Using Literature Circles to Increase Reading Comprehension in
Third Grade Elementary Students

Shawna R. Briggs

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology
Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

July 2010

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family, school colleagues, and professors at Dominican University of California for supporting me during my research. This was not an easy task but they made it manageable. I appreciate all of their help, guidance, and encouragement.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Reading comprehension strategies are important skills for a child to learn. Good strategies support struggling students to be more successful in all subjects at school as reading is the basis for subsequent mastery of most subjects (Bender & Larkin, 2003).

This action research project examined the use of literature circles in a third grade class. The research examined student performance on reading comprehension assessments before and after the use of literature circles. Other evidence of student learning and engagement with reading were examined.

This paper presents the findings of this research and provides third grade teachers with literature circles activities to support the development of reading comprehension in their students. This research found that through the use of literature circles students developed better comprehension skills while increasing social skills that will lead to enriched learning.

Chapter One Introduction

School has never been easy for me. As an elementary student, I had to put a great deal of effort into my work in order to do well. Specifically, reading comprehension was difficult for me. It took me a long time to finish a book because I had to reread it a number of times if I wanted to understand it, something I continue to do as an adult. While I was lucky that my mother was a teacher and I had her support at home whenever I had trouble, I wished I had better support at school. As I look back, I wish my teachers had taught me effective reading comprehension strategies.

Now I am a teacher and I teach third grade in a diverse school district in Northern California. I just finished my first year of teaching and in my class I had students who struggled with reading comprehension. My students needed extra support from their teachers, school district, and community. I wanted to teach my students vital comprehension skills but in my first year of teaching I was unsure of how to accomplish this. I recognized that some of my students did not have the kind of support system at home that I had when I was growing up. I felt responsible for giving them the tools they needed so that they could be successful.

A wide spread goal of education in elementary grades is to build reading comprehension for all students (Guthrie, Wigfield, Barbosa, Perencevich, Taboada, Davis, Scafiddi & Tonks, 2004). Reading comprehension becomes more important by the time students reach third grade. If students do not acquire reading comprehension skills by this time, their academic progress will be limited throughout their school career (Guthrie, et al., 2004). As many educators agree, by the end of third grade instead of

learning to read, students are reading to learn. When we give students something to read and ask them questions about it, we aren't teaching them to comprehend; we are checking to see if they *did* comprehend. When we "drill" them on reading, we don't make the process of understanding explicit. We do not provide the opportunity to "see" what comprehension looks like as we read (Pollack Day, Lee Spiegal, McLellan &, Brown, 2002).

Comprehension is the ability to understand and grasp the meaning of something. It is also the reason for reading. Teaching comprehension is important so that the reader can derive more meaning from a text. Comprehension improves through extensive reading. Researchers conclude that comprehension could improve more if all readers were taught to use comprehension strategies that good readers use (Block, Gambrell & Pressley, 2002). Moreover, students are more likely to be actively engaged with text they understand.

It has been suggested that students' amount of engaged reading correlates with achievement in reading comprehension (Guthrie, et al., 2004). As adults, and lifelong learners, we choose what we want to read. Through trial and error we find material with which we connect. We are able figure out what type of books we like and what we don't. In school this is not happening. The majority of reading material is provided in a district-adopted curriculum or selected by the teacher. Reading in the classroom rarely includes open-ended, reader-to-reader talk. Writing comes into play not as a tool for thinking but as a way of policing homework or testing recall. In short, kids in school hardly ever *own* reading the way grown-up readers do (Daniels & Steineke, 2004).

Children need to understand and remember what they read (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Teachers can plan classroom activities that teach reading comprehension strategies and allow students to practice them. Reading strategies include: visualizing, connecting, questioning, inferring, evaluating, analyzing, recalling, and self-monitoring these are vital to solid comprehension and lively conversation (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). It is also important to offer reading material students find enjoyable. Students need to connect personally to the story because this will lead to better discussions.

Literature circles were chosen for this research because they teach students reading comprehension strategies and engage students through discussions. Literature circles are a form of book group that engage students by allowing them to respond to the text in a variety of ways and practice using reading comprehension strategies.

In literature circles the teacher chooses about four books that will interest students. Out of the four books the students choose which book they would like to read. Students are organized into small groups of four to five children. Students meet daily to read a chapter from their book and each student is given a role for the day. Roles are described in literature review section of this paper. The purpose for assigning students a role is to have each student engaged in a conversation about the chapter read. Students are able to discuss what they read in a social environment. I decided that this was a strategy I would like to try with my own students to determine whether or not it helps them build reading comprehension.

