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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for advancing at-risk students' reading comprehension, which was adversely affecting their academic progress. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in a middle class community located near a large midwestern city. The problem with reading comprehension was documented through teaching referrals, Chapter One criteria, standardized testing, case study evaluations, and discussion with student readers. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of skills related to learning key words well enough to be able to retrieve them automatically for use in decoding other words. Faculty reported a weakness in structural analysis skills. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed an overemphasis on whole language, lacking the integration of structural analysis skills. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of intervention: the integration of multiple intelligences within literacy circles to improve reading comprehension. Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' attitude towards academic and recreational reading; an increased interest in specific authors when choosing a novel; and an increase in grade level reading comprehension. Contains 45 references and 10 figures of data. Appendixes contain a teacher reflective journal sheet, peer interview questions, student activity sheets, and a book report evaluation form. (Author/SR)

IMPROVING STUDENT READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH THE USE OF LITERACY CIRCLES

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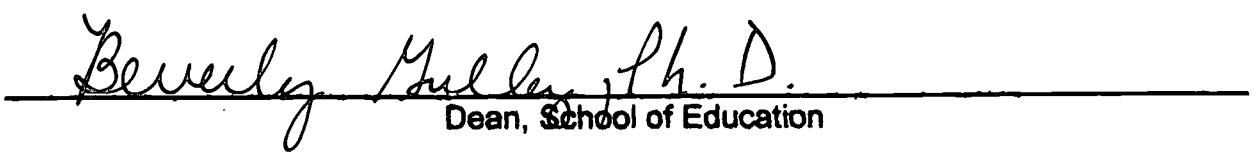

Dean, School of Education

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for advancing students' reading comprehension, which will adversely affect their academic process. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in a middle class community, located near a large midwestern city. The problem with reading comprehension was documented through teaching referrals, Chapter One criteria, standardized testing, case study evaluations, and discussion with student readers.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of skills related to learning key words well enough to be able to retrieve them automatically for use in decoding other words. Faculty reported a weakness in structural analysis skills. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies will reveal an over emphasis on whole language, lacking the integration of structural analysis skills.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of intervention: the integration of multiple intelligences within literacy circles to improve reading comprehension.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' attitude towards academic and recreational reading; an increase interest in specific authors when choosing a novel; and an increase in grade level reading comprehension.

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DEDICATION

To our husbands, Bob Parker, Brian Quigley, and Bryan Reilly, for all their love and support throughout our master's program. You made this all possible for us by being our cheerleaders, by being a single parent many many nights, and by putting a lot of your life on hold for us, all of which you did with a sense of humor and a smile. We love you!

To our children Robert Parker, Alyssa Parker, Caitlin Parker, Cecelia Quigley, Hannah Reilly, and Brenna Reilly, for helping us to see, as we look into your eyes, why we want to better ourselves, and by always brightening a difficult day with your precious smiles. We love you!

Last, but not least, all of our family and friends, who have babysat unconditionally, and listened endlessly. We love you!

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted group consists of students who are defined at risk by placement in the Chapter One Program and/or receive Special Education Services. These students exhibit difficulty with reading comprehension, which adversely affects their academic progress. Evidence that the problem exists includes teacher referrals, Chapter One Criteria, standardized testing, case study evaluations, and discussion with student readers.

Immediate Problem Context

The teacher researchers instruct at the same site. Teacher A is a third grade teacher in this school. The classroom consists of 26 students. Special services include speech and language services and Chapter One. The class instruction is divided with reading and language being taught in the morning, which includes daily oral language. In the afternoon, math, social studies, science, and spelling are taught. Seventy minutes a day are devoted to reading instruction and activities.

Teacher B is a fifth grade teacher at this site. The classroom consists of 23 students. Four of these students receive social work services. Special services include speech and language services and cross-categorical resource services. Class instruction is

divided with reading, math and social studies in the morning, and spelling, language, which includes daily oral language, and science in the afternoon. Sixty minutes a day are devoted to reading instruction and activities.

Teacher C is a third grade teacher at this site. The classroom consists of 26 students. The class instruction is divided with reading, language, and spelling being taught in the morning; which includes daily oral language. In the afternoon, math, social studies, and science are taught. Seventy minutes a day are devoted to reading instruction and activities.

The school is a public school located near a large midwestern city. This school consists of a K-6 Regular Education Program including Special Education Services. The total enrollment for the school is 356 students. The racial and ethnic backgrounds of these students include these groups: 94.1% White, 2.2% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.1% Black, and 0.3% native American. Of the 356 student population 11.8% come from low income families. In addition, the school has identified 2.5% of its student population as Limited English Proficiency Students. This school also has a 95.6% student attendance rate and a 3.4% student mobility rate with 0% truancy.

In regard to the instructional setting, according to the School Improvement Plan 1997/1998, the class size varies from grade to grade. Common class sizes are: Kindergarten, 17.7 students; Grade 1, 24.5 students; Grade 3, 21.0 students; and Grade 6, 27.0 students.

The ethnic background of this school district's faculty is 100% white. Of this percentage, 87.6% is female, 12.4% is male. The average teaching experience in this school district is 11.8 years with 66.7% of teachers holding a master's degree or above

while 33.3% of teachers hold a bachelor's degree. The pupil-teacher ratio in this school district is 20.8:1 and the pupil-administrator ratio is 204.2:1.

The school report card 1997/1998 states that the average teacher salary is $37,535. The average administrator salary is $62,037. The operating expenditure per pupil is $5,486. The remaining finances of this school district are distributed among the following expenses: education, $10,194,652; operations and maintenance, $21,053; transportation, $165,681; bond and interest, $1,207,638; rent, $0; Municipal Retirement/Social Security, $216,209; fire prevention and safety, $1,356,426; site and construction/capital improvement, $0; for a total of $13,161,659. The majority of the moneys, 77.5% in this school's district are spent on education. The remaining 22.5% is distributed throughout the other categories in the expenditure fund.

The Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) tests students in the areas reading, mathematics, writing, social studies and science. According to Illinois Goal Assessment Program, the academic performance of students in this school for grade three falls within the average to above average range. There were 41 students tested in third grade. These students were assessed in reading, mathematics, and writing. Out of those 41 students 8% did not meet state goals, 59% did meet state goals, and 33% did exceed the state goals. For mathematics, 3% did not meet the state goals, 65% met the state goals, and 33% exceeded the state goals. For writing, 5% did not meet the state goals, 71% met the state goals, and 24% exceeded the state goals.

In fourth grade, the IGAP assessed student performance in science and social studies. In this school, 45 students were administered these tests in the area of science and social studies. In the area of science 3% did not meet the state goals, 54% met the

state goals, and 44% exceeded the state goals. In the area of social studies, 3% did not meet the state goals, 62% met the state goals, and 36% exceeded the state goals.

In sixth grade, the IGAP assessed student performance in the areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. In this school, 54 students were administered these tests. In the area of reading, 15% did not meet the state goals, 62% met the state goals, and 23% exceeded the state goals. In the area of mathematics, 0% did not meet the state goals, 60% met the state goals, and 40% exceeded the state goals. In the area of writing, 0% did not meet the state goals, 17% met the state goals, and 83% exceeded the state goals.

Based on the School Improvement Plan, the areas of success and areas for planned improvement are instruction, staff development, and communication. Some programs are currently implemented while others are in the developing stage as stated below.

In the areas of reading and language arts throughout the grade levels, this school addresses materials, programs, and opportunities promoting school improvement. This school has engaged in several teacher in-service programs covering the integration of language arts through classroom activities. This school annually utilizes several different reading incentive programs. One of the programs is called the 600 Minutes Reading Club which is sponsored by Six Flags Great America. Another program utilized is Book It. This program is sponsored by Pizza Hut. Students also participated in Family Reading Night in November. In this program, children were encouraged to read as a family unity one evening. Each child who participated received a certificate of participation. Finally, this school participates in Drop Everything and Read. This is a national program that this school's PTA sponsors annually. Technology has become an

integral part of writing in this school. Writing to Write begins in the second grade and continues through the fourth grade. This intense program teaches writing skills covering concepts such as persuasive writing, narrative writing, expository writing, and imagery. This program was implemented because of the continuous updating of the library, media, and technological resources. All of the programs above aid in the utilization of instructional activities that emphasize critical thinking, writing, listening, and research.

In the area of mathematics throughout the grade levels, this school concentrates on school improvement through materials, programs, and opportunities. There are many programs offered at this school. This school has recently adopted a new math series that is based on critical thinking and problem solving skills. In addition, this school has also expanded the computer lab by installing a wide variety of mathematics programs for all grade levels. This school's district continually provides teacher meetings to ensure that the math skills are progressing throughout the grade levels. This school's fourth, fifth, and sixth grades participate in the Bank at School program. This program offers students the opportunity to open a bank account with the community bank. A representative comes to this school on a monthly basis for student deposits or new accounts. This program teaches students the concept of banking.

A program that incorporates both reading and math is the Project PAL. Project PAL stands for Positive Aspects of Learning, which is funded by Title I funds, takes place either after the school day or during the summer. Students who qualify for the program must meet specific criteria. If students are below the 50th percentile in reading and/or math they may qualify. Students receiving a D or F in a particular subject area may also qualify. The need for this program has increased which has caused several

problems. One of the problems with the program is that students who qualify do not always receive services. Three of the most common reasons for this are lack of space, lack of funding for number of teachers, and lack of parental permission. At this time, the program is being re-evaluated to determine the effectiveness, or lack thereof. The committee will also decide if the program needs to be continued or restructured.

In the areas of science and social studies, this school has implemented many new programs. This school has recently adopted a new science series. This series incorporates materials, programs, and opportunities that enhance the science program. The primary focus of this program is discovery through hands-on activities. This school's student council and PTA provide a variety of school assemblies that incorporate both social studies and science. For example, the PTA sponsors a Ben Franklin assembly. This assembly is an interactive play between students and the actors to aid in the learning process. Close Encounters of a Chemical Kind, is an example of a hands-on science assembly that is also sponsored by the PTA. In this assembly students actively participate in creating chemical reactions and go home with an example of what was learned. This school's district has established a Star Lab through the ESC7 (Educational Services Center). Star Lab simulates the actual yearly changes of the night sky. This school's district rents the Star Lab dome for two full weeks. The district has also purchased laser disc material, the bulk of which relates to science. With the adoption of a new social studies series, laser disc material related to social studies will also be available to each individual teacher. Lastly, this school sponsors a Science/Social Studies Fair for grades one through six. Students receive a ribbon of participation for their efforts.

In the area of self-esteem, this school focuses on materials, programs, and opportunities that will foster improved student performance. These include the following: ABC Awards, the Principal's High Honor Luncheon, the Principal's Brag Board, DARE, TLC Program, and conflict resolution. ABC Awards are awarded to students for outstanding academic performance, exceptional behavior, or exemplary citizenship. The Principal's High Honor Luncheon is for students who earn 3.6 to 4.0 grade point averages on their report card. The Principal's Brag Board is designed to display individual student's achievements. DARE stands for drug, alcohol, resistant, education. This program is implemented in sixth grade. The TLC program stands for together learning to communicate. This program is implemented in fifth grade. A wide variety of topics are discussed such as conflict resolution, peer pressure, self-esteem, and drug and alcohol awareness. Conflict resolution involves peer mediation. The goal is for students to succeed in learning to solve their own conflicts.

The Surrounding Community

The school is located in a residential community that is seventeen miles south of a large midwestern city. The population of this community is 22,400. Socioeconomically, this population is predominantly middle class. Approximately 34% of the residents are white collared professionals, 61% are blue collared workers, and about 5% are unemployed. The medial income is $36,869.00.

This community was incorporated December 20, 1893. The school district and the surrounding community actively participated in the 100th Anniversary celebration in 1993. The community encompasses an area of approximately four square miles. The area has thirteen established religious congregations serving the community.

There is a bus transportation system throughout the community that connects it to the metropolitan area as well as the outlying area. This bus service also connects the community to two major commuter train services that run through an outlying area. There are also two major railroads that traverse it.

The community consists of a banking, shopping, and medical center. There are six financial institutions. There is a major regional shopping center consisting of over 1.2 million square feet. This regional shopping center is a strong link to the community and is always responsive to the needs of civic, educational, and service groups within the community. In addition, this shopping center is the single largest taxpayer in the community and one of the largest employers in the area.

The largest employer in the community is a major hospital, which is one of the largest hospitals in the metropolitan area. This is a complete general hospital providing services ranging from around-the-clock emergency treatment to a sophisticated radiology department. This hospital opened an 18,000 square foot cancer center and a bone and joint center at the cost of three million dollars. In addition, this hospital includes an alcohol and drug abuse unit, and a one-day surgery facility.

A public library, operated by the community, has been serving the area for many years with more than 12,000 cardholders currently using the library facilities and over 58,000 volumes.

The multi-purpose community center houses a youth and recreation department and an office for citizen services, as well as an auditorium. Several services available to the area include employment referral services, counseling referral service, Red Cross Baby-sitting course, tutoring service, coordinates referral services for the handicapped

and needy, and varied recreational events. This also houses a youth center which allows the children in this community access to a jukebox, arcade games, table tennis, billiards, and other recreational outlets. In addition, the recreation department provides classes in sports, hobbies, and in the cultural arts for all ages.

This community has established a food pantry. Donations of food are accepted, which is distributed to resident families in need.

