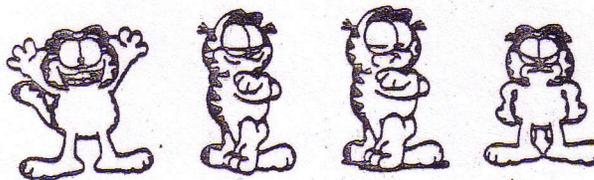
6. How do you feel about starting a new book?



7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

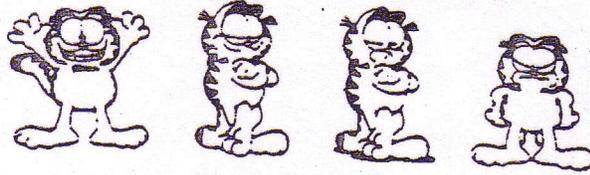


8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?

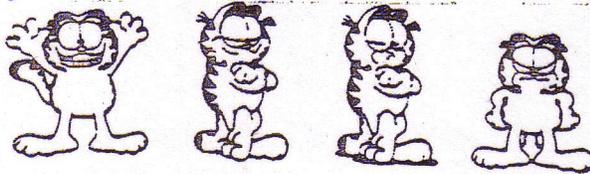


Appendix B2

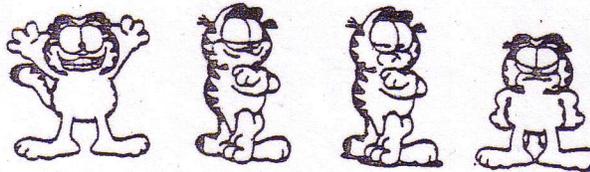
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?



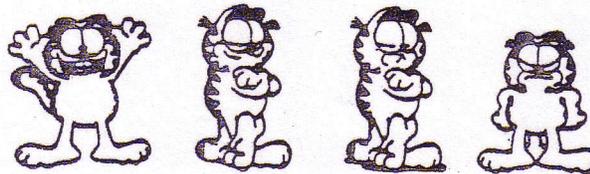
10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?



11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?

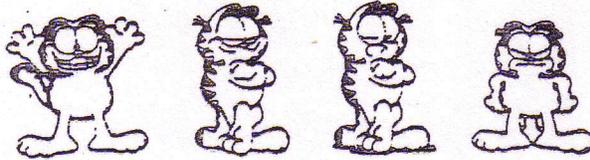


12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?

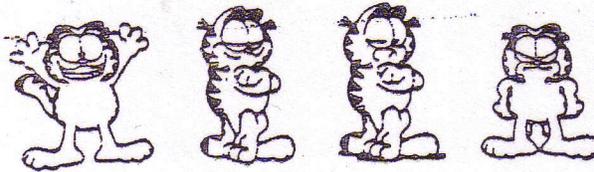


Appendix B3

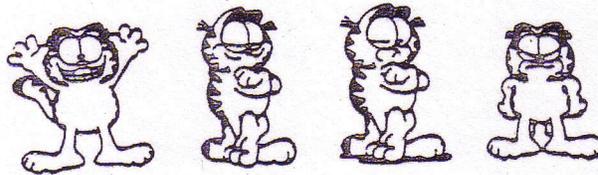
13. How do you feel about reading in school?



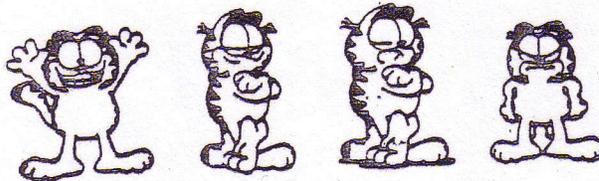
14. How do you feel about reading your school books?



15. How do you feel about learning from a book?

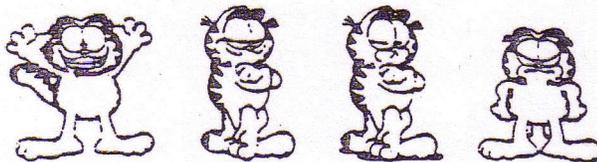


16. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?

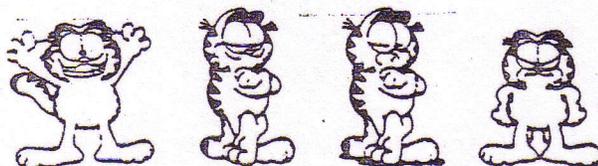


Appendix B4

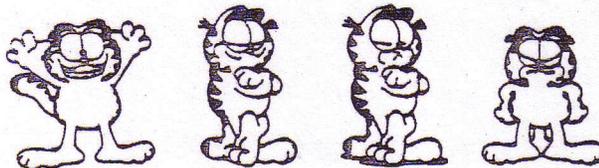
17. How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?



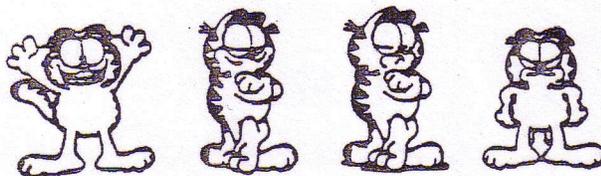
18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?



19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?



20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?



Appendix B6

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey Directions for use

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of student attitudes toward reading. It consists of 20 items and can be administered to an entire classroom in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply-worded statement about reading, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each pose is designed to depict a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative.

Administration

Begin by telling students that you wish to find out how they feel about reading. Emphasize that this is *not* a test and that there are no "right" answers. Encourage sincerity.

Distribute the survey forms and, if you wish to monitor the attitudes of specific students, ask them to write their names in the space at the top. Hold up a copy of the survey so that the students can see the first page. Point to the picture of Garfield at the far left of the first item. Ask the students to look at this same picture on their own survey form. Discuss with them the mood Garfield seems to be in (very happy). Then move to the next picture and again discuss Garfield's mood (this time, a *little* happy). In the same way, move to the third and fourth pictures and talk about Garfield's moods—a little upset and very upset. It is helpful to point out the position of Garfield's *mouth*, especially in the middle two figures.

