DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 282 CS 012 447

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TITLE Lifelong Readers.
PUB DATE 27 Oct 95
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discussion (Teaching Technique); *Discussion Groups; Elementary Education; Literature Reviews; Peer Groups; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; *Reading Attitudes; *Reading Motivation
IDENTIFIERS *Lifelong Readers; *Response to Literature

ABSTRACT

A brief review of the literature on the various approaches which have been used to help children formulate their emerging attitudes towards reading and literature helps clarify the goal of creating lifelong readers. Samway (1991), discussing literature study circles, relates that students read the book they have selected, answer assigned questions, then evaluate each other's contributions. In Leal (1993), literacy peer groups, grades 3-6, carry on discussions about books of their choice without teacher directed questions. The Shared Inquiry Method (Criscuola, 1994) is an interpretive discussion group, with open-ended questioning by a teacher. Faust (1992) states that learning comes from reading and sharing reading. We learn by "overhearing" our own and others' meaning-making processes. The "literacy club" blends Criscuola's and Leal's methods, mid-point between teacher-directed and student-directed learning, as a guided learning approach. Through any of these four approaches, the goal of reading is to empower children to enter inside the book and, through discussion, share their feelings and thoughts about the story, and thus to become lifelong readers. (Contains five references.) (CR)

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OCTOBER 27, 1995

Lifelong Reader?

Why are we teaching our children to read? Do we care about literature? And why do we care? If the purpose of teaching our children to read is to become passive readers, to focus on the factual information of the story, or on the technical components of literature, such as plot development, then we do not need to be concerned with learning to love literature, we would not have to think or discuss literature in a meaningful way. We could teach the mechanics of reading and not care whether children become lifelong readers.

Suppose instead, our ultimate goal was to create sophisticated readers who can experience what it is like being inside a book, with their thoughts and emotions involved in the events and feelings of the story. If this is our goal, then our concern would be to develop lifelong readers who will love literature and love sharing it with others.

This paper is a brief review of the literature on the various approaches which have been used to help children formulate their emerging attitudes towards reading and literature.

The benefits of reading literature and following-up with Peer Group Discussions (Leal, 1993) are many. Other names such as The Shared Inquiry Method (Criscuola, 1994) or Literature Study Circles (Samway, 1991) are all concerned with how children talk to one another about what they have read. Talking about what we read can reveal our thoughts and feelings to ourselves as well as others. In Literature Study Circles , students reveal themselves as both human beings and literate people. Group members make connections between their lives and the themes in books, and argue with each other over characters and their actions. (Samway 1991, p. 198). After independently reading the book they have selected, each group, consisting of 6-8 students, meets to discuss the book and are given an assignment such as "What does

the author do to make you feel like you're there in the book? Find clues to back up your answer." At the end of each discussion, the group meets to reflect on how the session went. Students can evaluate each other's contributions to the discussion.

Literacy Peer Groups, 3rd to 6th Grades, also carry on a discussion relevant to the book they choose themselves. Here, unlike Literature Study Circles, discussion is carried on by the students themselves without teacher directed questions to structure and guide their interactions. They help each other to modify and extend their individual interpretations. This example of negotiated understanding would not have occurred if the students had read independently (Leal, p.114).

The Shared Inquiry Method (Criscuola, p.58) is similar to the above approaches in that it is a cooperative discussion group. A significant number of studies on grouping of students indicates that cooperative teams under adult supervision achieve at "higher levels of thought and retain information longer" than students working quietly as individuals. The discussion focuses on interpretation. During interpretative discussions, students share opinions about what the text means. An interpretative question is defined as one that is specific to the text and yields more than one good answer supportable from the text. Teachers ask only genuinely open-ended questions . Students are asked to read the text twice, take notes, discuss, and do some post-discussion writing.

The word discussion implies several possible student responses : an aesthetic response, a rhetorical response, a metacognitive response, and a shared inquiry response.

Level 1: Free Response
Write (or draw) whatever you want about what you read. Does anyone have anything they want to say about what they have read?

Level 2: Reliving the reading experience
Did anything seem especially interesting? Annoying? Surprising? Funny? Sad? What would it feel like to be a character

Did anything seem especially interesting? Annoying? Surprising? Funny? Sad? What would it feel like to be a character in the book or participate in an event in the book? 3.

Level 3: Interpreting the reading experience
Have you ever experienced what a character in the book experienced? What do you think would happen to the book's characters in a different setting? Did you like the book? What about the book led you to this judgment?