There are also police and fire services provided to the residents. The community owns and operates its water distribution system and sewer disposal system.

Current estimates indicate that more than 83% of the housing is owner occupied. Single family dwellings constitute the remaining housing opportunities. The average price of a home is $121,080.00.

The National Context of the Problem

According to Early (1993) whole language has become the main focus of reading instruction in today's society. However, the author states that most teachers who use whole language in their classroom technically do not. She continues to explain that teachers tend to use bits and pieces rather than adopting the whole philosophy. She goes on to discuss that the focus in schools is more on what, how, who, and why we teach rather than where. Early continues to discuss the reasons that the "where" is not focused on. Tangible reasons include time, structures, schedules, planning times, and budgets. The intangible reasons, which Early feels play a more important role, are school politics, school climates, leadership styles, and group dynamics. While whole language is effective for some students, those students who are at risk need direct instruction in assimilating new ideas through reading (p. 306). The true holistic teacher will bring

direct instruction to the classroom as needed. Whole Language comes with a collection of practices and activities that can result in inconsistent reading experiences for students who are at risk and receive Special Education Services because teachers feel they are teaching holistically when they are not (p. 307). Often whole language requires balancing and juggling of instruction, which causes structural analysis to be neglected (Goldenberg, 1993). According to Harris and Graham (1996), it is necessary to maintain a balance between whole language and direct instruction in order to develop successful readers. These authors describe a progression from teacher directed instruction to more student directed autonomy. However, this progression is not linear. The authors stress that a teacher needs the flexibility to go back and to be direct and explicit as needed (p. 171).

Structural analysis is an integral part of reading comprehension. It empowers students to break down words in order to comprehend the written word (Adams, 1990). According to Purcell-Gates (1996) a child learning to ride a bike can be compared to a child learning to read. She compares bike riding to direct instruction by referring to the degree of support needed from this learning experience. She places emphasis on four factors: experience, preference for different types of support, comfort level with various degrees of risk, and speed of learning (p. 107). Teachers can be most helpful to their students by providing support as needed at any moment, perceiving and responding as a child learns pieces of the process, and providing meaningful feedback. While younger students are lacking the skills to be a successful reader, it becomes more prevalent in the older reader who is responsible for more independent reading comprehension skills (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). A study of first and second graders was conducted by

the US Office of Education, also known as the USOE, to compare and contrast the effectiveness of different teaching approaches to reading. What the USOE found to be effective was a reading program that included a systematic phonics program (Adams, 1990). These same students were then sampled again for a continuation of the study to see if subsequent instruction of structural analysis would be effective. The results were those students who received direct instruction outscored those students who did not (p. 9).

Lack of reading instructional time has always been a problem (Early, 1993). It continues to become more difficult as teachers take on major roles in changing school structures while continuing to work within the old structures (p. 307). The current school reform movement concentrates on teachers making decisions about how to structure their schools to yield more quality time and resources for learning and teaching. According to Early, the question arises as to how teachers can teach, and at the same time, play powerful roles in restructuring their work places (p. 307). Early feels that this can be done by teachers making their views known, engaging in the same cooperative learning with colleagues as they are teaching their students, and the fact that teachers are better educated than in years past. The reality still remains; how much time students and teachers have to pursue their interests depends on the structures they inhabit, such as schedules, curricula, media resources, planning time, budgets, school climate, group dynamics, school politics, and leadership styles (p. 307).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The probable causes gathered from the targeted students and literature indicated deficiencies in reading comprehension. These problems seemed to be the result of several causes. Lack of structural analysis, lack of personal reading interests, inexperience and/or outdated teaching strategies, and lack of early reading experience were but a few.

The following instruments were used in order to document targeted students' growth in reading comprehension: student reflective journals (see Appendix A), teacher PMI journals that reflect the teacher researcher's positive, negative and interesting experiences (see Appendix B), student reading comprehension tests, and the Accelerated Reading (AR) program (Paul, 1996). The AR program incorporated a wide variety of reading materials in all grade levels. It was an individualized reading comprehension program that used computerized multiple choice questions to measure student comprehension. The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery--Revised (WJ-R) Tests of Achievement (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) was used to establish baseline data. This test measured broad reading in the targeted students. Broad reading included reading identification skills and comprehension of short passages. Also used for baseline data was an Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Johns & Lenski, 1997) as well as a teacher made peer interview.

Of the 26 students in Class A, ten were involved in this process over the sixteen week time period. The targeted students consisted of:

1. Four students who received social work services only.
2. One student who received social work and chapter one reading support.
3. One student who received speech and language services.
4. One student who received chapter one reading services.
5. One student who received cross-categorical resource services and social work services.
6. Two students who were in process of being evaluated to determine eligibility.

A teacher PMI journal (see Appendix B) and a student reflection journal (see Appendix A) were being used to aid in the recording process. In addition, reading comprehension was measured through weekly AR (Paul, 1996) assessments and weekly reading tests, which covered each level of critical thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

Of the 23 students in Class B, ten were involved in this process over the sixteen week time period. The targeted students consisted of:

1. Two students who received speech and language services.
2. Three students who received social work services.
3. One student who received chapter one reading services.
4. Two students who received cross-categorical resource services
5. Two students who received cross-categorical resource services and social work services.

A teacher PMI journal (see Appendix B) and a student reflection journal (see Appendix A) were used to aid in the recording process. In addition, reading comprehension was

measured through weekly AR assessments (Paul, 1996) and weekly reading tests, which covered each level of critical thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

Of the 26 students in Class C, ten were involved in this process over the sixteen week time period. The targeted students consisted of:

1. One student who received chapter one services and social work services.
2. One student who received chapter one services and English as a second language support.
3. Four students who received chapter one services.
4. One student who received cross-categorical resource services.
5. One student who received cross-categorical resource services, social work services, and speech and language services.
6. One student who received cross-categorical resource services, occupational therapy, and speech and language services.
7. One student who received speech and language services

A teacher PMI journal (see Appendix B) and a student reflection journal (see Appendix A) were being used to aid in the recording process. In addition, reading comprehension was measured through weekly AR assessments (Paul, 1996) and weekly reading tests, which covered each level of critical thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

At the start of the action research project the students completed a reading attitude survey. A summary of the all students' academic reading attitude was reported in Figure 1. The survey assessed the students' attitudes towards reading. The attitudes

various books read, places to read, the people with whom a student reads, how often they read or are read to, feelings about taking reading tests, and answering questions about what was read. Figure 1 illustrated that Class A's targeted group showed a slightly lowered fluctuation in their attitudes toward academic reading. It also illustrated that Class B's targeted group attitude in academic reading was higher than the whole class. Class C showed no variance in the targeted students' attitude in academic reading.

Figure1. Attitude survey towards academic reading.

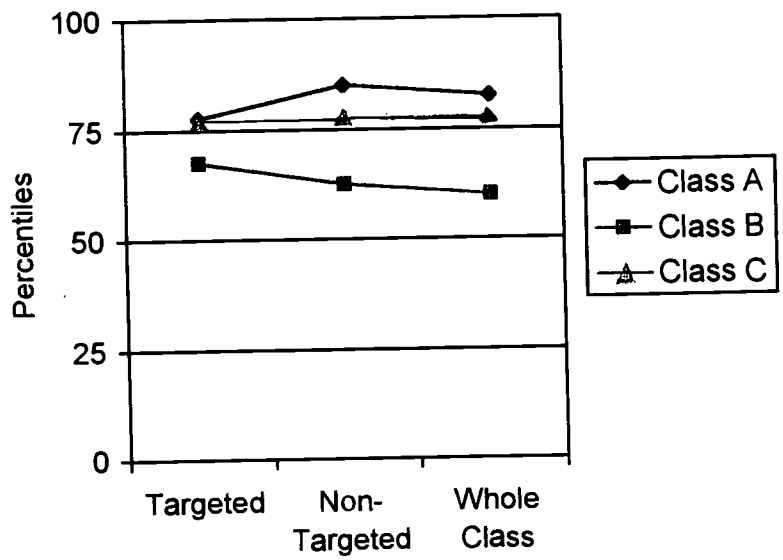

Figure 1 illustrates the fluctuation of students' attitudes towards academic reading in the targeted group, the non-targeted group, and the class as a whole in Classes A, B, and C.

A summary of the all the students' attitudes towards recreational reading was reported in Figure 2. Class A showed a slight variance, in its attitude, towards

recreational reading between the targeted and non-targeted students. Class B's targeted students scored higher on the survey than the non-targeted students in their attitude towards recreational reading. Class C's targeted students scored lower than the non-targeted students in their attitudes towards recreational reading.

Figure2. Attitude survey towards recreational reading.

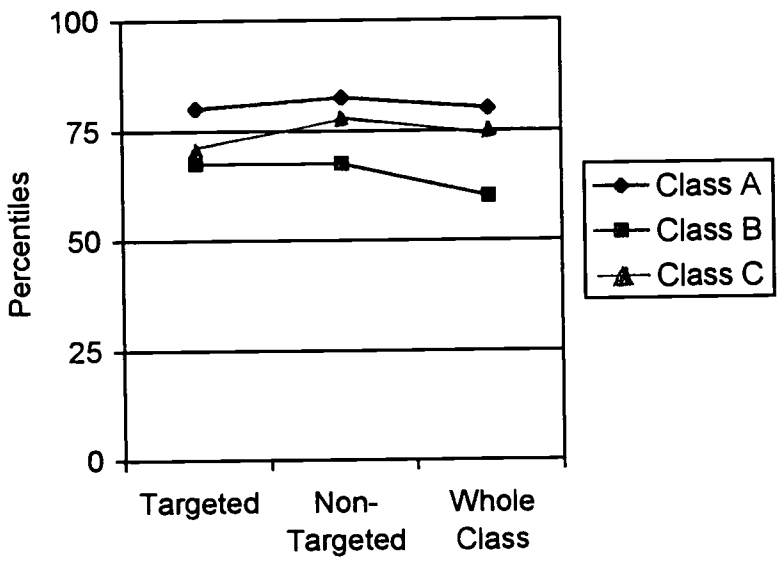

Figure 2 illustrates the fluctuation of students' attitudes toward recreational reading in the targeted group, the non-targeted group, and the class as a whole in Classes A, B, and C.

Figure 3 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) show grade level performance from Class A's targeted students. The targeted students' scores fell into one of three categories: below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. In Class A, sixty percent of the targeted students performed below grade level; ten percent performed at grade level; and thirty percent performed above grade level.

Figure 3. Class A's reading performance from the WJ-R.

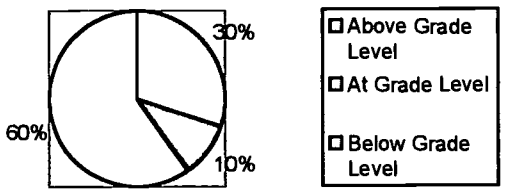

Figure 3 illustrates Class A's targeted students' broad reading performance. The pie chart represents the students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention.

Figure 4 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) show grade level performance from Class B's targeted students. The targeted students fell into one of three categories: below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. In Class B, sixty percent of the students performed below grade level; twenty percent of the students performed at grade level; and twenty percent of students performed above grade level.

Figure 4. Class B's broad reading performance from the WJ-R.

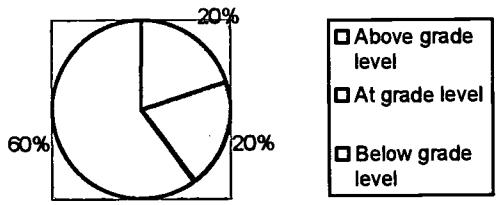

Figure 4 illustrates Class B's targeted students' broad reading performance. The pie chart represents the targeted students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention.

Figure 5 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson) show grade level performance from Class C's targeted students. The targeted students fell into one of three categories: below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level. In Class C ninety percent performed below grade level; ten percent performed at grade level; and zero percent performed above grade level.

Figure 5. Class C's broad reading performance from the WJ-R.

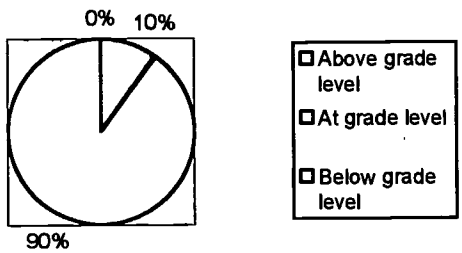

Figure 5 illustrates Class C's targeted students' broad reading performance. The pie chart represents the targeted students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention.

Finally, a reading peer interview was conducted (see Appendix C). Most students acknowledged being read to before first grade. These students commented that they enjoyed the experience. According to the peer interviews, most students continue to desire being read to. Alarmingly, among all the grade levels where the interviews were conducted, an overwhelming amount of students were not read to any longer.

Probable Causes

According to Atwell (1987), people with normal intelligence do not read once they complete formal schooling. Research has shown that people stop reading right after leaving formal education. Her research revealed that employers were complaining about their new young employees who were unable to read basic text, which inhibited their job performance. In addition, Atwell cited that the 1979 Ford Foundation figures estimated that 60 million Americans were illiterate (p. 153). In conjunction with Atwell, Rhodes and Shanklin (1993) estimate that there are 26 million illiterate people, and 23 million marginally illiterate people in the United States. They also stated that by the year 2000 that number would be astronomical (p. 367). Furthermore, in the United Nations rankings the United States was ranked 49 out of 158 United Nation countries in literacy (Atwell, p.153).