Explain that together you will read some statements about reading and that the students should think about how they feel about each statement. They should then circle the picture of Garfield that is closest to their own feelings. (Emphasize that the students should respond according to their own feelings, not as Garfield might respond!) Read each item aloud slowly and distinctly; then read it a second time while students are thinking. Be sure to read the *item number* and to remind students of page numbers when new pages are reached.

Scoring

To score the survey, count four points for each leftmost (happiest) Garfield circled, three for each slightly smiling Garfield, two for each mildly upset Garfield, and one point for each very upset (rightmost) Garfield. Three scores for each student can be obtained: the total for the first 10 items, the total for the second 10, and a composite total. The first half of the survey relates to attitude toward recreational reading; the second half relates to attitude toward academic aspects of reading.

Interpretation

You can interpret scores in two ways. One is to note informally where the score falls in regard to the four nodes of the scale. A total score of 50, for example, would fall about mid-way on the scale, between the slightly happy and slightly upset figures, therefore indicating a relatively indifferent overall attitude toward reading. The other approach is more formal. It involves converting the raw scores into percentile ranks by means of Table 1. Be sure to use the norms for the right grade level and to note the column headings (Rec = recreational reading, Aca = academic reading, Tot = total score). If you wish to determine the average percentile rank for your class, average the raw scores first; then use the table to locate the percentile rank corresponding to the raw score mean. Percentile ranks cannot be averaged directly.

Appendix B7

Technical aspects of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

The norming project

To create norms for the interpretation of scores, a large-scale study was conducted in late January, 1989, at which time the survey was administered to 18,138 students in Grades 1-6. A number of steps were taken to achieve a sample that was sufficiently stratified (i.e., reflective of the American population) to allow confident generalizations. Children were drawn from 95 school districts in 38 U.S. states. The number of girls exceeded by only 5 the number of boys. Ethnic distribution of the sample was also close to that of the U.S. population (*Statistical abstract of the United States, 1989*). The proportion of Blacks (9.5%) was within 3% of the national proportion, while the proportion of Hispanics (6.2%) was within 2%.

Percentile ranks at each grade for both subscales and the full scale are presented in Table 1. These data can be used to compare individual students' scores with the national sample and they can be interpreted like achievement-test percentile ranks.

Table 1
Mid-year percentile ranks by grade and scale

Raw Scr	Grade 1			Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4			Grade 5			Grade 6					
	Rec	Acc	Tot																		
80			99			99			99			99			99			99			99
79			95			96			98			99			99			99			99
78			93			94			97			98			99			99			99
77			92			94			97			98			99			99			99
76			90			93			96			97			98			99			99
75			88			92			95			96			98			99			99
74			86			90			94			95			97			98			99
73			84			88			92			94			97			98			99
72			82			86			91			93			96			98			99
71			80			84			89			91			95			97			99
70			78			82			86			89			94			96			99
69			75			79			84			88			92			95			99
68			72			77			81			86			91			93			99
67			69			74			79			83			89			92			99
66			66			71			76			80			87			90			99
65			62			69			73			78			84			88			99
64			59			66			70			75			82			86			99
63			55			63			67			72			79			84			99
62			52			60			64			69			76			82			99
61			49			57			61			66			73			79			99
60			46			54			58			62			70			76			99
59			43			51			55			59			67			73			99
58			40			47			51			56			64			69			99
57			37			43			48			53			61			66			99
56			34			41			44			48			57			62			99
55			31			38			41			45			53			58			99
54			28			35			38			41			50			55			99
53			25			32			34			38			46			52			99
52			22			29			31			35			42			48			99
51			20			26			28			32			39			44			99
50			18			23			25			28			36			40			99
49			15			20			23			26			33			37			99
48			13			18			20			23			29			33			99
47			12			15			17			20			26			30			99
46			10			13			15			18			23			27			99
45			8			11			13			16			20			25			99
44			7			9			11			13			17			22			99
43			6			8			9			12			15			20			99
42			5			7			8			10			13			17			99
41			5			6			7			9			12			15			99
40	99	99	4	99	99	5	99	99	6	99	99	7	99	99	10	99	99	13			99
39	92	91	3	94	94	4	96	97	5	97	98	6	98	99	9	99	99	12			99
38	89	88	3	92	92	3	94	95	4	95	97	5	96	98	8	97	99	10			99

Appendix B8

37	86	85	2	88	89	2	90	93	3	92	95	4	94	98	7	99	99	8
38	81	79	2	84	85	2	87	91	2	88	93	3	91	96	6	92	98	7
39	77	75	1	79	81	1	81	88	2	84	90	3	87	95	4	88	97	6
34	72	69	1	74	78	1	75	83	2	78	87	2	82	93	4	83	95	5
33	65	63	1	68	73	1	69	79	1	72	83	2	77	90	3	79	93	4
32	58	58	1	62	67	1	63	74	1	68	79	1	71	86	3	74	91	3
31	52	53	1	56	62	1	57	69	0	60	75	1	65	82	2	69	87	2
30	44	49	1	50	57	0	51	63	0	54	70	1	59	77	1	63	82	2
29	38	44	0	44	51	0	45	58	0	47	64	1	53	71	1	58	78	1
28	32	39	0	37	46	0	38	52	0	41	58	1	48	68	1	51	73	1
27	28	34	0	31	41	0	33	47	0	35	52	1	42	60	1	48	67	1
26	21	30	0	25	37	0	28	41	0	29	48	0	38	54	0	39	50	1
25	17	25	0	20	32	0	21	36	0	23	40	0	30	49	0	34	54	0
24	12	21	0	15	27	0	17	31	0	19	35	0	25	42	0	29	49	0
23	9	18	0	11	23	0	13	26	0	14	29	0	20	37	0	24	42	0
22	7	14	0	8	18	0	9	22	0	11	25	0	18	31	0	19	36	0
21	5	11	0	6	15	0	6	18	0	9	20	0	13	29	0	15	30	0
20	4	9	0	4	11	0	5	14	0	6	16	0	10	21	0	12	24	0
19	2	7	0	2	8	0	3	11	0	5	13	0	7	17	0	10	20	0
18	2	5	0	2	6	0	2	8	0	3	9	0	6	13	0	8	15	0
17	1	4	0	1	5	0	1	5	0	2	7	0	4	9	0	6	11	0
16	1	3	0	1	3	0	1	4	0	2	5	0	3	6	0	4	8	0
15	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	1	3	0	2	4	0	3	6	0
14	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	3	0
13	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0
12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha, a statistic developed primarily to measure the internal consistency of attitude scales (Cronbach, 1951), was calculated at each grade level for both subscales and for the composite score. These coefficients ranged from .74 to .89 and are presented in Table 2. It is interesting that with only two exceptions, coefficients were .80 or higher. These were for the recreational subscale at Grades 1 and 2. It is possible that the stability of young children's attitudes toward leisure reading grows with their decoding ability and familiarity with reading as a pastime.