Statement of Problem

Teachers often complain that students do not remember what they read and are not engaged with their text (Oczkus, 2003). Teachers often have students read a story or

book within a timeframe, lead short classroom discussions, provide recall worksheets, and then expect students to pass a quiz at the end of the week. This type of instruction does not help students learn strategies for comprehending what they read. Instead, teachers need to break the task up into its component steps or tasks, and provide kids with specific strategies they can use to get ready, to construct meaning, and to apply what they have read (Daniels, 1994). It's also important to offer books/stories students find enjoyable. The goal is to get students to connect personally because this will lead to better engagement.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to better understand how to implement student run literature circles in a third grade classroom, to examine the effects on student engagement of providing students with reading material based on student interests and reading level and to assess whether or not literature circles increase student reading comprehension.

Assumptions

This study is based on the following assumptions: by working in literature circles, students will develop better comprehension; by increasing reading comprehension, students will develop self-esteem, which will allow them to be more successful throughout their school careers, and give them opportunities for a better future. Another assumption is that by providing teachers with a simple framework, assessments, and defined roles for students they will be able to use literature circles effectively in their classrooms.

Research Questions:

Does participation in literature circles lead to increased student engagement in reading? Does participation in literature circles help students increase reading comprehension?

Theoretical Rationale

In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt had a new and creative idea. She developed a "reader response" school of literacy. It was her fundamental insights in *Literature as Exploration* that a text is just ink on a page until a reader comes along and gives it life. She insisted that there is not one correct interpretation of literary work, but multiple interpretations, each of them profoundly dependent on the prior experiences brought to the text by each reader (Daniels, 1994). In order for literature circles to be successful, students need to connect the text to their own experience, to events in the world or other readings.

The Literature circle model is partly based on Piaget's constructivist theory, and on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Piaget believed that learners construct knowledge through experiences. Building on Piaget's initial theories, constructivists also believe that a child is an active learner and thinker, or a sense maker who is constructing his or her own knowledge by interacting with objects and ideas (Constructivist Education, n.d.). In literature circles there is specific role for each student and students must draw upon past experiences. Vygotsky's theory of ZPD suggests that if children practice a new skill with the help of an adult or a slightly more capable peer then they gradually develop the ability to perform the skill without help or assistance.

Literature circles engage students in active sense making and involve them in peer interactions like those expressed in the theory of ZPD.

Lev Vygotsky was known for his scaffolding instruction strategy. In scaffolding instruction, a teacher provides students with scaffolds that allow them to attain educational goals. Scaffolds can be words that a teacher uses to explain concepts that are unclear in a passage that the child is reading. Scaffolds can also be drawings that a teacher uses to show relationships between things that are being studied. A scaffold is anything that a teacher provides to support or facilitate a student's ability to build upon any prior knowledge and internalize new information. As the learner's abilities increase, support is decreased gradually in order to shift the responsibility onto the learner until he or she is able to complete the task independently. The goal for a teacher is to help students become independent and self-regulated learners (Scharlach, 2008).

The idea of scaffolding is integrated into literature circles because they are predictable, playful, and meaning-centered activities in which kids exercise a lot of choice and responsibility. Teachers provide structures to help students' function at a higher level with out help, and everyone gradually adopts a new language for talking about their work together in all different roles (Daniels, 1994).

Background and Need

Some teachers may assume that reading comprehension will develop naturally without any direct teaching (Denton & Fletcher, 2003). However, teachers must acknowledge that each student does not learn in the same way. If the teacher chooses just one style of teaching such as, direct instruction, collaborative learning, small groups, and so on, students will not be maximizing their learning potential. Implementing literature

circles appeals to a variety of learning styles and allows all students the chance to learn in at least one way that matches their learning style (Teaching with the Constructivists, n.d.).

Harvey Daniels (1994) suggest that it is important to explicitly teach reading comprehension skills, and increase student engagement with what they are reading (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). These research-based strategies are underutilized in classrooms for many reasons. Pressley and El-Dinary found that teachers were concerned because comprehension instruction takes a great deal of classroom time. Researchers have attempted to give teachers training, however quite often the new strategies have not directly helped the teacher and their students in the long run. This is because the new reading comprehension strategies were far removed from classroom realities (Kuhn & Dean, 2004). Teachers will be more likely to implement strategies that have been studied in real classrooms.

Constructivist learning theory suggests that students should be actively engaged in choosing reading material and discussing what they have read. Implementing literature circles allows each student to have his or her own reading experience. Students decide how much to read and how much to participate in the discussions. Students learn and practice reading comprehension strategies while reading books that are at their reading level and are interesting to them.