Atwell (1987) pointed out that up to World War II, newspapers were written at the sixth grade level. She made a special note that today's newspapers print many stories using an eleventh grade reading level, and the sports section contains articles that are

written using a ninth or tenth grade reading level. This shows that society's expectations have increased in literacy while the public's performance was not meeting that expectation

(p.153).

According to Clymer (1996), part of the literacy problem today exists due to overloading the students with strategies and rules that have too many exceptions. An example that Clymer cited was the rule when two vowels go walking the first one does the talking (p.183). Three hundred nine words confirm that generalization, while three hundred seventy-seven words exhibit the exception to that rule; giving it a 45% utilization rate. Clymer felt that there are too many exceptions to learn, and students would be more successful in reading if they learned the pronunciation rather than rule (p.186).

It has become popular to blame society, television, drugs, parents, etc. for the literacy deficiency with students in the United States (Greene, 1998). According to Greene, the bottom line was that the school system educates each student for five days a week for twelve years and is producing illiterate adults. This literacy consultant questioned what we have done to our kids by failing to implement an effective literacy curriculum (p. 74). According to Atwell (1987), teachers unconsciously model negative messages about reading. She listed twenty-one modeled behaviors such as: reading is a difficult serious business, and that literature is even more difficult and serious a business; that reading is always followed by taking tests, drawing lines, filling in blanks, and circling; that it is wrong to read more of the assigned text than the teacher actually

assigned; and lastly, that there is another kind of reading, a fun and satisfying kind, you can do outside of school on your free time (p. 152).

Simmonds (1992) stated that most elementary reading programs are primarily concerned with beginning reading skills such as phonics and word recognition and less concerned with developing reading strategies (p. 194). Goodlad (cited in Atwell, 1987) found in kindergarten through sixth grade buildings that only six percent of the actual school day was spent on reading (p. 156). In a study reported by Gaskins et. el. (1996/97) it was discovered that explicit instruction was missing in the reading program. Therefore, some students were not successful in learning key words well enough in order to retrieve them automatically for use in decoding other words (p. 156). Simmonds (1992) believed that most teachers at the elementary level were focused on teaching to read rather than reading to learn (p. 195).

Torgesen (1998) stated that failure to acquire early reading skills creates many obstacles for students to be successful readers. He stressed that many children who get off to a poor start rarely catch up. Similar to the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, Torgesen concluded that the good readers were getting better and poor readers were getting poorer (p.32).

Atwell (1987) has found support in Goodlad's research and cited that few middle and high school teachers were trained in the reading content area. These teachers were teaching content area material out of textbooks, but were not teaching reading strategies to help the students effectively comprehend what they had read (Goodlad, as cited in Atwell, 1987). Furthermore, where there was six percent of the actual day spent reading

in the elementary level, only two percent of the school day was spent on reading at the high school level (p. 156).

According to Torgesen (1998), students who fail to aquire early reading skills suffer major consequences. He stated that children who develop a negative attitude toward reading early on rarely change that attitude. He then stressed that their negative attitude correlates to their limited vocabulary growth. Torgesen felt that these students missed important opportunities for reading comprehension due to the lack of instrumental reading strategies. In addition, Torgesen's research agreed with Atwell in the fact that children have limited practice in reading during their school day (p.32).

According to Greene (1998), up until fourth grade children could compensate by predicting, using context clues, looking at pictures, and guessing. This consultant stressed that when these students reach middle school they experience a breaking point. She used the example that students very rarely are given pictures to help with their comprehension. In addition, the vocabulary level has become too difficult to utilize the strategies taught in the early grades. She summarized three factors contributing to the breaking point. First, the content area vocabulary does not exist in the student's prior knowledge, therefore, it is difficult for students to decode new vocabulary. For example, a student can easily recognize the word wagon over the word chlorophyll based on text. Second, because the vocabulary is embedded in the text, students fail to comprehend the information presented in the passage. An example of this would be a sentence with ten words, where the student only recognizes two words such as the and wagon. Last, Greene mentions the fact that students become frustrated when text presents too much language woven into the sentence. A simple sentence becomes a frustrating sentence

when it is full of clauses and prepositions. By this point the students have lost any meaning. Therefore, they have reached the breaking point (p. 76).

Simmonds (1992) discussed the problem that students experience instruction such as phonics and word recognition in isolation. This was especially problematic for students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities could not transfer the information from isolation to text (p. 198). On the other hand Mather (1992) stated that isolation was not the problem. He strongly suggested that the problem continued to be that many reading programs with phonics were not well rounded. In addition, he discussed school districts that were entirely whole language. In these school districts, teachers were supplementing their reading curriculum with phonics based materials (p. 88).

Greene (1998) mentioned the student who fell into the gray area. Students were considered to be in the gray area when their overall performance fell between the performance of a regular education student and a student who received special education services. This student is ineligible for special services, but continues to struggle and fail in the regular education program. Greene stated that these students are receiving accommodations and modifications such as oral testing, extended time on test, assistance with notetaking; everything except a literacy based program. She strongly felt that these accommodations and modifications were a sorry substitute for literacy. She stated that this was only a Band-Aid to a continually growing problem (p. 77). The Council for Exceptional Children suggested that the problem was not the students; it was just that the students had not been taught well (Edyburn, 1997).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

According to Mather (1992), there were many strategies for teaching reading, but to use only one would not be beneficial to all students. He further emphasized that all children learn in different ways. In addition, he stressed that every student's reading needs change over the course of his or her reading continuum. Mather also stated that the correct strategy is a combination of strategies that will help the child to become a successful reader. Mather discussed five components that make a reading program effective. The five components consisted of: (a) the purpose of reading is to reconstruct meaning; (b) teachers and students should be active participants in literary acquisition; (c) students should be provided with integrative learning experiences, and engage in meaningful reading and writing activities; (d) students should be intrinsically motivated; and finally (e) children's literature is valuable and belongs in reading programs (p. 93).

Graves, Graves, and Braaten (1996) stated that scaffolding is one of the most effective strategies available. Included in scaffolding were three important components; pre-reading activities, during reading activities, and post-reading activities. Some activities found in these three components were (a) relating the reading to student's lives, (b) activating prior knowledge, (c) silent reading, (d) guided reading and questions, and (e) artistic endeavors. Many activities used discussion. Vacca and Vacca (1996) supported this research by stating that discussion was one of the major process strategies in scaffolding. All of these activities, as stated by Graves et el. (1996) have been easily

modified to meet the needs of students who struggle with reading. The authors continued to report that teachers subconsciously used some form of scaffolding in the classroom. These authors further stated that scaffolding can be even more successful if used consciously in a classroom; especially those classrooms that include a range of abilities and backgrounds (pp. 14-16).

Rhodes and Shanklin (1993) reported that think alouds involve a reader's reactions to the text before, during, and after the reading. These thoughts are verbalized aloud as the reader interacts with the text. These authors stated that this reaction process is a natural ability for readers. They also developed a four-step procedure for this technique.

The first step focused on telling the reader to think aloud in order to encourage interactions with the text at hand. As the students become more efficient with verbalizing their thoughts they will become much more accurate with the comprehension of the text (p. 224).

The second step taught the readers to schedule set intervals to experience their interactions. For instance, the readers were directed to place specific symbols to signal a reaction to what was read and what was thought about as they, the reader, read the text (p. 224).

The third step centered on demonstration with a relevant explanation to thinking aloud. This step was critical for the teacher to model how this process worked (p. 225).

The fourth step directed the students to read the text either silently or orally. During this step the students demonstrated the think alouds (p. 225).

An important component to this technique was for the teacher to tape record or journal the individual student's think alouds and record patterns that were observed. These patterns included the author's message, the reader's ability to summarize, and the reader's connection between the text and their own lives (p. 228).

In conjunction with Rhodes and Shanklin, Goldenberg's (1992-93) research on instructional conversations discussed comprehension though discussion. He stated that knowledge and skills are important. However, real teaching involved helping students think, reason, comprehend, and understand ideas. He further explained that in most American classrooms today, especially low income, minority classrooms, students are taught in a way of drill, review, and redundancy in order to move on academically. The strategy of instructional conversation promoted analysis, reflection, and critical thinking. This researcher cited Socrates' idea of "...bringing students thoughts to birth, stimulating them to think, and to criticize themselves, not to simply instruct them" (p. 320).

Goldenberg (1992-1993) stated that the instructional conversation strategy appears simple but must be intricately planned by the teacher. He stated that it is important that the teacher manages to keep everyone involved by questioning, challenging, coaxing, or keeping quiet in order to weave the discussion comments into a large tapestry of meaning. The teacher wove this all together by using ten elements; the first five focused on the instruction and the second five focused on conversations. The instruction elements included:

1. thematic focus
2. activation and use of background and relevant schemata
3. direct teaching

4. promotion of more complex language and expression
5. elicitation of bases for statements and positions
6. fewer fill in the black questions
7. responsivity to student contributions
8. connected discourse
9. a challenging but non threatening atmosphere
10. general participation including self selected turns.

Goldenberg stated that if instructional conversation was planned carefully and activated accordingly the student would learn to think, reason, comprehend, and understand rather then regurgitate an expected answer (page 319).

Another solution for improving reading comprehension was studied by Leal (1993). She observed literary peer group discussions in a third grade classroom. She stated that children naturally interact with one another which promotes effective discussions, interesting creations and investigations with new possibilities, and exciting explorations from reading together. Leal cited several benefits that occur when student's interactions play an important role in their peer's comprehension (p. 117). Rhodes and Shanklin (1993) agreed with Leal (1993) that collaboration among students creates a positive, productive peer transaction. For instance, Leal discussed that a student's individual prior knowledge triggers another student's prior knowledge. Leal stressed that these literacy circles are also a catalyst for learning. This enables the students to take ownership for their reading success. It also provided an opportunity for effective peer tutoring. She used the example of how one student's knowledge strengthens another student's knowledge. Leal's major discovery with literacy circles was the difference in

the atmosphere, because it provided a less threatening format to give students an opportunity for exploratory communication (p. 117).

As for the teacher benefits, Leal (1993) discussed how the literacy circles transfer the teaching responsibility to the student. She also stated that assessing the students was easier because the teacher could observe how the student processed information to arrive at his or her answer. She noted an interesting observation. The kids willingly discussed the topics in their circles 26% longer than discussing as a whole class (p. 119).

Finke and Edwards (1997) reported a student teaching experience using literacy circles that proved to be very enlightening. The experience began as a teaching experience but evolved into a learning experience for the student teacher. The elements that contributed to this student teacher's new discoveries were: the collaborative talk amongst the circles, including the student teacher, helping to access prior knowledge; writing a song to retell a story; creating poems such as diamantes; using performances via television cabled through the school during morning announcements; students come to group with an open ended question from a list provided by the teacher; and begin the discussion by sharing what it is the student liked best about the story itself (p. 368).

Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) discussed a new way for reading. They shared a fifth grade teacher's successful experimentation with literacy circles. Her main focus was to facilitate the work of the students' literacy circle rather than translating or interpreting the books. She allowed the students to choose from a collection of novels. Several of the novels from her classroom library were: Katherine Patterson's Bridge to Terabithia; H.G. Wells's War of the Worlds; Beverly Cleary's Dear Mr. Henshaw; and Sid Fleischmann's The Whipping Boy (p. 23). This teacher used a set of rotating

formalized roles that included: Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Vocabulary Enricher, Illustrator, and Connector. These roles created a purpose for the students and helped to guide them as they discussed the questions they prepared for the group. Interestingly, this teacher provided the students with a choice. The teacher left the decision to the students as to what novel they would read, which in turn formed the literacy circle. The circle was formed by interest, not by assignment. This teacher has worked for three years to eliminate the kinks from her literacy circles. Some of the solutions that she used to solve the difficulties were: refining the group roles; stressing the importance of being prepared for circle meetings; and building a substantial classroom library that consisted of several copies for each title (p. 23).

In conjunction with Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (1993), Cordeiro's (1992) format of the literacy circles paralleled the fifth grade teacher. Just like the fifth grade class, Cordeiro's students were provided with a choice as to what novel they wanted to read. Her literacy circles started with reading materials related to social studies. In addition, she also allowed students to read a novel of choice that related to social studies at the same time. This produced a problem. Cordeiro's own personal paradigm of reading groups in grade school interfered with her expectations of her students. She found herself frustrated because some students read equal amounts of both novels; some went ahead; and some lagged behind. During this experience she came to terms with her larger purpose; to instill the love of reading and sense of being readers. Cordeiro needed to change her expectations to meet her larger purpose. She stopped asking questions; they started talking. Once she stopped trying to control the dialogue, they talked forever (p. 167).

Brooks and Brooks (1993) stated that constructivism stands in contrast to the more traditional methods of teaching strategies. They further discussed that constructivism allows the learner to internalize and reshape new information. They presented examples of what a constructivist classroom should consist of (a) students who primarily worked in small groups, (b) students whose questions are highly valued by the teacher, (c) teachers who inquired about the students' thought processes for their answers, and (d) teachers who played an interactive role in the classroom environment (p. 17).