Grade	N	Recreational Subscales				Academic Subscales				Full Scale (Total)			
		M	SD	SEM	Alpha ^a	M	SD	SEM	Alpha	M	SD	SEM	Alpha
1	2,518	31.0	9.7	2.9	.74	30.1	8.8	3.0	.81	61.0	11.4	4.1	.87
2	2,974	30.3	9.7	2.7	.78	28.8	8.7	2.9	.81	59.1	11.4	3.8	.88
3	3,181	30.0	9.8	2.5	.80	27.8	8.4	2.8	.81	57.8	10.9	3.8	.88
4	3,079	29.9	9.8	2.4	.83	26.9	8.3	2.8	.83	56.8	11.0	3.8	.89
5	3,374	28.8	9.1	2.3	.88	25.8	8.0	2.5	.82	54.1	10.8	3.6	.89
6	2,442	27.9	8.2	2.2	.87	24.7	8.8	2.5	.81	52.9	10.8	3.3	.89
All	18,138	29.8	9.0	2.5	.82	27.3	8.6	2.7	.83	56.8	11.3	3.7	.89

^aCronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951).

Appendix B9

Validity

Evidence of construct validity was gathered by several means. For the recreational subscale, students in the national norming group were asked (a) whether a public library was available to them and (b) whether they currently had a library card. Those to whom libraries were available were separated into two groups (those with and without cards) and their recreational scores were compared. Cardholders had significantly higher ($p < .001$) recreational scores ($M = 30.0$) than noncardholders ($M = 28.9$), evidence of the subscale's validity in that scores varied predictably with an outside criterion.

A second test compared students who presently had books checked out from their school library versus students who did not. The comparison was limited to children whose teachers reported not requiring them to check out books. The means of the two groups varied significantly ($p < .001$), and children with books checked out scored higher ($M = 29.2$) than those who had no books checked out ($M = 27.3$).

A further test of the recreational subscale compared students who reported watching an average of less than 1 hour of television per night with students who reported watching more than 2 hours per night. The recreational mean for the low televiewing group (31.5) significantly exceeded ($p < .001$) the mean of the heavy televiewing group (28.6). Thus, the amount of television watched varied inversely with children's attitudes toward recreational reading.

The validity of the academic subscale was tested by examining the relationship of scores to reading ability. Teachers categorized norm-group children as having low, average, or high overall reading ability. Mean subscale scores of the high-ability readers ($M = 27.7$) significantly exceeded the mean of low-ability readers ($M = 27.0$, $p < .001$), evidence that scores were reflective of how the students truly felt about reading for academic purposes.

The relationship between the subscales was also investigated. It was hypothesized that children's attitudes toward recreational and academic reading would be moderately but not highly correlated. Facility with reading is likely to affect these two areas similarly, resulting in similar attitude scores. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine children prone to read for pleasure but disenchanted with assigned reading and children academically engaged but without interest in reading outside of school. The intersubscale correlation coefficient was .64, which meant that just 41% of the variance in one set of scores could be accounted for by the other. It is reasonable to suggest that the two subscales, while related, also reflect dissimilar factors—a desired outcome.

To tell more precisely whether the traits measured by the survey corresponded to the two subscales, factor analyses were conducted. Both used the unweighted least squares method of extraction and a varimax rotation. The first analysis permitted factors to be identified liberally (using a limit equal to the smallest eigenvalue greater than 1). Three factors were identified. Of the 10 items comprising the academic subscale, 9 loaded predominantly on a single factor while the 10th (Item 13) loaded nearly equally on all three factors. A second factor was dominated by 7 items of the recreational subscale, while 3 of the recreational items (6, 9, and 10) loaded principally on a third factor. These items did, however, load more heavily on the second (recreational) factor than on the first (academic). A second analysis constrained the identification of factors to two. This time, with one exception, all items loaded cleanly on factors associated with the two subscales. The exception was item 13, which could have been interpreted as a recreational item and thus apparently involved a slight ambiguity. Taken together, the factor analyses produced evidence extremely supportive of the claim that the survey's two subscales reflect discrete aspects of reading attitude.

Appendix C

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following:

SA = Strongly Agree
 A = Agree
 U = Undecided
 D = Disagree
 SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: I think pizza with pepperoni is the best. SA A U D SD

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is best, circle SA (Strongly Agree).

If you *think* that is good but maybe not great, circle A (Agree).

If you *can't decide* whether or not it is best, circle U (undecided).

If you *think* that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, circle D (Disagree).

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not very good, circle SD (Strongly Disagree).