The current project explores the use of literature circles as defined by Daniels (1994) in order to understand how to implement student run literature circles. The research examines the effect of literature circles on student engagement with the text and assess whether or not literature circles increase student reading comprehension.

Chapter Two Review of the Literature

The purpose of this research is to better understand how to implement student run literature circles in a third grade classroom, to examine the effects on student engagement of providing students with reading material based on student interest and reading level and assess whether or not literature circles increase student reading comprehension. The research also examines the following questions: Does participation in literature circles lead to increased student engagement in reading? Does participation in literature circles help students increase reading comprehension?

This chapter takes a closer look at the research on explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies and the role of student interest and appropriate reading level on engagement with text. Then the chapter examines the research that defines literature circles. Literature that informs the reader about how to start literature circles with book selection and gives reading strategies that students will be able to perform after using literature circles.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Daniels and Steineke (2004) emphasize that students need to understand and remember what they read. Harvey Daniels conducted his research using inner city schools in Chicago to its cosmopolitan suburbs to the rural school down state (Daniels, H. 1994). Teachers in these areas allowed Daniels to use their students, time, and space to try out and observe ideas about literature. It was then that Daniels developed literature circles. When literature circles started to get popular ten and fifteen years ago, our understanding of reading-as-thinking was at a pretty early stage, and few teachers were

showing children the specific cognitive moves that skilled readers use to crack through

text (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Today, things have really changed, thanks to the

wonderful work of Keene and Zimmerman (1997), Harvey and Goudvis (2000). Ellin

Keene and Susan Zimmerman wrote *Mosaic of Thought* and Stephanie Harvey and Anne

Goudvis wrote *Strategies That Work: Teaching Reading Comprehension to Enhance*

Understanding. Both books use the same set of reading strategies to help students

understand text. They have laid out a set of reading comprehensions skills that teachers

can use to help their students understand how to make sense of what they read: Teachers

can explain to their students that smart readers:

Visualize – Students make mental pictures or sensory images as they read

Connect – Students connect the text to their own experience, to events, in the

world, to other readings.

Question – Students actively wonder, surface uncertainties, and interrogate the

text, the author, or the characters

Infer – Students predict, hypothesize, and draw conclusions

Evaluate – Students determine relative importance, make judgments, and develop

critiques

Analyze – Students notice elements of the author's craft: text structure, language,

style, theme, and point of view

Recall – Students can retell, summarize, and remember information

Self-monitor – Students can recognize and act upon uncertainty as they read;

adjusting, troubleshooting, fixing up their understanding

(Daniels & Steineke, 2004)

Because these thinking strategies are so vital to solid comprehension and lively conversation (Daniels & Steineke, 2004), they targeted these thinking strategies when developing the literature circle roles. Literature circles allow students to learn and practice how to use these strategies when completing their roles.

Book Selection

Rosenblatt (1938) was one of the first to suggest that reading comprehension is increased when students are able to connect what they read to their own experiences and interests. To connect reading selections to student experiences, teachers can incorporate students' backgrounds and interests. At the beginning of the year, the teacher could administer an interest inventory. Interest inventories are defined as questionnaires or surveys of student interests that include closed and opened questions whose answers will allow the surveyor to learn more about the interests of the surveyee (Grande, 2008 pg. 5) Inventories should be completed independently by students and include ample space for written answers. The teacher can use the results to gather a list of literary interests and identify books or stories that will be appealing to his or her students as they work in literature circles.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) indicated that one gains meaning from text when engaged in "intentional, problem solving thinking processes" (National Institute of Child Health and Development [NICHD], 2000). To enhance reading comprehension, readers must relate to the ideas in the text. The best way to engage students is to have them read books or stories they understand. In a classroom, students will not always be at the same reading level. Teachers can target each student and determine their reading level. Then the teacher can divide the literature circles based on students reading levels.

Literature Circles

Daniels (1994) described traditional literature circles. He was a teacher educator, writing project co-director, and researcher. He spent a lot of time in other people's classrooms, borrowing ideas, developing the idea of literature circles. In this classroom practice, students are divided into groups to read fiction books that the teacher has briefly introduced to the whole class. The classroom practice starts by the teacher briefly introducing a few different books to the entire class. Then, students are divided into groups to read fiction books described by their teacher. During sessions, students assume various "roles" that guide their reading (Daniels, 1994). Students meet on a weekly basis to discuss agreed-upon chapters, rotating roles among members of the group.