A supportive strategy during reading is the Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) which was studied by Vacca and Vacca (1996). They cited two sources for the reader to use to answer questions. The first source discussed was information from the text, and the second source was information from the reader's head. The sources are the information retrieved using four different levels of formatted questions (p. 48). These levels include *right there* and *think and search types of questions* from the text, *on my own* and *author and you* types of questions from the reader's head. For *right there* types of questions the words in the answer and the words in the question were the same. For *think and search* types of questions the reader needs to infer how the text and the ideas come together to answer the question. *On my own* types of questions use the student's prior knowledge to answer the question, while the *author and you* encourages the reader to look at what the author says, what the reader knows, and how the two fit together (p. 50).

Purcell-Gates (1996) cited a case where QAR's were used to gain momentum and build confidence in a student's reading comprehension. The focus of the QAR stresses

the importance to formulate questions and to set purposes for reading. The student learned to recognize the relationships between his comprehension questions and his answer sources. The three information sources McIntyre and Pressley (1996) observed are somewhat similar to Vacca and Vacca's (1996) two information sources. The three information sources were: information explicit in the text, information that can be inferred from the text by pulling together different parts of the text; and information that can only be constructed by referring to personal knowledge (McIntyre & Pressley, 1996).

According to Richardson and Morgan (1997) the teacher should: (a) demonstrate, (b) model, and (c) provide, label, and answer at least one question at each QAR level. This should be done after introducing QAR to the students. The teacher should also use a graphic organizer to assist the students. They stressed how QARs positively effected student comprehension. Their final note regarding QARs was that it fosters speaking, listening, reading, and writing if students wrote their own QAR (p. 159).

Another way students were gaining momentum and building confidence in reading comprehension was using the Accelerated Reading (AR) program (Paul, EDS., 1997). On the surface Accelerated Reading appeared simple because of the series of questions covering content. Beneath the surface the test measured critical thinking skills and higher order thinking skills. A question could elicit a critical thinking response if it includes key words such as recall, select, and relate. A question can elicit a higher order thinking response if it includes key words such as synthesize, interpret, and theorize. This provided information on how a student thinks and reads. AR helps the students key into the important details. Also, AR asks broader questions that help students to draw

inferences from the details. Most AR tests ask integral questions such as recalling key elements of the story grammar (p. 4).

According to Paul (1997) most studies showed schools implementing Accelerated Reader (AR) performed better than non-accelerated reader schools in major academic areas. More specifically, Paul stated that schools using AR post higher mean scale scores in all major content areas than the schools not using AR. Paul found it interesting that librarians in AR schools have been flooded with book circulations. He joked that many English teachers were thrilled not to be subjected to reading the same book report! The implementation of AR has increased the variety of reading materials students were reading (p. 6). The real treasure of AR according to Paul, was that it measured critical thinking at a student's individual reading level (p. 4).

Barnes (1996) experienced and critiqued Reading Recovery, an early intervention program targeting at-risk students in first grade. Barnes, an experienced and credentialed reading specialist for seven years, went through the training out of curiosity of the acclaimed success of Reading Recovery in teaching first grade children who were having difficulty reading. Barnes discussed both positive and negative points about the program. Barnes mentioned that Reading Recovery extended and refined her knowledge of how to help those children in reading who have not found success anywhere else. She also stated that she had learned specific interventions to aid the students who have tried most everything. Some of the interventions she mentioned were praise and monitoring. For example, as children self monitor their comprehension they cross check one source against another to make a response. Barnes further explained that she encouraged the students as they worked through the process rather than waiting to the end (p. 285).

However, Barnes (1996) found the experience of training, as well as implementing the program, to be very difficult. Some of the negative issues Barnes experienced were the length of the program, paperwork, and the time allotted each session. The program runs thirty minutes a day for twelve to twenty weeks. Barnes realized that what a teacher plans for a school day and what a teacher covers in a school day are two different things. She stated that staff development, field trips, illnesses, workshops and committee meetings often interrupt the days. The students must make up the time before school, after school, or during lunch. Barnes also discussed the paperwork involved. Running records were kept of information on each student from each session. Barnes felt that keeping running records to this extreme kept her occupied to the point that she was unable to illicit higher capacity work from the students. She also mentioned that the sessions were thirty minutes long and the five components of reading recovery must be completed in that time frame. The students were cut short when working so that all five components could be completed (pp.284-292).

The major issues Barnes (1996) discussed were that the trainees were trained in the same way without respect to uniqueness, with no discussion during training, just direction. The trainees were not encouraged to use prior knowledge, to construct their own knowledge, to learn from one another, or to share prior experiences. Barnes felt that the trainers looked at the trainee's views as unimportant. Participants were not given sufficient wait time between questions and answers. Barnes felt that Reading Recovery sends mixed messages to the student about classroom routine, where a student is encouraged to (a) express, (b) elaborate, and (c) be given sufficient amount of time to answer. In Reading Recovery the student is often cut short, not encouraged to talk, and is

not given sufficient time to answer. Barnes felt that Reading Recovery could be successful and was valuable in refining her knowledge on how children read and write. However, she felt that these benefits were overshadowed by the negative aspects of the program (pp. 284-292).

According to Gardner (1995), many schools have experienced a shift in the diversity of their school population in the last ten years. He stated that this shift has caused frustration in teachers because they experienced reaching only a small percentage of their students. Gardner stressed that teachers should focus on how students learn rather than how teachers teach. After working with brain damaged adults, Gardner developed his theory of the seven multiple intelligences which include:

1. linguistic intelligences
2. logical/mathematical intelligence
3. musical intelligence
4. spatial intelligence
5. bodily/kinesthetic intelligence
6. interpersonal intelligence
7. intrapersonal intelligence.

While he identified only seven, he stated that there are many more intelligences yet to be identified. Gardner reported that his theory of multiple intelligiences significantly increased student learning even in a student's weakest intelligence. He stated that each individual possesses these seven intelligences, but each individual was successful at a different performance level. Gardner found that there was no one way to implement the multiple intelligences into a curriculum. Professionals from Fuller Elementary School in

Gloucester, Massachusetts found many instructional approaches to implement Gardner's seven multiple intelligences into the curriculum. These approaches included:

1. interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences
2. team teaching
3. centers of instruction
4. inclusion of students with special needs
5. project based learning
6. cooperative learning
7. thematic instruction
8. performances and presentations.

The teachers as well as the parents were amazed how well the students responded to the seven multiple intelligences when implemented using these instructional approaches. In addition, student self-assessment increased. For example, the music teacher from the Fuller School asked students if they were ready to perform a song to an audience. The students responded that they needed more practice, and commented on individual areas that needed to be improved upon before performing that they would not have been aware of previously (Gardner, 1995).

According to White, Blythe, and Gardner (1992), multiple intelligences allows schools to broaden their curriculum from the package curriculum districts purchase. Most curriculums targeted linguistic intelligences and logical intelligences. This left many students' educational needs undeveloped. Using the seven multiple intelligences students were able to develop a fuller range of their potential (p. 130). In addition,

White et el (1992) along with Gardner (1995) stressed that no one intelligence works in isolation. It was the incorporation of several intelligences that impacted student learning. (White et el, p. 133).

Project Objectives and Processes

The probable causes gathered from the targeted students and literature indicate deficiencies in reading comprehension. These problems seem to be the result of several causes: lack of structural analysis, lack of personal reading interest, inexperience and/or outdated teaching strategies, and lack of early reading experiences.

The following objectives define the solution to the problem:

> As a result of literacy circles during the period of September, 1998 to January 1999, the targeted third grade and fifth grade students will improve their reading comprehension skills as measured by reflective journals, teacher PMI journal, Accelerated Reading program, and reading comprehension tests.

Project Action Plan

This action plan is presented in outline form in a weekly format. This allows the teachers participating in the action research the time that is needed in the classroom to meet the students' needs as necessary. The weekly schedule format covers the time frame from September of 1998 and will end after 16 weeks sometime in January 1999.

I. Week One

- A. Students will be placed in base groups.
- B. Students will fill in reading inventory.
- C. Send home parent reading inventory and action research letter.
- D. Students will take reading pre-test.
- E. Students will work with a partner to complete peer interview.

F. Teacher and students will set up portfolios.

G. Class discussion defining literacy circles.

II. Week Two - Five

A. Students will be placed in literacy circle task groups.

B. Students introduced to Accelerated Reading program and begin implementing.

C. Activities in reading based on Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic Multiple Intelligences.

D. Students will reflect in journal weekly. Teacher researchers will respond to six journals each week.

E. Teacher will journal weekly in the Field Based Master's Program journal entry log.

III. Week Six - Eight

A. Reading activities will be centered around Bodily/Kinesthetic Multiple Intelligence.

B. Students continue Accelerated Reading program.

C. Students work in literacy circles.

D. Students will reflect in journal weekly. Teacher researchers will respond to six journals each week.

E. Teacher researchers will journal weekly in the Field Based Master's Program journal entry log.

IV. Week Nine - Eleven

A. Reading activities will be centered around Mathematical/Logical

Multiple Intelligence.

B. Students continue Accelerated Reader program.

C. Students work in literacy circles.

D. Students will reflect in journal weekly. Teacher researchers will respond to six journals each week.

E. Teacher researchers will journal weekly in the Field Based Master's Program journal entry log.

V. Week Twelve - Fourteen

A. Reading activities will be centered around Verbal/Linguistic and Musical/ Rhythmic Multiple Intelligences.

B. Students continue Accelerated Reader program.

C. Students continue to work in literacy circles.

D. Students will reflect in journal weekly. Teacher researchers will respond to six journals each week.

E. Teacher will journal weekly in the Field Based Master's Program journal entry log.

VI. Week Fifteen

A. Reading activities will be centered around all eight Multiple Intelligences.

B. Students continue Accelerated Reader program.

C. Students continue to work in literacy circles.

D. Students will reflect in journal weekly. Teacher researchers will respond to six journals each week.

E. Teacher will journal weekly in the Field Based Master's Program journal

entry log.

VII. Week Sixteen

A. Students fill out post reading inventory.

B. Send home post reading inventory for parents to complete.

C. Students take reading post-test.

D. Students work with partner to complete peer interview.

E. Students will reflect in journal. Teacher researcher will respond to six journals.

F. Teacher will journal in the Field Based Master's Program journal entry log.

G. Teacher will conference with individual students on assignments placed in portfolio throughout the sixteen weeks.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention a variety of data collection tools were used throughout the action research project. Baseline data, processing data, and end result data were all collected.

The following methods of assessment were used to collect baseline data:

1. Reading inventory gave the teacher researchers an understanding of recreational and academic reading attitude.

2. Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (WJR) Test of Achievement letter identification and reading comprehension sub-tests were individually administered. This test supplied the teachers with a broad reading grade level standardized scores.

3. Peer interviews gave the teacher researchers insight into the students' thoughts on reading. The interviews were taken in a casual conversational atmosphere.

The following methods of assessment were used to collect processing data:

1. Reflective journals were used so that the students were able to reflect on either story elements or a particular reflection the teacher assigned.
2. Teacher PMI journals were used so that the teacher researchers were able to keep accurate anecdotal records of daily occurrences during the action research project.
3. Accelerated reading program; a computer based reading comprehension program, served as a tool to develop reading comprehension skills using critical thinking and higher order thinking skills.

The following methods of assessment were used to collect end result data:

1. Post reading inventory illustrated any fluctuation in students' recreational or academic attitudes towards reading over the course of the action research.
2. Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (WJ-R) Tests of Achievement letter identification and reading comprehension sub-tests were individually administered. This test illustrated any fluctuation in students' broad reading grade level standardized score over the course of the action research.

3. Peer interview illustrated any differences in students' reading interests over the course of the action research.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve reading comprehension skills in the targeted students who were defined at risk by placement in the Chapter 1 Program and /or received special education services. The following instruments were used in order to document the targeted students' growth in reading comprehension: student reflective journals (see Appendix A), a teacher PMI journal (see Appendix B), weekly student reading comprehension tests, and individual comprehension assessments accessed through the Accelerated Reading Program. The focus of reading instruction centered on the implementation of group literacy circles to produce the desired change in students' reading comprehension.

Teacher A was on maternity leave during the intervention process. Therefore, she worked with the students in her co-worker's third grade class. Teacher A scheduled one to two days a week, from 8:50 - 11:30 AM, as the time to work on this intervention with the students. Due to changes in classroom schedules, field trips, and vacation days the times and days changed; a great deal of the time being decreased to only three hours a week of contact with the students. Some weeks were as many as 12 hours of contact, but more often the contact time was as little as three hours a week.

Teacher A began the project by placing students into base groups. She explained the fundamentals of a base group, as well as how a base group worked together, including mini lessons on social skills needed for any group to work in unity. The students loved the idea of base groups. They were very excited and worked diligently on deriving

names, pledges, banners, and energizers. Teacher A was incredibly surprised with the complexity of the writing for the pledges at the third grade level. The pledges were extremely well written and well-thought out.

After three weeks of centering activities around multiple intelligences and base groups, using stories from the reader, Teacher A placed the students into task groups for literacy circles. The literacy circle task groups consisted of three to four students with one to two students from the targeted group. Over time the base groups established earlier in the intervention diminished and the task groups or literacy circles replaced the base groups. This was due to the lack of time, as well as the fact the regular classroom teacher did not use base groups as part of her classroom teaching. The students were disappointed about this as evidenced in some journal entries.

At the core of the intervention, literacy circles were used to familiarize students with discussion of novels between peers rather than question-answer sessions between students and teacher. Multiple Intelligence strategies were one strategy used in the literacy circles to increase reading comprehension.