	1. I think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	2. I can tell that my teacher likes to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	3. My teacher thinks that my reading is fine.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	4. I read faster than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	5. I like to read aloud.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	6. When I read, I can figure out words better than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	7. My classmates like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	8. I feel good inside when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	9. My classmates think that I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	10. When I read, I don't have to try as hard as I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	11. I seem to know more words than other kids when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	12. People in my family think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	13. I am getting better at reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	14. I understand what I read as well as other kids do.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	15. When I read, I need less help than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	16. Reading makes me feel happy inside.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	17. My teacher thinks I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	18. Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	19. I read faster than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	20. I read better than other kids in my class.	SA	A	U	D	SD

(continued)

Appendix C1

APPENDIX A (cont'd.)
The Reader Self-Perception Scale

[PS]	21. I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	22. I read more than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	23. I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	24. I can figure out words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	25. I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	26. I think reading is relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	27. I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	28. When I read, I recognize more words than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	29. Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	30. Other kids think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	31. People in my family think I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	32. I enjoy reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	33. People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Appendix C2

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

Directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is intended to provide an assessment of how children feel about themselves as readers. The scale consists of 33 items that assess self-perceptions along four dimensions of self-efficacy (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Children are asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The information gained from this scale can be used to devise ways to enhance children's self-esteem in reading and, ideally, to increase their motivation to read. The following directions explain specifically what you are to do.

Administration

For the results to be of any use, the children must: (a) understand exactly what they are to do, (b) have sufficient time to complete all items, and (c) respond honestly and thoughtfully. Briefly explain to the children that they are being asked to complete a questionnaire about reading. Emphasize that this is not a test and that there are no right answers. Tell them that they should be as honest as possible because their responses will be confidential. Ask the children to fill in their names, grade levels, and classrooms as appropriate. Read the directions aloud and work through the example with the students as a group. Discuss the response options and make sure that all children understand the rating scale before moving on. It is important that children know that they may raise their hands to ask questions about any words or ideas they do not understand.

The children should then read each item and circle their response for the item. They should work at their own pace. Remind the children that they should be sure to respond to all items. When all items are completed, the children should stop, put their pencils down, and wait for further instructions. Care should be taken that children who work more slowly are not disturbed by children who have already finished.

Scoring

To score the RSPS, enter the following point values for each response on the RSPS scoring sheet (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) for each item number under the appropriate scale. Sum each column to obtain a raw score for each of the four specific scales.

Interpretation

Each scale is interpreted in relation to its total possible score. For example, because the RSPS uses a 5-point scale and the Progress scale consists of 9 items, the highest total score for Progress is 45 ($9 \times 5 = 45$). Therefore, a score that would fall approximately in the middle of the range (22-23) would indicate a child's somewhat indifferent perception of her or himself as a reader with respect to Progress. Note that each scale has a different possible total raw score (Progress = 45, Observational Comparison = 30, Social Feedback = 45, and Physiological States = 40) and should be interpreted accordingly.

As a further aid to interpretation, ~~Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics by grade level for each scale.~~ The raw score of a group or individual can be compared to that of the pilot study group at each grade level.

Appendix C3

The Reader Self-Perception Scale scoring sheet

Student name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Scoring key: 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)
 4 = Agree (A)
 3 = Undecided (U)
 2 = Disagree (D)
 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Scales

General Perception	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
1. _____	10. _____	4. _____	2. _____	5. _____
	13. _____	6. _____	3. _____	8. _____
	15. _____	11. _____	7. _____	16. _____
	18. _____	14. _____	9. _____	21. _____
	19. _____	20. _____	12. _____	25. _____
	23. _____	22. _____	17. _____	26. _____
	24. _____		30. _____	29. _____
	27. _____		31. _____	32. _____
	28. _____		33. _____	
Raw score _____ of 45		_____ of 30	_____ of 45	_____ of 40

Score interpretation

High	44+	26+	38+	37+
Average	39	21	33	31
Low	34	16	27	25

Appendix C4

Validation

A pool of initial items was developed that reflected each of Bandura's (1977) four factors (Performance, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Thirty graduate students in reading were presented the pool of items in random order as well as the conceptual definitions for each of the four factor categories. The graduate students were asked to place each item in the category it seemed to fit best. Based upon feedback received in this judgmental process, modifications were made to the item pool.

The instrument was then administered to 625 students in grades four, five, and six in two different school districts. Preliminary alpha reliabilities for each scale measured in the mid 70's range. Although alpha reliabilities in this range are quite acceptable for an affective measure (Gable, 1986), the analysis identified some items that did not seem to fit well with the rest of the scale. In addition, an exploratory factor analysis indicated clear scales for Observational Comparison, Social Feedback and Physiological States, but not for the Performance scale. Since the items were not clustering as a single construct, the operational definition of the scale was reexamined. A panel of eight experts (consisting of both university faculty and graduate students enrolled in reading and affective instrument development courses) examined the data more closely and made recommendations. The panel concluded that it was more meaningful to use perceptions of personal progress as the one concrete way readers might be able to make ability judgments apart from the other scales. It was also felt that the progress construct subsumed the majority of the dimensions of the original Performance scale. Thus, the original scale was operationally redefined, and only those items that reflected personal progress were retained. For this reason, the scale was renamed Progress.

After the revisions indicated by the first pilot had been made, an additional 1,479 fourth, fifth and sixth grade children in several urban, suburban and rural school districts were asked to respond. Further reliability analyses indicated scale alphas ranging from .81 to .84 with all items contributing to the overall scale reliability. Table 1 (p. 473) displays the internal consistency reliabilities for each scale by grade level. A factor analysis indicated the existence of each of the expected categories and, as hoped, moderate yet significant relationships were indicated between RSPS scores (total and individual scale) and both the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and a variety of standardized reading achievement measures (Henk & Melnick, 1992, 1993).