Questions to center discussions on rhetorical responses: Discussions about how the author uses words to evoke responses, for example: How does the author Farley Mowat make you laugh in Owls in the Family?

Questions to center discussions on metacognitive responses: Metacognition refers to the extent to which readers are aware of and able to control their own thinking processes. Typical questions: *Prereading:* Why did you choose this book? What did the title suggest? *During reading:* What sections of this book did you read quickly or slowly? Describe some of the pictures that formed in your mind. *Post reading:* What was the most important thing about this book for you? Why?

Questions to center discussion on shared inquiry: Shared inquiry refers to the interpretative model, as discussed above. Questions are asked as a way of engaging with the text. For example, Why isn't Jack content even though he has a limitless supply of gold from the magic hen? Students can then talk about Jack and discuss how he was feeling and why. (Noden/Zarrillo p.505)

I have included the above examples of aesthetic responses because they are especially relevant to the work I have done with Literacy Groups. The common thread to the three approaches discussed above is group discussion. When students realize there is no pressure to produce "the right answer", the outcome of group discussion includes many new insights and applications in a meaningful context.

Another approach to reading that centers around energetic discussion is presented by Faust (1992, p.45). Faust describes the "resistant reader", as opposed to the "responsive reader" who is concerned with mirroring the authors views. The resistant reader, is listening to one or more voices speaking out in a situation occurring in the text of a book. Questions a resistant reader would ask are, Who's talking? Why should I care about this situation? What values and beliefs am I being asked to confirm. Faust states that we learn from reading and sharing our readings not because knowledge is "transmitted" to us via texts. We learn by "overhearing" our own and others' meaning-making processes (p.46).

The Literacy Club is a group I worked with for two years. As a result of the research I've done for this paper, I've discovered that it is a blending of the Shared-Inquiry Method (Croscuola) and the Literacy Peer Groups Method (Leal). I started working with 3rd grade students and followed them into the 4th grade. Literacy Club is designed to operate at a midway point on a continuum between teacher-directed and student-directed learning. It is a "guided" cooperative learning approach. Children learn that the group's dynamic role in constructing meaning is far more powerful than the resources and abilities of any one member of the group.

Each leader had 5 or 6 children in their group. They were allowed to choose their own book to discuss. The 3rd grade book that I found to be the most successful in terms of the level and intensity of discussion was Beverly Cleary's, Dear Mr. Henshaw. One of the many benefits of group discussion is that when joyful events occur in a text, children love to talk about the event and celebrate it together. When disturbing events surface, discussion brings the event out into the open. The children could identify with Cleary's main character, Leigh Botts, whose parents were divorced and it was always a struggle for his father, who was a cross country truck driver, to spend time with Leigh. The children spent many hours discussing divorce and the relationship that divorced

parents have with their children and with one another. They were very concerned for Leighs feelings. I was amazed at the richness and diversity of the feelings presented. The children were truly inside the book with their thoughts and emotions and were able to connect those feelings to their own lives. As leaders, we monitored group dynamics. As in all new projects, children must move through a learning process. They had to learn to harness their enthusiasm for a few minutes while the other children were speaking, as well as learn to respect one another's opinions. Leaders only participated when necessary to bring the conversation back on target by interjecting an interpretative question. One of the objectives of the Literacy Club is to empower the children with the ability to lead their discussion groups alone. By the 4th grade, the students had accomplished this objective. They grew from responding to the leaders questions to devising their own. They learned to successfully facilitate a group discussion around their question. The opportunities to develop leadership skills and self-esteem in a trusting atmosphere was also an important objective.

Not all of the children in the group liked to read. Students learning to appreciate books must sometimes connect with a book they love and that will inspire them to continue reading for pleasure. I observed this occur with several children as a result of reading the White Mountain trilogy by John Christopher. We made a cooperative decision to increase our reading pace to complete the trilogy in our allotted time. The children then went to the library to find other books written by Christopher. These children are on the path to becoming lifelong readers.

In summary, the goal of reading is to empower children to enter inside the book, and through discussion share their feelings and thoughts about the story as they did in Dear Mr. Henshaw and The White Mountains. Whether the approach is through Peer Group Discussions, the Shared Inquiry Method, Literature Study Circles or the

Literacy Club, with which I was personally involved, the goal is the same, to create lifelong readers.

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