In the first few weeks of the intervention, prior to the start of the novel, Teacher A used several of the multiple intelligences to enhance the activities. Musical/rhythmic intelligence was used to enhance the story from Treasury of Literature (Farr & Stickland, 1995), "Music Music for Everyone" by Vera B. Williams. The students designed and created an instrument; formed a "band" in the classroom; wrote a song with the "band"; and performed for the class. Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences helped the round robin writing activity succeed. Here students worked in groups to develop a story by adding their individual sentence to a story that is written by the entire class. There

were six stories circulating the class simultaneously. The students were directed to add a sentence, and then continue drawing a picture depicting a scene from the story that their particular group started. The students were very creative, as well as humorous. One particular student used a monkey in every sentence. He wrote it in every story so that it appropriately fit and brought quite a bit of humor to the activity, as a whole, when the stories were read orally.

Bodily/kinesthetic intelligence was the center for the opening activity to begin the novel Helen Keller by Stewart Graff and Polly Anne Graff. Students were placed in their literacy groups and each group was assigned one vocabulary word from chapter one. The group needed to look up the definition and elicit a bodily/ kinesthetic movement related to the definition. The students then taught the class and, by the end, every student knew the words and definitions. The classroom teacher also pointed out one of the targeted students and explained to Teacher A that this particular student has a tremendous amount of difficulty daily with behavior and staying on task. During this particular lesson this student thrived. Teacher A also noticed how the other students in the class also thrived. At that point Teacher A decided to keep this bodily/kinesthetic activity as the means to learn the vocabulary in the novel. The activity would change, but the use of actions to convey definitions remained constant. For example, the students jigsawed definitions in an expert group and then would teach it to their cohort group. Sometimes the student would develop an action at home, come in and compare it with others, and decide on the action that best helped him/her remember. However, because of the success with bodily/ kinesthetic intelligence in this class the plan for use of other intelligences somewhat diminished. Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and verbal/linguistic intelligences were used in

every lesson. Naturalist, mathematical/logical, and musical/rhythmic seemed to fall by the wayside due to the success of the other intelligences as well as lack of time to incorporate the less successful intelligences. Students expressed the need for the bodily/ kinesthetic in their response journals by writing things like, "...that was the easiest way to learn definitions." and "I didn't know I was learning them because it was so much fun."

As stated previously, literacy circles were used to familiarize students with open discussion rather than targeted question-answer sessions. For instance, when students were placed in literacy circles for their first discussion, questions were written on the board to help facilitate conversation regarding chapter one. The students were told to look at what was on the board and discuss it amongst themselves. Teacher A noticed immediate panic on the student's faces. Hands went up and the questions that followed were, "Is this a grade?"; "Who should write our answers down?"; "How long does the answer have to be?"; and "...we just talk?" These questions proved to Teacher A that students were not accustomed to having freedom to just discuss thoughts, feelings, and ideas after reading. Holding a conversation about what they read was foreign to them. It became obvious that students were use to regimented questions at the end of a reading assignment.

Once Teacher A calmed the students, they began discussing. At that moment Teacher A was reminded of what Cordeiro talked about. When she stopped asking questions, they started talking. Once she stopped trying to control the dialogue, they talked forever (Cordeiro, 1992). Once the students realized that it was okay to just discuss and have a conversation about chapter one, they did just that, and they did it very well. As time went on the discussions grew and the students related personal experiences

to that of *Helen*. What Cordeiro said is true; when Teacher A did not try and control the dialogue, the students learned to talk.

When students worked in their literacy circles they were designated to one of three jobs for group discussions. The recorder filled in the graphic organizer. The checker kept track of time to work on the assignment or time left in the discussion. The most wanted position was the spy. At different times throughout activities, Teacher A would call out, "Go spy!" and the spy would walk around to other groups to look at graphic organizers and see if there was anything pertinent to the novel that their group had overlooked. Students were given two to three minutes to spy. At first the students had difficulty with this. They would cover their papers or cover certain information they did not want others to see. In time they found that sharing when learning is not the same as copying.

Another strategy used throughout the novel, in the literacy circles, was the use of response cards in conjunction with graphic organizers. The three response cards used covered the areas of characters, setting, and plot (see Appendixes D-O). Questions from the response cards focused on during reading and after reading to elicit discussion. A web (see Appendix P) was used with the character response card (see Appendix D) to add characters throughout the novel. The students described whether the character was a main or minor character, as well as if they liked the character or not and why. The mind map (see Appendix Q) was used with the setting response card (see Appendix E). Here the students described a setting, if it were a main or minor setting in the story, and what happened at this particular setting. A PMI chart (see Appendix R) was used for the plot response card (see Appendix F). The students filled in what had happened in the story by

dividing events between positive and negative occurrences with the problem of the story being a negative occurrence. The students predicted what they thought would happen next in the interesting section of the chart. The students would identify each statement with the number of the chapter from which it came. They were then able to see how the story changed throughout, as well as how their predictions changed.

Other activities, used to enhance the literacy circles and increase reading comprehension, were also used. As the sixteen weeks closed in on Teacher A, the students began to jigsaw chapters and use the mindmapping technique to describe the chapter to their cohort group. Surprisingly, the students grasped mindmapping immediately and did a terrific job clearly explaining the chapters using only pictures. Students were also introduced to Braille and sign language. Students learned to sign their name as well as some vocabulary words. They also had to "decode" vocabulary words written in Braille. The students went on a journey through the school with ear plugs in and blind folds on to help them understand the main character of the novel to a higher degree. All of the above activities were new to the students and their excitement was evidenced in the response journals.

When it came to assessment, Teacher A's action plan of weekly vocabulary and comprehension assessments was put aside. With Teacher A only being present once a week, and witnessing the need for students to learn how to discussed readings she decided to concentrate more on enjoyment of reading. The use of the response cards gave this teacher a sense of the students' understanding of the material. She felt if she gave vocabulary and comprehension tests often, the meaning of the literacy circle would be lost to question-answer sessions. At the halfway point the students were given a quiz.

They were assigned to write a letter to a friend explaining the novel to that point. They needed to tell the story in order, explain the problem, and use one vocabulary word from each chapter correctly in the letter. The students also needed to use context clues in the sentence to give part of the definition. The students were allowed to use any notes they had taken as well as vocabulary definitions from the notebook. They were not allowed to use their response cards. Overall, the students demonstrated a great understanding of the story. Some students had difficulty with the vocabulary portion because they were not keeping accurate notes in their notebook. The students took a more traditional test, at the end of the novel, with questions targeting critical and higher order thinking skills. The majority of the students did well. The targeted group of students did not show a tremendous amount of improvement in critical thinking skills, but they did demonstrate understanding of the novel, and seven out of ten knew the vocabulary.

Lastly, Accelerated Reader (Paul, 1996) was used to encourage students to read outside of the classroom, as well as increase student reading comprehension. The students attended library weekly with their regular classroom teacher. Here they had the opportunity to choose from a variety of reading materials. After reading the book the students would take a computerized reading comprehension test consisting of multiple choice questions. The questions targeted critical and higher order thinking skills while testing to measure the student's ability to recall details from the story. This class had read more books than most classes in the building. Teacher A noticed that the books were read because of the competition among classes. However, some of the targeted students who rarely read out of class were reading out of class because of AR. One targeted student had only read one book. She is experiencing tremendous amounts of

difficulty in the classroom as well as at home. She was also pulled out of class for services a great deal of the time Teacher A was present in the class. Overall, by the show of excitement when AR (1996) was discussed, it gave some students the incentive to read.

Teacher B used literacy circles to allow the students exploration of reading while improving their reading comprehension skills. The use of multiple intelligence based activities was incorporated as an instructional technique. These activities were carried out while the students were in literacy base groups. These groups were established during the sixth week of the school year. Each group consisted of at least one targeted and two non-targeted students. Two of the groups consisted of two targeted students and one non-targeted student. During the first week, each base group created their own flag, motto, energizer, and name. The majority of the students were very enthusiastic to be placed in a literacy base group. One of the students made the comment that he had never worked in a base group before for reading. One student had difficulty accepting his peers in his group. He made the comment that none of the students, who were in his group, were his friends. It was obvious, by his lack of cooperation, that he did not feel comfortable in the group. These groups stayed the same, without any changes, throughout the intervention. This teacher noted, in her logs, that the groups should have changed after each completed story or book. It was also noted that several groups had difficulty completing some activities.

The original action plan was formatted into a weekly schedule. This schedule allowed Teacher B to meet the needs of her students as necessary. Each skill was presented and modeled by Teacher B and practiced by the students while in their literacy

base groups. One of the first skills targeted by Teacher B was reading vocabulary. Teacher B used the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence to imprint the word and its definition on her students. The students were very successful. At the end of the week the students were quizzed on their vocabulary words. The lowest grade was an 88%. The majority of the students, six out of ten, received 100%.

Teacher B began her literacy circles with a story from the students' reader, Treasury of Literature (Farr & Strickland, 1995). The stories included:

1. "Sarah, Plain and Tall" by Patricia MacLachlan
2. "Pride of Puerto Rico" by Paul Robert Walker
3. "Whose Side Are You On" by Emily Moore.

Teacher B continued with the literacy circles with the use of the following list of novels:

1. The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare
2. Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
3. Blue Willow by Doris Gates
4. Echohawk by Lynda Durant
5. Hatchet by Gary Paulsen
6. A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle
7. Bunnicula by Deborah and James Howe
8. The Family Under the Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson
9. Survival! By K. Duey and K. A. Bale
10. The House of Dies Drear by Virginia Hamilton.

The students would use their journals to guide the literacy circle discussions and activities. Each student had a set of twelve student response cards (see Appendixes D-O). These cards guided the groups to discuss what they had read the previous night. Teacher B observed many heated discussions when students in a group disagreed. Each student was expected to record the information that was discussed, within his or her own spiral notebooks. Teacher B noted that many times it was difficult to stop the literacy groups' discussions. The students expressed difficulty at being told to stop before their discussion was completed. At the end of each week the students were quizzed on their story. The students' scores varied from 66% to 100%.

Another technique, Teacher B implemented with her students, was the use of student journals. Each student was asked to reflect weekly, in his or her journal, about the week's activities. The students' comments enlightened Teacher B about their feelings towards the week's activities. The journals were also instrumental to Teacher B about what activities the students enjoyed or had difficulties completing. One student's reaction to the first vocabulary activity mediated by the bodily/kinesthetic vocabulary, encouraged Teacher B to continue this activity. He stated that he thought it was weird but admitted that he had fun. Another student stated that he felt weird, but justified it by saying that he had never done this before with his vocabulary words. Teacher B found it difficult to comment weekly in the students' journals. But this teacher did meet with each group to discuss their progress and/or difficulties each group was experiencing.

It was obvious through the students' journal writing that two other activities stood out with the students. The first activity was silent reading. The students and Teacher B brought in soft comfy items to lean on as they read their novels silently. Teacher B noted

that her classroom had never been so quiet! But it was also evident that the students and Teacher B were actively engaged in reading. After completing this activity, the students professed the need to discuss their experience. Teacher B did a T-chart about the students' experience. The students expressed what they felt and how this time benefited them. The students' reactions varied from, "peaceful", to "there were no distractions in the room."

The second activity that the students enjoyed completing was the story's culminating activity. Each group of students chose an activity that would reflect their story's main idea. It was evident that some groups put more time and effort into their project. Two of the projects were so thorough that they surprised Teacher B. The activities that the students were able to choose from were:

1. mobiles
2. filmstrips
3. pop-up book
4. newspaper
5. play
6. road-map
7. book jacket
8. song.

These activities also included a rubric of what was expected with each project (see Appendix S). A rubric for their oral report was also included.

One of the multiple intelligence based activities that Teacher B had difficulty implementing was musical/rhythmic. Teacher B found it difficult because the teacher

was not comfortable with this intelligence. But this intelligence was always offered as an option in their culminating activities.

The activity that Teacher B felt culminated the project best was the timeline. The students had moved from the base groups reading from their own novels to all of the groups reading the same novel. Each base group was in charge of writing, on the chalkboard, the important events in their particular chapter. After each chapter, the events were discussed. The discussions that ensued from the group's decisions were great! There were disagreements and agreements. The class questioned each event, and the base groups needed to justify their choices.

Another program that was implemented during this time was the use of the Accelerated Reader (Paul, 1996). During library time, the students could check out books and take a quiz about any finished book. This program built the student's confidence in reading comprehension. This program appeared simple to the students because of the types of questions that covered the content of the story. The types of questions used in the Accelerated Reader (1996) program targeted critical and higher order thinking skills. These questions made the students think about their answers. This program also focused on the important details of the story. Several of the students still experienced difficulty. This was evident in the students' summary reports. These students experienced difficulties passing the quizzes. Teacher B discussed these difficulties with each student privately. The students experienced success within the classroom but not in their recreational reading. The students' stated that the use of the graphic organizers were very helpful in the classroom. These students now use small pocket size notebooks to write down and organize their thoughts about the story. This

has been very successful with three out of four students. The fourth student admitted that he doesn't always write down the information. But on the stories that he did use this method, he was successful.