Moreover, as Table 2 (p. 474) indicates, the mean scores and standard deviations for each scale were extremely similar across grades, and the corresponding standard errors were desirably low. Children reported the highest relative reader self-perceptions on the Progress scale (39.4 of the maximum possible 45) followed by Physiological States (31.2 of 40), Social Feedback (32.7 of 45), and Observational Comparison (20.9 of 30). Overall, these scores indicate that children tended to think of themselves as capable readers.

Appendix D

Name _____

Reading Interview

1. Why do people read? (List as many reasons as you can.) _____

_____2. Why do you read? (For example, what have you read this week and why?) _____

_____3. How often do you read when you are not at school? Why? _____

_____4. How do you decide what to read about? _____

_____5. How do you feel about the reading that you do at school and at home? _____

_____6. What is the best thing you have ever read? Why did you like it? _____

_____7. How did you learn to read? _____

Appendix D1

8. What have you learned from reading? _____

9. What kinds of topics do you especially like to read about? _____

10. What kind of reading do you like?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> historical fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> fairy tales/folktales | <input type="checkbox"/> poetry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> realistic fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> biography and autobiography | <input type="checkbox"/> science fiction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fantasy | <input type="checkbox"/> information books | |

Select one type of book and tell why you like it. _____

11. What advice would you give students in this room to help them read well? _____

12. What would you like to learn how to do better as a reader? _____

13. How can I help you become a better reader? _____

14. Is there anything else you want me to know about you as a reader? _____

Appendix E

Name- _____

RRI method-

An Unlikely Heroine by Susan Beth Pfeffer

- 1) Look at the picture. What do you think might happen to the child?
- 2) Who is standing on the corner?
- 3) What goes wrong at the corner?
- 4) Why doesn't Dana want to let go of the child's hand?
- 5) How do you think the driver of the blue car feels? What does this tell you about the driver?
- 6) Notice how the word *registered* is used on page 16. What are some examples of experiences that do not register with the characters until after they are over?
- 7) Why does Dana accept the woman's offer to drive her home?
- 8) Why does Dana notice the marigolds in the garden?
- 9) From what you've read so far, how would you describe Dana's character? Tell why.
- 10) How do the family members react to the newspaper article?
- 11) What does Dana want to do?
- 12) Why does Jean say the next few days are going to be unbearable?
- 13) What reason does Sharon give Dana for not believing her story?
- 14) What does Sharon say that lets you know what kind of person she thinks Dana is?

Appendix E1

- 15) Why does Dana invite Sharon rather than her sister Jean to go to the newspaper with her?
- 16) Why does Dana want the meeting over and done with?
- 17) What convinces Sharon that Dana is telling the truth?
- 18) Why does Mrs. Marsh believe Dana is the girl in the story?
- 19) How do you think Dana is feeling as she waits for Mrs. McKay to arrive?
- 20) What conclusions can you draw about Dana's character? What clues help you figure out her character?

Appendix F

Comprehension Checklist

What are you reading? _____

When you read, ask yourself: Does it make sense? If it doesn't make sense, place a check beside which of the following comprehension strategies you used.

Prereading: Before you started reading, did you:

- Set a purpose for reading-what do you need to find or figure-out? _____
- Think about what you already know about the topic- a lot or a little? _____
- Look at the pictures and predict what the story is going to be about? _____
- Read the captions? _____
- Read the bold words? _____
- Read the questions at the end of the chapter? _____

During reading: While you were reading did you:

- Skip the word- is it one word that doesn't make sense? Did you try skipping that word and reading to the end of the sentence or paragraph? Did you go back to see if you knew what the work was or if you knew what it meant? _____
- Reread the paragraph and look for new information? _____
- Keep a mental picture of what's happening in your head? _____
- Summarize- stop every page or two pages and summarize the main points? _____
- Find that you could go on or do you need more information from another student or teacher? _____

After reading: After you finished reading did you:

- Do a text check- was this text too hard, too easy, or just right? _____
- Reread the section, looking for new details? _____
- Develop questions- what might the teacher ask? What might be on a test? _____
- Check your predictions- were you right? If you weren't, did you decide why? _____

Appendix G

Reciprocal Teaching

Definition: A peer tutoring procedure that utilizes a structured discussion (dialogue with a purpose) based on the four strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. Students model and lead the discussion.

Purposes:

1. To teach students that the reading process requires continual predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing for effective comprehension of reading material.
2. To assist students in self-monitoring their comprehension.

Strategies:

1. Predicting: Stating what probably will occur in the text.
2. Questioning: Identifying critical information and connecting prior knowledge with new information.
3. Clarifying: Resolving any confusing points.
4. Summarizing: Listing and connecting important ideas.

Procedure:

1. Give students direct instruction in the appropriate use of the four strategies prior to engaging in reciprocal teaching.
2. Place the students into groups of four. Put one member in charge of each strategy and give him/her a prompt card with the strategy name printed on it.
3. Have the students read a common text. As they are reading, have them apply the four strategies with each team member leading the group at the appropriate time. In this manner, each student gives to and gains from the group (reciprocity).

Note: Although the students take turns teaching during this experience, through practice of this scaffolded instruction method, the students gradually apply the strategies to their personal reading.

Recommendations and Options:

1. Conduct mini-lessons that model the use of each of the strategies.
2. Role play and discuss the strategies prior to implementation.
3. Have students record their predictions, questions, clarifications and summaries in response journals.
4. Take time for processing sessions that give students opportunities to discuss what went well and what needs to be improved along with ways to make the improvements.
5. Have sharing times when students can discuss how they are using

Appendix G1

Predicting

I think _____.
I bet _____.
I wonder _____.

Questioning

Who? Where? When? What? How?
Why?

Clarifying

I did not understand the part where

I need to know more about _____
_____.

Summarizing

The important ideas in what I read
are _____.

Appendix G2

Self-Evaluation of Think Alouds

Name _____ Date _____

	Not very much	A little bit	Most of the time	All of the time
Made Predictions				
Formed Pictures				
Used Like a				
Found Problems				
Used Fix-ups				

Name _____ Date _____

	Not very much	A little bit	Most of the time	All of the time
Made Predictions				
Formed Pictures				
Used Like a				
Found Problems				
Used Fix-ups				

Appendix G3

Name _____ Date _____

Title _____ Pages read _____

Buddy Journals

Highlight/ Occurrence	My Thoughts	Prediction for Next Occurrence	My Questions for Discussion	New Ideas After Discussion
Buddy's Name	Buddy's Thoughts about My Thoughts	Buddy's Prediction	Buddy's Answer to My Question	Buddy's Important Highlight/ Occurrence

Appendix H

Section 1: Chapters 1-4

Number the Stars

Quiz Time!

1. On the back of this paper, write a one paragraph summary of the major events that happened in these four chapters.
2. Describe what happens to Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti on their way home from school.

3. What is "De Frie Danske"? Who brought it and why?

4. Who are the Resistance fighters?

5. What is Lise and what happened to her?

6. On the back of this page, list three ways in which the Nazi occupation changed the lives of the citizens of Copenhagen.

7. What religion do the Rosens practice? Why is that a problem?

8. What is wrong with Kirsti's shoes? How is this problem solved?

9. Why does Ellen spend the night with Annemarie?

10. The following statements are events that have happened in Chapters 1 and 2. Put a 1 next to the event that happened first, a 2 next to the event that happened next, and so on until all 6 events are numbered in the order in which they occurred.

_____ Kirsti asked Mama for cupcakes.

_____ Annemarie thought about King Christian X.

_____ Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti raced home from school.

_____ Annemarie thought about Lise, and what happened to her.

_____ The girls were stopped by the German soldiers.

_____ Annemarie told Kirsti a fairy tale.

Appendix H1

Section 2: Chapters 5-8

*Number the Stars***Quiz Time!**

1. Describe what happens in the middle of the night when Ellen stays with Annemarie.

2. What makes the German soldiers suspicious of Ellen's identity? _____
3. What does Papa do to answer the German soldier's questions about Ellen? _____
4. Describe how the German soldiers treat the family. _____
5. What does the code word "cigarettes" mean? _____
6. What is Annemarie afraid that Kirsti will do on the train ride to visit Uncle Henrik? _____
7. Describe Uncle Henrik's house and the surrounding land. _____
8. What does Ellen say that her mother is afraid of? _____
9. What does Uncle Henrik say happened to Great-aunt Birte? _____
10. On the back of this page, write a paragraph describing Uncle Henrik's housekeeping, and Mama's reaction to it.

Appendix H1

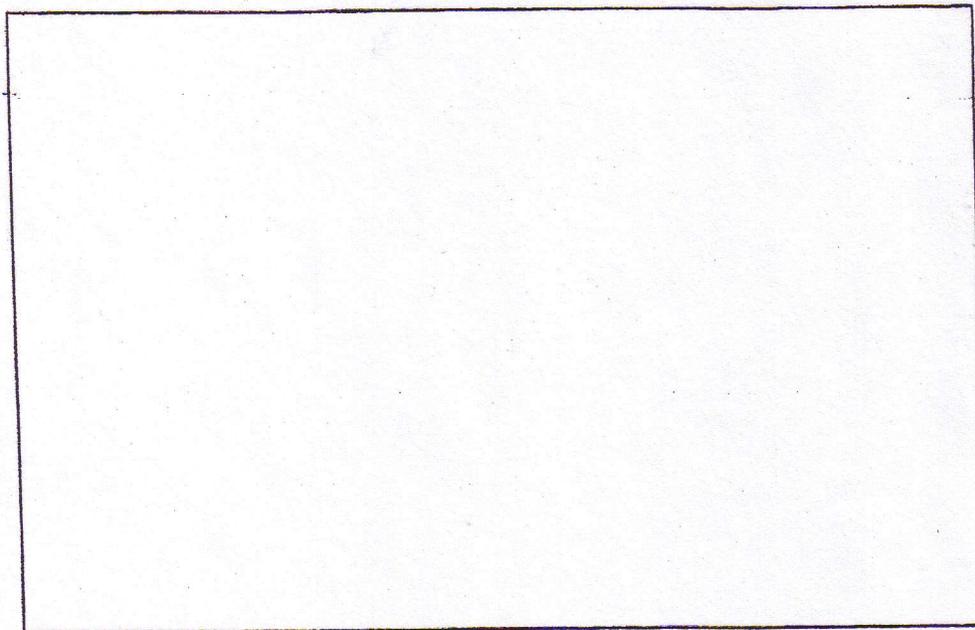
Appendix H2

Section 2: Chapters 5-8

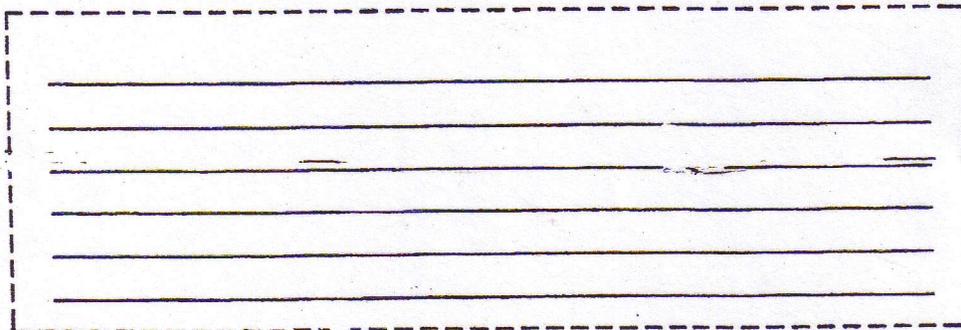
Number the Stars

A Postcard to Papa

In the space below, design a postcard to send to Papa in Copenhagen. Using the descriptions in the book, draw the countryside, the farm of Uncle Henrik, the seashore, or a fishing boat.