Teacher C implemented literacy circles using cooperative learning and multiple intelligences as a teaching strategy to increase student enthusiasm for improving reading comprehension skills. Teacher C's class consisted of the ten targeted students and sixteen non-targeted students who were mixed together into base groups of four to five students. The targeted students were divided equally among the non-targeted students to create a diverse group. The students loved the bonding experience of forming their groups. Teacher C observed most of the student actively participating in the complete bonding experience. The students created a group name, a logo, a song, a pledge, and an energizer. Each group formally presented all the components of their base group to the entire class. The students demonstrated outstanding enthusiasm during their group presentations. The base groups that were formed were:

1. The Spice Boys
2. The Four Cubbies
3. Nsync
4. The Four Backstreet Kids
5. The Five Cubbies
6. KSAW.

Teacher C explained to the students that their base groups would be used for their literacy circle for reading activities and lessons. In addition, to the literacy circles, these base groups were used in all other curriculum areas throughout the school year.

All the students decorated a file folder to be used for their portfolio. They were instructed to illustrate their individual personality on the cover. The students' portfolios included these items:

1. reading comprehension/vocabulary test
2. completed reading response cards with the corresponding graphic organizer
3. Accelerated Reading composite sheets
4. various artifacts
5. reading response reflective journal
6. participation T-chart and encouragement T-chart.

As the individual portfolios developed, a few students expressed how fun it was to keep all their materials in one safe place.

Teacher C set the stage for the literacy circles by using a T-chart to teach all the students positive participation and encouragement. First, Teacher C prompted the students to think what participation looked like and sounded like. The students quickly caught on and created an appropriate T-chart for participation. Next, Teacher C did the same thing for encouragement. Again, the students carefully thought out what it looked like and sounded like. Teacher C had each student add these T-charts to their portfolios to be a reminder of appropriate behavior during base group activities.

Teacher C developed four specific roles that the teacher alternated assigned roles each time the students worked in their literacy circle. The roles were:

1. the snap was the person who recorded all the responses;
2. the crackle was the person who worried about keeping the group focused;

3. the pop was the person who checked to see that everyone maintains understanding of the task;

4. the zip was the person who reminded group members to use 6-inch voices.

The students treated each one of these roles with great respect and they all enjoyed the opportunity to rotate roles on a frequent basis.

Teacher C used the third grade literature book as a starting point for the literacy circles. The students read a variety of weekly stories from Treasury of Literature (Farr & Strickland, 1995) for the first four weeks. The stories were:

1. "Miss Rumphius" by Barbara Cooney
2. "Ramona Quimby Age 8" by Beverly Cleary
3. "The Adventures of Ali Baba Bernstein" by Johanna Hurwitz
4. "Meet the Orchestra" by Anne Hayes.

Students tapped into their interpersonal intelligences by using three different reader response cards in their literacy circles. The students used reader response card 1 which centers on the characters from a story, reader response card 2 which centers on the settings of a story, and reader response card 3 which centers on the plot of a story (see Appendix D-F). These cards guided the focus of their discussions before reading and after reading each story. Teacher C had the students use a specific graphic organizer for each reader response card. The reader response cards facilitated the appropriate discussion of the story and the graphic organizer aided in the recording of information discussed.

The students activated their verbal/linguistic intelligence by presenting their group's completed reading response packet and graphic organizer to the entire class. One

of the targeted students mentioned to Teacher C that he enjoyed listening to the other groups' responses and seeing the graphic organizers because it helped him remember parts of the story better.

The students developed their bodily/kinesthetic intelligence when exploring the assigned vocabulary for each reading selection. For each selection, Teacher C developed vocabulary experiences that centered on the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence. Teacher C modeled how to physically act out the definition of a vocabulary word. For example, as Teacher C said the word *lupine,* she held her hands over her head into a spike and proceeded to slowly say, "*a plant that has long spikes of a flower*." The targeted students and non-targeted students demonstrated unbelievable excitement using this process for the remainder of the intervention. For each selection, Teacher C first had the students recorded the definitions in their individual reading spiral. Then, the students worked in their literacy circle to create bodily/kinesthetic movements to reflect the meaning of a particular definition. Last, the students presented their definitions using bodily/ kinesthetic movement to the entire class. The targeted students quickly retained the definition of each vocabulary word using this method. Teacher C was astonished when the targeted students and non-targeted students all received 100% accuracy on the vocabulary selection of the first reading comprehension/vocabulary test for "Miss Rumphius" by Barbara Cooney. This was evidence that the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence increased student performance compared to just memorizing a definition without creating movements. Therefore, this teacher maintained this procedure for the duration of the action research intervention.

The story "Meet the Orchestra" provided an excellent opportunity for the students to channel their musical/rhythmic multiple intelligence. In November, Class C took a field trip to Symphony Center to experience the sounds of a real orchestra. Several of the targeted students were surprised they truly enjoyed the experience. However, two of the targeted students decided that they did not enjoy the orchestra experience.

Next, teacher C implemented chapter books into her intervention. The students in Class C were thrilled to receive their individual chapter book for reading class. Teacher C originally tried to cover a story from Treasury of Literature (Farr & Strickland, 1995) along with the first chapter book. Teacher C quickly discovered that this agenda was not conducive to maintaining the schedule on her action plan. Therefore Teacher C focused solely on the chapter books for the remainder of the action plan. The chapter books that Class C read next were:

1. The Chalk Box Kid by Clyde Robert Bulla
2. The Best Christmas Pageant by Barbara Robinson
3. Helen Keller by Stewart Graff and Polly Anne Graff.

The reader response cards and graphic organizers were used the same way as used with the selections from Treasury of Literature (Farr & Stickland, 1995). The students continued to thrive with the comprehension and vocabulary of these chapter books when working with their literacy circles.

The targeted and non-targeted students used reflective journals that Teacher C referred to as the students' reader response journals to record their individual discoveries for each reading selection and chapter book. These journals provided the students an opportunity to express their individual reactions privately except for an occasional

preview from Teacher C. Some of the students wrote about the parts of a story that they liked and disliked while other students compared characters to people that they knew, settings they wanted to visit, and plots that were similar to their personal experiences. The targeted students generally wrote simple and short summaries in their reading response journals.

The students used their intrapersonal multiple intelligence at the completion of each story and chapter book. The students were administered a reading comprehension/vocabulary test to measure their individual comprehension of the characters, setting, and plot of each selection. The questions allowed for students to respond using short answers with complete sentences. The test questions created inspired individual critical thinking abilities and individual higher order thinking. These tests also measured students' knowledge of vocabulary. The format for assessing the vocabulary ranged from:

1. Matching the appropriate definition to the appropriate word
2. Filling in the blank of a sentence
3. Writing a sentence using the word
4. Recording the definition.

The targeted students' performance ranged from excellent to below average on these tests.

Every Monday during Class C's scheduled library time, they engaged in the Accelerated Reading (Paul, 1996) program as another vehicle to improve reading comprehension. This program allowed students to select from a wide range of library books to read. The following week the students took an individual computerized reading

comprehension test pertaining to the book. The test consisted of multiple choice questions that measure the students' ability to remember the important details from the story. In addition, the questions targeted critical thinking and higher order thinking skills. A few of the targeted students experienced difficulties with these tests because they had difficulties reading the actual test. Teacher C modified for these students by reading the Accelerated Reading test aloud to the student. This modification proved to be successful because the students then passed the test. The problem that exists with this program was the limited time factor. The students could not take a test until they checked out a book for the week. The remainder of the library time they were allowed to log on to the Accelerated Reading (1996) program. Sometimes, a student would have less than five minutes to complete a test. This time factor increased test anxiety in some students who experienced difficulties taking these tests.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

At the conclusion of the intervention the students completed the post-reading attitude survey. A summary of all the students' academic reading attitude was reported in Figure 6. The survey assessed the students' attitudes toward reading. The attitudes ranged from very happy to very upset. The nature of the questions included feelings about various books read, places to read, with whom a student reads, how often they read or are read to, feelings about taking reading tests, and answering questions about what was read. Figure 6 illustrated that Class A's targeted group showed no remarkable change in their attitudes towards academic reading. It also illustrated that Class B's targeted group attitude in academic reading remained the same. Class C's targeted group showed a slight decrease in the targeted students' attitudes in academic reading.

Figure 6. Attitude survey towards academic reading.

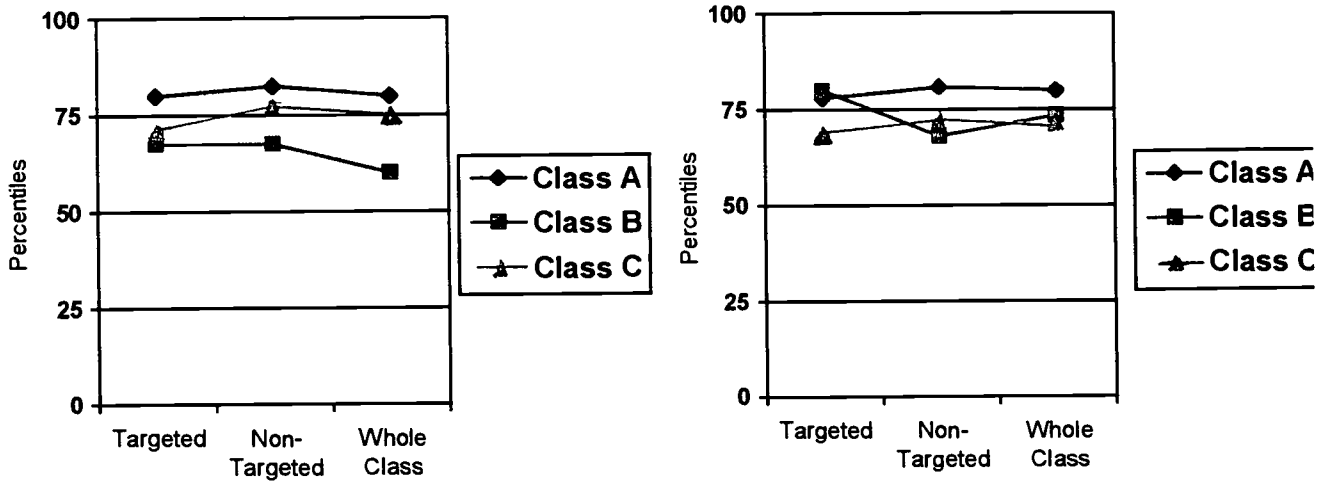

Figure 6 illustrates the fluctuation of students' attitudes towards academic reading in the targeted group, the non-targeted group, and the class as a whole in Classes A, B, and C. The chart on the left shows the students' attitudes towards academic reading at the beginning of the intervention. The chart on the right shows the students' attitudes towards academic reading at the end of the intervention.

A summary of all the students' attitudes towards recreational reading was reported in Figure 7. Class A's targeted students showed a slight decrease, in its attitude, towards recreational reading; whereas non-targeted students showed no change. Class B's targeted students showed a remarkable increase, in its attitude, towards recreational reading; whereas non-targeted students remained the same. Class C's targeted and non-targeted showed a slight decrease, in its attitude, towards recreational reading.

Figure 7. Attitude survey towards recreational reading.

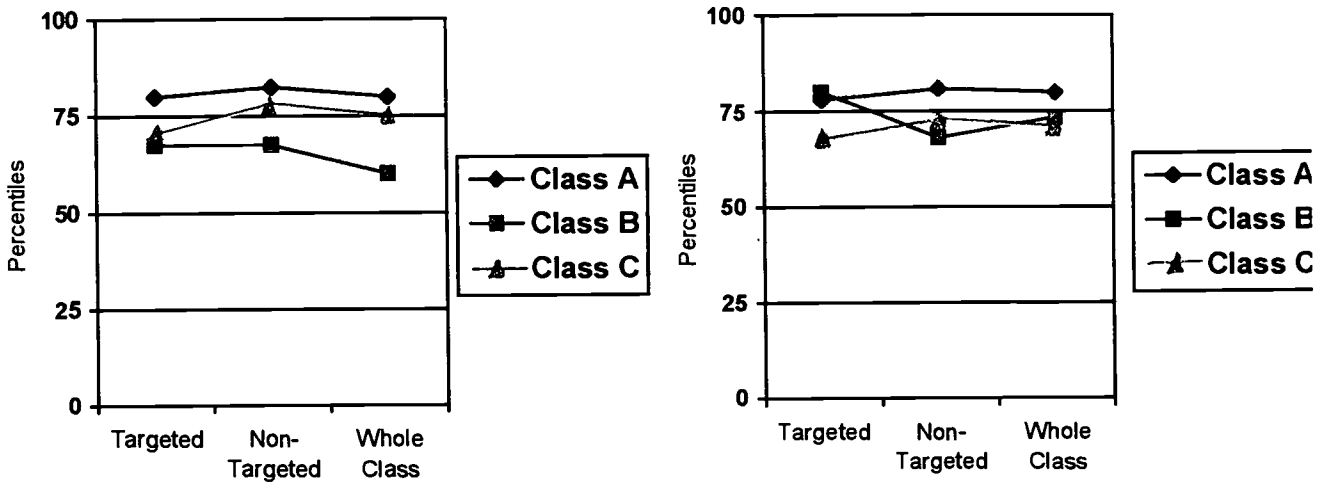

Figure 7 illustrates the fluctuation of students' attitudes towards recreational reading in the targeted group, the non-targeted group, and the class as a whole in Classes A, B, and C. The chart on the left shows the students' attitudes towards recreational reading at the beginning of the intervention. The chart on the right shows the students' attitudes towards recreational reading at the end of the intervention.