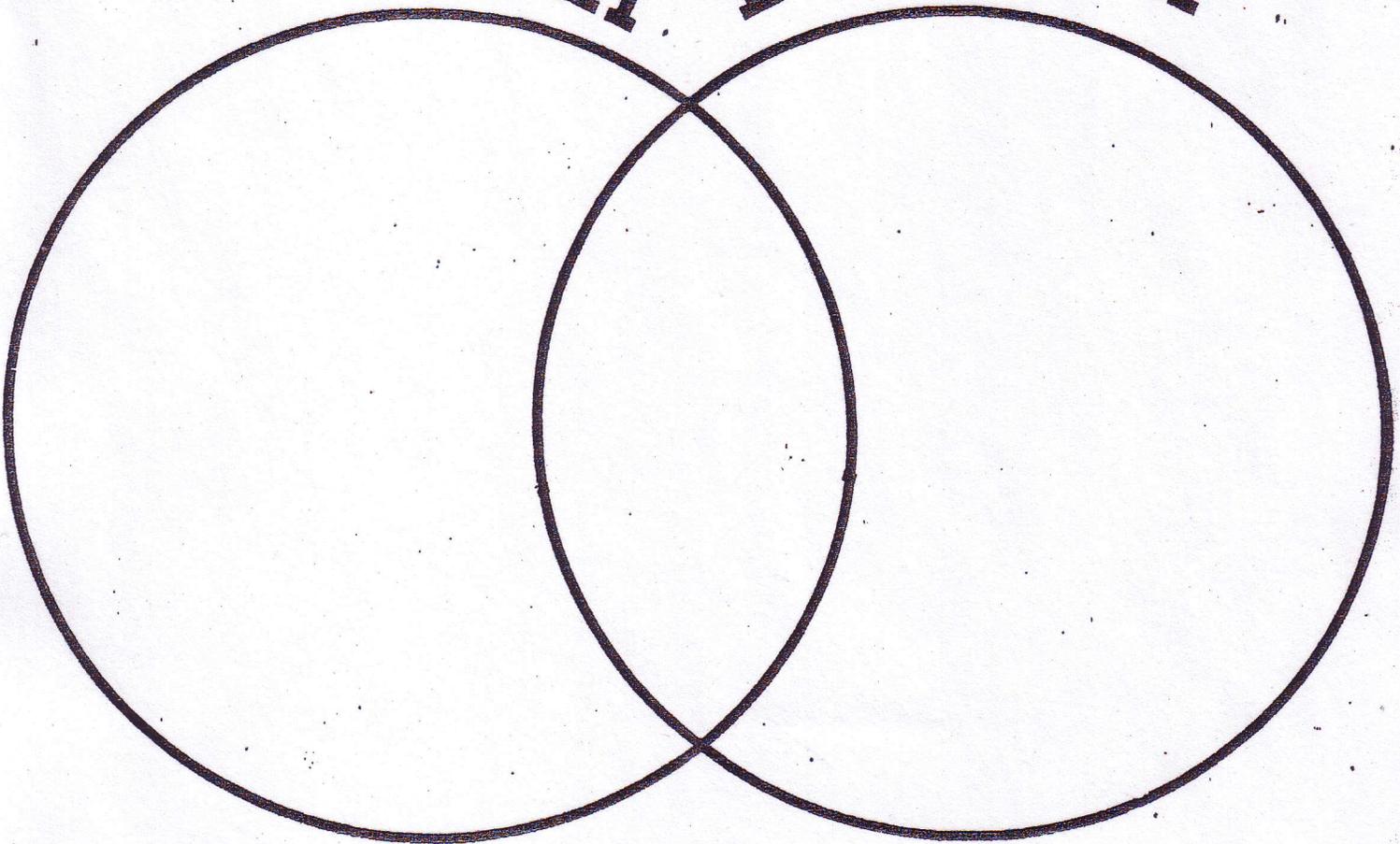
In the box below, write a message to Papa telling him of the trip to Uncle Henrik's. Remember that the Nazis might intercept the mail, so you will need to write anything about Ellen in code. Cut out the postcard and the message. Glue the message to the back of the postcard. Share the postcard with the class.



Appendix H3

Title/Topic

Venn Diagram



Appendix H4

Section 3: Chapters 9-12

*Number the Stars***Quiz Time!**

1. Why does Mama lie to Annemarie? _____

2. What is the surprise Ellen receives during the funeral of Great-aunt Birte? Describe Ellen's reaction to the surprise. _____

3. How does Mama keep the soldiers from opening the casket? _____

4. What is the meaning of the Psalm read at the funeral? _____

5. What is in the casket? _____

6. What does Peter give to the baby? Why? _____

7. Peter gives Mr. Rosen a paper-wrapped package. What instructions does Peter give to Mr. Rosen? _____

8. Describe the plan that Peter devises to get the group safely away. _____

9. How long is Mama supposed to be gone? How long is she actually gone? _____

10. What do you think has happened to Mama? _____

Appendix H5

Section 4: Chapters 13-15

*Number the Stars***Quiz Time!**

1. Describe what happens to Mama on the way back from the boat. _____

2. What does Annemarie find next to the house?

3. What instructions does Mama give Annemarie concerning the item she found next to the house?

4. What story does Annemarie think about on the path to the boat? _____

5. List the main characters in the story that Annemarie thought about. _____

6. How are the characters you named in question 5 like the ones in *Number the Stars*?

7. What are the instructions that Annemarie's mother gives her in case she is stopped?

8. On the back of this page, describe Annemarie's encounter with the German soldiers. Tell about their attitudes and actions, and Annemarie's reaction.

9. What does the German soldier find in the packet? _____

10. Using the back of this page, predict what you think will happen next. Tell where you think the Rosens are and what is in the packet. Remember, it's more important to be logical than absolutely correct.