Figure 8 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) show grade level performance from Class A's targeted students. The targeted students' scores fell into one of three categories: below grade level, at grade level, and below grade level. In Class A there was a ten percent decrease in the amount of targeted students who performed below grade level. There was a ten percent decrease in the amount of targeted students who performed at grade level. There was a twenty percent increase in the amount of targeted students who performed above grade level. There was a forty percent decrease in students indicated as achieving below grade level.

Figure 8. Class A's broad reading performance from the WJ-R.

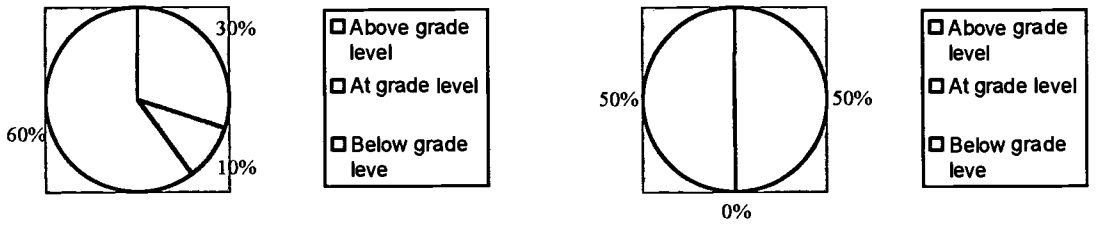

Figure 8 illustrates Class A's targeted students' broad reading performance. The pie chart on the left represents the students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention. The pie chart on the right represents the students' broad reading performance at the end of the intervention.

Figure 9 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) show grade level performance from Class B's targeted students. There was a forty percent decrease in the amount of targeted students who performed below grade level. There was no change in the amount of targeted students who performed at grade level. There was a forty percent increase in the amount of targeted students who performed above grade level.

Figure 9. Class B's broad reading performance from the WJ-R.

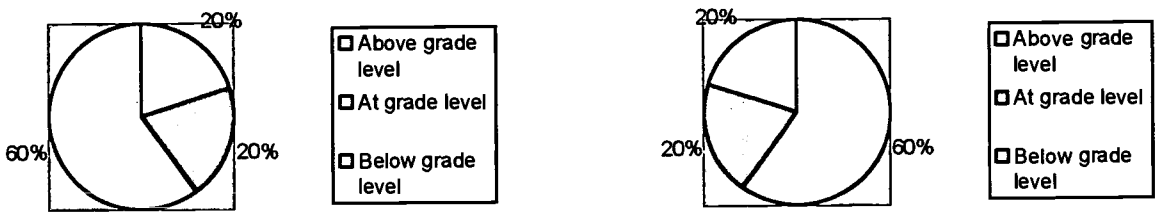

Figure 9 illustrates Class B's targeted students' broad reading performance. The pie chart on the left represents the students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention. The pie chart on the right represents the students' broad reading performance at the end of the intervention.

Figure 10 results from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) show grade level performance from Class C's targeted students. The targeted students' scores fell into on of three categories: below grade level, at grade level, and below grade level. There was a forty percent decrease in the amount of targeted students who performed below grade level. There was a twenty percent increase in the amount of targeted students who performed at grade level. There was a twenty percent increase in the targeted students who performed above grade level.

Figure 10. Class C's broad reading performance from the WJ-R.

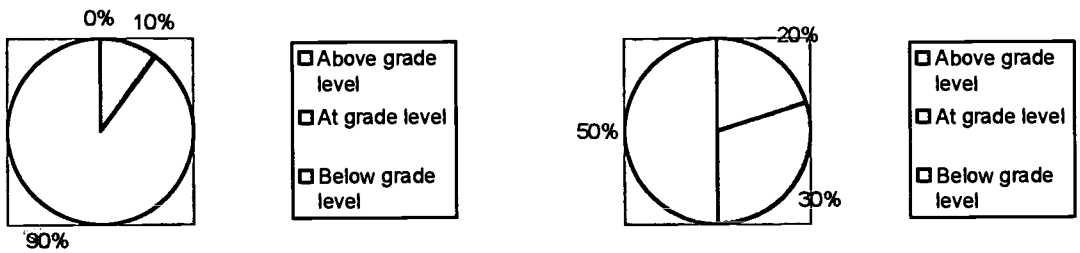

Figure 10 illustrates Class C's broad reading performance. The pie chart on the left represents the students' broad reading performance at the beginning of the intervention. The pie chart on the right represents the students' broad reading performance at the end of the intervention.

Consistency proved to be the greatest influencing variable in each class. Teacher B and C found this to be the most important aspect of the intervention. These teachers used literacy circles everyday during their scheduled reading period. At the end of the intervention, in Classes B and C there was a forty percent decrease in the amount of students who performed below grade level on the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990). Teacher B and C felt that the success of the intervention was based on the consistency of the literacy circles. Whereas, Teacher A for the same reasons, found it to be detrimental to her intervention. There was no consistency. It took twelve weeks to read one novel. The students in Class A had difficulty discussing the previous lesson due to the time lapse between lessons. In Class A, the classroom teacher did not practice the intervention strategies daily. The strategies were only implemented when Teacher A was present.

Finally, a peer reading interview was conducted (see Appendix C). The peer interview administered in the beginning of the intervention informed the researchers that most students acknowledged being read to before first grade. These students commented that they enjoyed the experience. According to the beginning peer interviews, most students continued to desire being read to. Alarmingly, among all the grade levels where the beginning peer interviews were conducted, an overwhelming amount of students were not read to any longer. This holds true, with the ending peer interview, for two out of the three classes. Class A voiced a resounding decrease in the desire to be read to.

In the ending peer interviews there were some new significant changes that were not evident in the beginning peer interviews. Overall, in two out of the three classes, students greatly increased the time spent reading. Class A remained the same.

In all three classes, when asked, "what is your favorite book"; or "who is your favorite author"; there were a variety of answers. In the beginning peer interviews, students mentioned general titles of books and most did not have a favorite author. In the ending peer interviews, the students' responses were very specific and very diverse regarding their choices of authors and book titles.

After review of: (a) the student reflective journals, (b) teachers' PMI journals, (c) summary reports from AR, (d) beginning and ending peer interviews, (e) beginning and ending broad reading comprehension assessments from the WJ-R (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990), and (f) the beginning and ending reading attitude surveys, it was evident to Teachers A, B, and C that there were many variables affecting the intervention's outcome. Some variables were found to be common among classes, while other variables were unique to a class (see Appendixes A-S).

The response journals were found to be a positive variable for the following reasons:

1. The format of the response journal was great preparation for the Illinois Standard Assessment Test.
2. Journal writing correlated to state goals.
3. Student/teacher feedback was essential in understanding student reaction and insights to the novel and text.

The Chapter One program was found to have positive and negative variables. Teacher C found this to be a positive variable. This teacher found the time spent with the students to be significant. The Chapter One teacher spent the entire reading period and also scheduled pull out time, immediately following, for the targeted students. Teachers

A and B found the opposite to be true. Teacher A noticed that her targeted students were always pulled out during her reading time with students. Teacher A attributes this to the fact that she was only in the class once a week. Teacher B found that little time was spent with her targeted student. The student only received twenty minutes of service per week. Teacher B attributes this to the fact that the younger students are receiving more time than the older students.

There were both positive and negative variables that affected the success of AR (Paul, 1996). The teachers found AR to be a positive experience. The program offered incentives, which encouraged the students to start reading. Teacher B found AR to be negative because there were not enough novels at the 4.0 grade level and higher. In addition, this teacher felt that the diversity was limited. This teacher also noted that two of the targeted students, in Class B, did not transfer the skills from their reading class to the AR program. Teacher C was discouraged about the limited time provided to access the AR program (1996).

Consistency proved to be the greatest influencing variable in each class. Teacher B and C found this to be the most important aspect of the intervention. These teachers used literacy circles everyday during their scheduled reading period. Teacher B and C felt that the success of the intervention was based on the consistency of the literacy circles. Whereas, Teacher A for the same reasons, found it to be detrimental to her intervention. There was no consistency. It took twelve weeks to read one novel. The students in Class A had difficulty discussing the previous lesson due to the time lapse between lessons. In Class A, the classroom teacher did not practice the intervention strategies daily. The strategies were only implemented when Teacher A was present.

There were several variables unique to Teacher A. In Teacher A's class, the students viewed the intervention as extra curricular. As previously stated, these students received the intervention approximately one to three times per week, and otherwise received instruction from their regular homeroom teacher. When engaged in the intervention, the students enjoyed the time spent reading the novel. The students often commented on how they wished the intervention would be more consistent.

Another variable was, one of Teacher A's targeted students was frequently absent during the intervention. This targeted student was absent during one-fourth of the intervention. Teacher A felt any changes in the data were invalid, either positive or negative, due to the fact that there was no consistency in the implementation of the intervention. Due to these variables this teacher was uncomfortable accepting results as effects of the intervention. Most likely, changes in the data were influenced from other outside factors.

Unique to Teacher B was the variations of novels used by the literacy circles. Teacher B's literacy circles were able to choose from ten different novel titles. The book selections included a variety of categories. These categories included science fiction, action, humor, mystery, and historical fiction. The students' enthusiasm for these novels was evident. Several weeks after the intervention was completed, the students still anticipated their next novel. Teacher B found a couple of negative aspects in the structuring of the literacy circles in her classroom. The first aspect was the amount of time spent outside of class reading the various titles. The second aspect was the amount of money spent purchasing a variety of titles.

Unique to Teacher C was the implementation of the literacy circles. This implementation started with the use of the short stories from the students' literary text. After completing several stories, Class C switched to reading novels. The targeted students' enthusiasm during the literacy circles rose when reading the novels compared to the short stories. The students expressed interest in these novels. Another interesting observation was the way Class C became very proficient when using the graphic organizers in alignment to the character, plot, and setting. However, Teacher C found the amount of time that was necessary to implement the literacy circles affected other curricular areas. These subjects were cut short on several days during the intervention.

An interesting observation was students' responses elicited by Teachers A and C. When asked what their favorite part of reading class was students from Class A responses centered on stories from the reader. Class C's responses centered on the novels read in their literacy circles. These responses were evidence the consistent use of literacy circles were not present in Class A. This informal discussion does not correlate with the data. However, Teachers A and C, both recognized the difference in attitude between classes towards literacy circles. When used consistently students remembered literacy circles as a daily activity. When literacy circles were not used as a daily activity, the students did not even mention even being a part of one.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on literacy circles, the majority of the targeted students showed a marked improvement in reading comprehension. When comparing traditional reading classes, which follow the teacher guide, to literacy circle discussion, the teachers discovered a remarkable rise in enthusiasm, desire to read

recreationally, and desire to read academically. The teachers also noticed increased autonomy, as well as individual and group accountability.

In addition, Teachers A, B, and C realized that the students perform at the level of expectation that they set for them. The use of critical and higher order thinking skills brought the expectations to a higher level, and the students reached that level. The multiple intelligences aided in the raising and meeting of expectations.

The following should be considered when incorporating literacy circles into a classroom:

1. Literacy circles seem to work best when they are part of the daily reading curriculum at least in regard to making an impression on the students.
2. An appropriate amount of planning time for each novel that would be incorporated for literacy circles might be considered.
3. Strategies such as multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, authentic assessment, the use of graphic organizers, and AR are instrumental in bringing about desired changes.
4. For literacy circles to succeed, a great deal of class time is needed. A suggestion would be to use novels that can cross over into other content areas so that other subjects are equally covered.

In the end, Teachers A, B, and C see the consistency in literacy circles as key to its success. At the end of the intervention the teachers can not see themselves teaching reading any other way than in literacy circles, incorporating all the strategies mentioned, on a consistent basis.

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Appendixes

Teacher Reflective Journal

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Notes and Comments

Response to "Notes and Comments"

Teacher PMI

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed):

Peer Interview

Name:_____ **Interviewer:**_____

Date:_____

Reading Peer Interview

1. How often do you read?

2. What types of materials do you enjoy?

3. What kinds of books do you enjoy reading?

4. Do you enjoy it when someone reads to you?

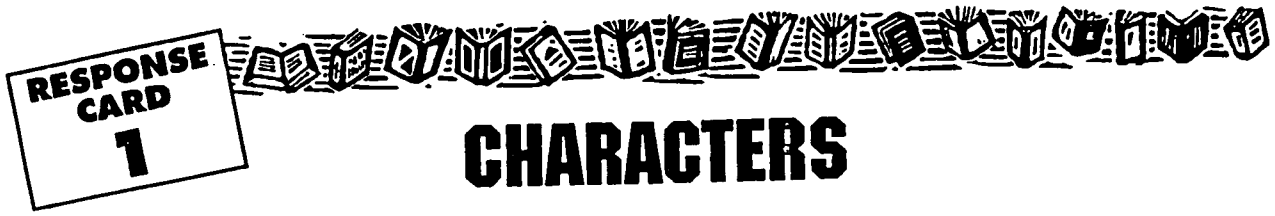
5. Who do you read to?

6. What is your favorite book?

7. Who is your favorite author?

8. Did anyone read to you before you started first grade?

9. Does anyone read to you now?



CHARACTERS

DURING READING

1. Who are the main characters? Who are the minor characters?
2. Do you like or dislike the characters? Why?
3. Does a character in this story remind you of anyone else you have read about? If so, how are they alike?

AFTER READING

4. Choose one character. Why was this character important in the story?
5. Did any of the characters change? If so, how?
6. If you could be any character in this story, who would you be? Why?
7. Suppose you had a chance to meet one of the characters. What would you say to him or her?

SETTING

DURING READING

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Describe the place.
3. Have you ever been to a place like this? If you have, how was it like the place in the story?
4. When does this story take place—long ago, in the future, or in the present? How do you know?

AFTER READING

5. How did the place affect what happened in the story?
6. How would the story be different if it were set in a different place?
7. How would the story be different if it were set in a different time?
8. If you could visit the place, would you go? Why or why not?

Response Card 3

Plot

PLOT

DURING READING

1. Tell the main things that have happened so far.
2. What is the problem in the story? How do you think it will be solved?
3. What do you think will happen next? What do you think will happen at the end?

AFTER READING

4. Tell the main events that happened in the story.
5. What was the solution to the story problem?
6. Did you guess the ending? How else might the author have ended the story?
7. What do you think was the best part of the story? Why?

Theme/Mood

During Reading

1. What do you think the author's message will be? Why do you think that?
2. From the title of the story, what do you think this story will be about?
3. How do you feel at this point in the story? Why?
4. What do you remember most about the story so far?

After Reading

5. What was the author's message? Which story events helped you figure out the message?
6. If you wanted to suggest this story to a friend, what would you say it is mostly about?
7. How do you feel now that you have finished the story? Why?
8. What part was
   - the funniest?
   - the saddest?
   - the most exciting?

Author's Viewpoint

During Reading

1. What do you know about the author?
2. What is the author trying to tell you? How do you know?
3. Can you tell what kinds of things (people, places, behavior, feelings) the author likes? If so, how do you know?

After Reading

4. Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?
5. What did the author have to know in order to write this article or story?
6. What else could the author have said to support his or her opinion?

Author's Craft

During Reading

1. Have you noticed anything you think the author might bring up again later in the story? If so, what did you notice?
2. Tell about any pictures the author has left in your mind.
3. What words has the author used so far to help you
   - see things in the story?
   - hear things in the story?
   - feel things in the story?
4. What does the dialogue tell you about the characters? Do they talk the way people really talk? Why or why not?

After Reading

5. What is your favorite word, line, or paragraph in the story? Why is it your favorite?
6. What do you like about the way the author has written the story?
7. Would you like to read something else by this author? Why or why not?
8. What was the most important thing you learned from the dialogue in this story?

Free Response

During Reading

1. Work with a partner. Look over the story, and decide whether you will read it silently or aloud.
2. Think about the way the story is organized. Decide with your partner how often you will stop to discuss it.
3. Each time you stop, talk about what you have read. Tell what you think, and listen to your partner.
4. Read the next section, and talk about it. Continue doing this until you finish the story.

After Reading

5. Talk about the whole story. Tell what you think, and listen to what your partner says.
   - You might talk about your favorite part of the story.
   - You might discuss the author's writing.
   - You might discuss whether what you thought would happen really did happen.

Written Dialogue

During Reading

1. Work with a partner. Silently read the pages your teacher suggests.
2. On a sheet of paper, write a comment about what you read. Then write a question about something you didn't understand.
3. Pass your paper to your partner.
4. Write the answer to your partner's question. Then add a new question to the paper.
5. Pass the paper back to your partner. Answer the new question your partner wrote.

After Reading

6. Read the rest of the story. Repeat steps 2–5.
7. Discuss the story. Use the questions and answers on your paper to help you.

Literature Circle

Organizing a Literature Circle

The members of your group

- may want to read the selection independently.
- may want to read the selection together to discuss certain parts during reading.
- should decide how many pages to read and what to discuss.

During and After Reading

Your group members can

- discuss their reactions to part or all of the selection.
- ask questions about parts they did not understand.

Choose a sentence starter to help your group begin a discussion.

1. My first reaction was . . .
2. I loved the way the author . . .
3. I didn't like the part . . .

Writing in Your Personal Journal

Sometimes, the members of your Literature Circle may want to write their responses to the selection and then discuss what each of you has written. Here are some things to write about. Choose one.

1. Think of at least three things that the story reminds you of in another story or in your own lives. Tell about them.
2. Copy in your personal journal an important paragraph, sentence, or word from the selection. Explain why it is important to you.
3. What influenced you most when you read: the setting, one of the characters, or the plot of the story? Write about it.

How Do I Know What I Know?

Before Reading

1. How can I find out what the selection is about?
2. What am I going to be reading to find out?
3. What is the story problem?
4. How is this story problem like problems I have solved?

During Reading

5. What do I know so far?
6. What is the topic or theme of this selection?
7. What questions do I have that are still unanswered?
8. What is the story problem?
9. How do I know what the story problem is?

After Reading

10. Did my first prediction match what happened in the selection?
11. How did I know I should change my predictions?
12. How did I know if the story problem would be resolved?
13. What did the writer do to make me think that?
14. How can I use the information I have learned in everyday life?
15. What else would I still like to know about this topic or theme?

Critics Circle

RESPONSE CARD 11

Critics Circle

As a member of a Critics Circle, you are going to be comparing two or more selections or articles. Here's what to do.

When Reading Fiction

1. The members of your group should preview the selection that you are going to read to decide what it's about.
2. Before your group members read the selection, each of you should find another book or selection or a story in your reading anthology that you have read that has the same topic or theme.
3. With your group members, decide when you should read the new selection in your reading anthology and when you will discuss it.
4. After reading, bring with you to your discussion group the book, selection, or story that you want to compare.

When Reading Nonfiction

1. The members of your group should preview the selection that you are going to read to decide what it's about.
2. Before your group members read the selection, find a book or a magazine, newspaper, or encyclopedia article that you have read that gives information about the same topic.
3. After reading the selection in your reading anthology, bring your book or article to your discussion group.
4. Talk about how the information in the selection and the information in your book or article is the same or different.

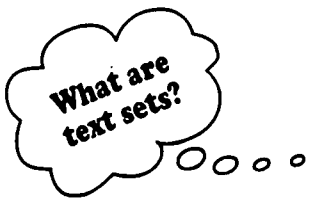
Discussion Questions

Your group members may want to use one of these questions to talk about the materials you have read:

1. How is the information alike?
2. How is the information different?
3. Did one of the reading materials offer more or better information? Which one? Give examples.
4. Which reading material did you like better? Why?

ESPONSE CARD 12

Text Sets



Text sets are things that you read that have the same topic, theme, or genre (nonfiction, fiction, poetry, biography), are written by the same author, or are illustrated by the same illustrator. Text sets include:

- selections in your reading anthology,
- articles found in magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, or other reference sources, and
- books.

omparing Text Sets

1. Have everyone in your group read *all* of the selections. After everyone has read the selections, use some of these questions for discussion:

To compare texts, use *one* of these ideas.

- What are the similarities in the way these stories were written?
- What information did you find presented in more than one of the texts? (This should be used with nonfiction.)
- What other selections have you read that are related to these similarities or differences?

2. Have each group member read one of the selections that have the same theme, are by the same author, or are the same genre (nonfiction, fiction, poetry, biography).

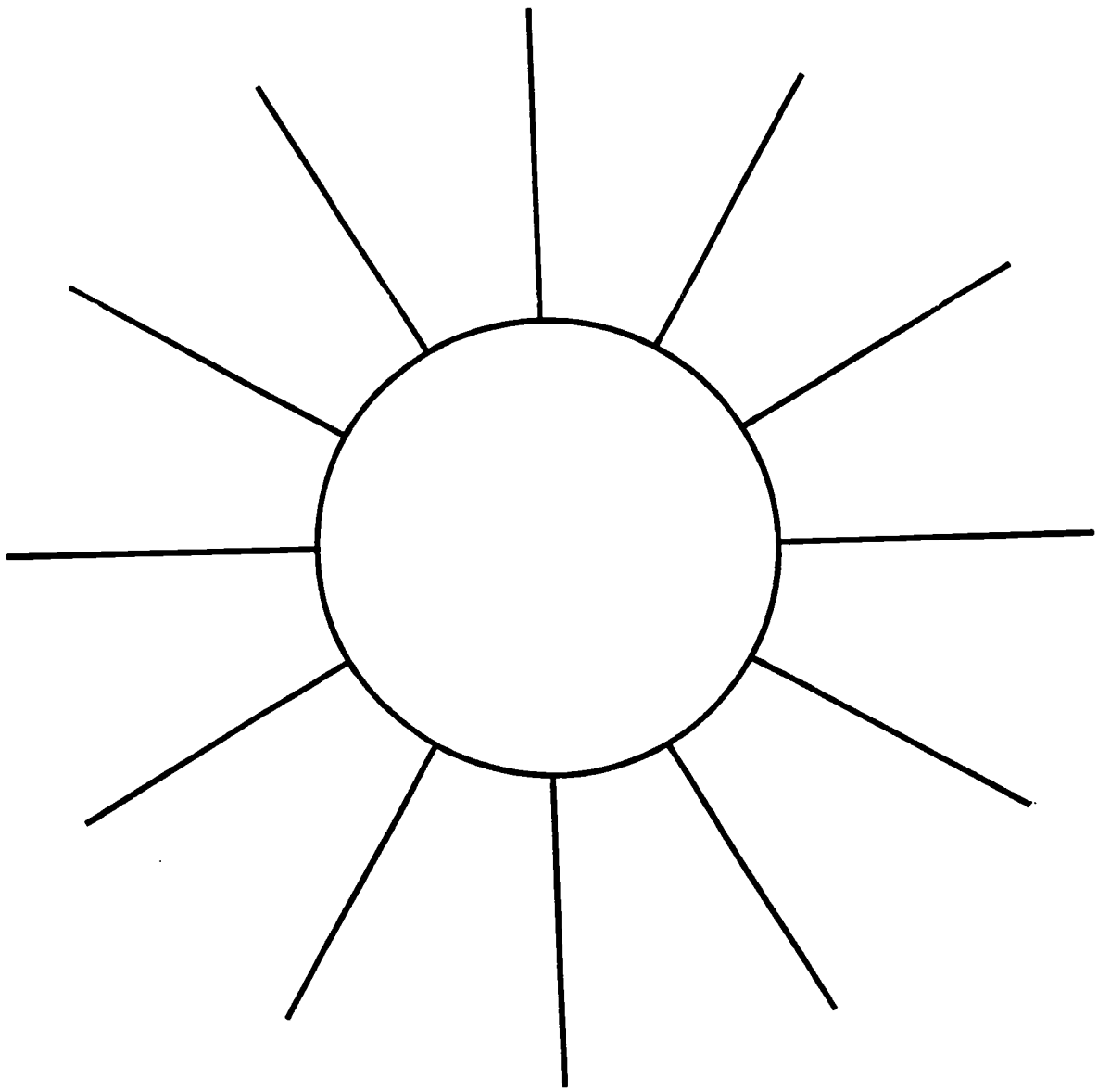
- Each group member should share what he or she has read.
- Everyone should discuss the similarities and differences in the selections.
- At the end of the discussion, the group may want to brainstorm how to present the comparisons.

Show Your Group's Comparisons

* Create a comparison chart to display your findings.
* Write a drama or a Readers Theatre that fits the text set.
* Make a game showing the comparisons.
* Create a mural and display it in your classroom.

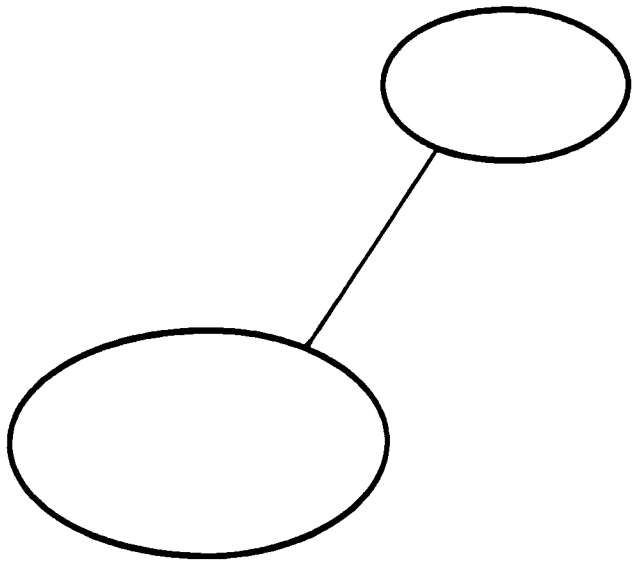
NAME _____ CLASS _____

THE WEB



NAME _____ CLASS _____

THE MIND MAP



PMI CHART (PLUS/MINUS/INTERESTING QUESTIONS)

P (+)	M (-)	I (?)

Appendix R

Student PMI Chart

Book Report Rubric

Name:_____

Book Title:_____

Objective: The student will recreate the stories main event through their choice of a book report project.

Assessed item	**Points**	**What to look for**
Literacy Circle Project		
Scrapbook Newspaper Biography Mobile Filmstrip	3	Followed set guidelines and demonstrates story concepts.
Mobile Song Road Map Pop-up book Play	2	Followed set guidelines and demonstrates story concepts.
	1	The work is unclear or incomplete.
Literacy Circle		
Oral Presentation (above project)	3	The student was very prepared and communicated the results in a meaningful way.
	2	Student's responses are adequate for presentation.
	1	Student's responses show that he/she is unprepared for group discussion.

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