Appendix H6

Section 5: Chapters 16-Afterword

*Number the Stars***Quiz Time!**

1. What is the first thing Annemarie had to try to do after returning to her uncle's house?

2. What is Uncle Henrik's definition of bravery?

3. Does Annemarie feel that she is brave? Why or why not?

4. How does Uncle Henrik get the Rosens to Sweden?

5. What does Annemarie learn about Peter?

6. What is the secret of the handkerchief?

7. Describe the city of Copenhagen when the war ended.

8. What does Annemarie finally learn about Lise's death?

9. Ellen's Star of David was kept in a safe place by Annemarie. Where has it been, and what will Annemarie do with it now?

10. On the back of this page, write one paragraph telling how much of this story is true, and how much is fiction. Be sure to include the characters, the war, the dogs, the handkerchief, and the king of Denmark.

Appendix H7

Unit Test: Option 1

Number the Stars

Unit Test

Matching: Match each of the following items with the phrase that best relates to it.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Kirsti | a. cocaine and dried rabbit's blood |
| 2. _____ the "Giraffe" | b. brave, but sloppy |
| 3. _____ "cigarettes" | c. green shoes |
| 4. _____ Resistance | d. code name for Jewish escapees |
| 5. _____ handkerchief | e. Annemarie's best friend |
| 6. _____ Ellen | f. afraid of deep water |
| 7. _____ Mrs. Rosen | g. Danish money |
| 8. _____ Uncle Henrik | h. comparison using "like" or "as" |
| 9. _____ kroner | i. German soldier |
| 10. _____ simile | j. Danish freedom fighters |

True or False: Write true or false next to each statement below.

- _____ Kirsti, Annemarie's older sister, was afraid of the German soldiers.
- _____ Denmark, Germany, and Sweden were occupied by the Nazis during World War II.
- _____ The Resistance sank the Danish navy ships.
- _____ The Rosens were alerted to their danger by the Rabbi.
- _____ There was no such person as Great-aunt Birte.

Short Answer: Provide a short answer for each of these questions.

- Annemarie found out that _____ and _____ were in the Resistance.
- _____ helped the Jews escape by hiding them in his boat.
- The man who rode through the streets of Copenhagen with all of Denmark as his guard was _____.
- _____ owned a button store until the Nazis came.
- _____ was engaged to Lise.

~~Essay: Write the answers to these questions on the back of this paper.~~

- Describe the Rosen family. Include family members, occupation of father, and religion.
- Why did Mama lie to Annemarie? Was this the right thing to do? Tell why or why not.
- What happened to Mama on her return from the boat?

Appendix I

Consent Form

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on reading comprehension. The title of my research is 'Incorporating structured activities during silent reading in the sixth grade classroom'. My students will benefit from participating in this study. By learning better methods to use during reading, students will learn to self-monitor their own comprehension in all content area classes.

As part of this study, students will be asked to complete interest surveys, participate in small and large group discussions and activities, use an in-class chat room set up to converse with the teacher and other students during reading, and reflect and evaluate the process and their own learning. We will begin during the first week of September and conclude the second week in December.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms- no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked drawer in my classroom. Any files on the computer will only be accessed by my password. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. This includes activities such as discussions, reading aloud, and responding to their reading through writing. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research can be directed to me, *Kimberly Ravese*, (610) 250-2440, ravesek@eastonsd.org, or my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-861-1482, jshosh@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Student's Name

Appendix II

Consent Form

Dear Student:

I am also a student as well as being your teacher. I attend a night class at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA. My course helps me to learn better ways to teach you. One of my assignments in this program is to conduct research in our classroom of my own teaching methods. This semester, I am focusing on reading comprehension. The title is 'Incorporating structured activities during silent reading in the sixth grade classroom'. I want to find the best ways to help my students to better understand what they've read. I also want you to enjoy reading! You should always pick up books to read for fun and pleasure- no matter what your age!

As part of this study, you will be asked to discuss what you read, write about what you read, and learn new activities about how to better understand what you read. I will give you surveys that you can use to tell me about how you really feel about reading. We will learn new methods to use during reading to help you answer your own questions as you read. A reading chat room will be set up in our classroom between only students in our class so we can share questions and predictions as we read. The study will begin during the first week in September. It will conclude in the second week of December.

The data (your journals and papers) will be collected by me. I will organize it and use codes to find patterns about how you learn so I can better determine what you need to know. This information is for my eyes only! My results will be shared with my teachers using pseudonyms (fake names). I will store the data in a locked drawer and all my computer files will be accessed by only me. At the end of this study, all of the data will be destroyed.

You do not have to participate in this study. However, you must participate in all regular classroom activities. We will read together, discuss what we've read, and respond to our reading through writing. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on your grade.

Please ask me if you ever have any questions or concerns during this research. Remember: your participation is voluntary. If you refuse to participate, there will be no penalty or consequence. You may also go to Mr. Steckel, Mrs. Symia, Mrs. Hart, or Mrs. Volchko about any questions or concerns that you have.

Sincerely,

I agree to participate in this project. I understand that I can choose to participate at any time.

Student Signature

Date

Appendix I2

Dear

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on reading comprehension. The title of my research is 'Incorporating structured activities during silent reading time in the sixth grade classroom'. My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning new methods to self-monitor their own comprehension as they read.

As part of this study, students will be asked to complete interest surveys, participate in small and large group discussions and activities, use an in-class chat room set up to converse with the teacher and other students during reading, and reflect and evaluate the process and their own learning. The study will take place from September 5 and conclude on December 15th 2005.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms- no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked drawer in the classroom and keep any computer files with only my password access. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. This includes activities such as discussions, reading aloud, and responding to their reading through writing. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

I welcome questions about this research at any time. My advisor, Joe Shosh, will also answer any questions or concerns (Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-861-1482, jshosh@moravian.edu).

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Ravese