During the reading sessions, each student is given a specific role that guides his or her reading. Harvey Daniels outlined roles in *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (1994): Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Illustrator, Connector, Summarizer, and Vocabulary Enricher. The Discussion Director's job requires the students to question and evaluate the reading. The job of this role is to develop at least five questions that he/she thinks the group might want to discuss about the reading. Their task is to help their group talk over the big ideas in the reading and share reactions. The Literary Luminary's job is to analyze the reading. They have to locate a few special sections of the text that they think their group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help the students remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. The Illustrator visualizes and draws a picture related to the reading. During the group meeting the Illustrator shows their drawing and other students get to speculate what it means, to connect to the drawing to their own ideas

about the reading. After everyone has their say, the Illustrator has the last word and gets to tell them what the picture means, where it came from, or what it represents. The Summarizers job is to recall what happened in the reading and then they prepare a brief summary. The group counts on the Summarizer to give a quick (one- or two-minute) statement that conveys the gist, the key points, the main highlights, and the essence of the reading assignment. The last job, the Vocabulary Enricher has to self-monitor in this role. The role required the student to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in the reading. They find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar then they write them down and find the definitions. When the group meets the Vocabulary Enricher helps their group find and discuss the words (Daniels, 1994). Students meet on a regular basis to discuss the readings. In each meeting the roles are changed so that every student has the opportunity to have different roles. When student groups finish a book, the strategy ends with the creative group presentation, such as a play or song, to the entire class.

The research presented in this chapter suggests that literature circles can be an instructional model that engages students, and help them learn and practice reading comprehension strategies. Key components for successful literature circles in a third grade class are carefully selecting books for each group. Books need to match students' reading comprehension level and be interesting to the students. The research suggests that if the students are interested in the book they will be engaged during literature circles. Literature circles allow students to learn and practice the reading comprehension strategies. Once students understand they will be able to visualize, connect, question, infer, evaluate, analyze, recall, and self-monitor. Ultimately once students reach this level their reading comprehension will improve.

Chapter Three Methodology

The purpose of this research project is to better understand how to implement student run literature circles in a third grade classroom, to examine the effects on student engagement of providing students with reading material based on student interest and reading level and assess whether or not literature circles increase student reading comprehension. The research also examined the following questions: Does participation in literature circles lead to increased student engagement in reading? Does participation in literature circles help students increase reading comprehension? Since the research purpose was to examine how to implement a teaching model in classroom practice, the researcher chose to use an action research model.

Action research is a teacher research model that involves teachers in reflecting on their own classroom practice to determine an area of concern. Teachers then study research about the area of concern to learn how other teachers and researchers have addressed this concern. Finally, the teachers make a plan of action, based on research to address their area of concern; the plan includes assessment of student learning. Finally, after the teacher has tried the new practice, and assessed student learning, the teacher reflects on how it went and decides whether or not the new practice was effective. The teacher may also make adjustments to make the new strategy work better.

In the current study the teacher has determined that students need to be more engaged with books and learn strategies to increase their reading comprehension. After examining the research literature on various reading comprehension strategies, the researcher decided she wanted to better understand how to implement student run literature circles in her own third grade classroom.

Following the literatures circle model described by Daniels (1994) the teacher started by breaking students into small groups of four to five. Groups were based on student's reading comprehension levels. The books chosen met the reading comprehension levels of each group. Based on a vote the students said they were most interested in either funny or mysterious books. Two groups read a funny book that connected to their age and the other two groups read more mysterious/imaginative books.

The teacher then taught the students how to practice the model as follows: During literature circles the students determined how many pages their group was going to read. The students had two days to complete the reading and complete their assigned literature circle role. The student roles were: Wacky Word Finder, Super Storyteller, Passage Performer, Discussion Director, Artful Artist, and Cool Connector. Each role required students to discuss with their group and reflect about what they just read, in a different way (see appendix for all roles).

The roles chosen for this research were modified from Harvey Daniels' roles in *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (1994). Daniels' roles were too difficult for third grade. His roles seemed more appropriate for upper grade classrooms. The researcher had similar roles but adapted them to meet the third grade level. Here is a description of each of the six roles used in this research: Wacky Word Finder finds three wacky words (words they haven't seen before or don't know the meaning), looks up the words using the dictionary, and uses each word in a sentence. The Super Storyteller identifies the main character, and the setting, and writes a short summary (using 4-5 sentences). The Passage Performer picks their favorite passage from the reading, writes down why they chose it, then they practice reading the passage

over and over so they could read it with no mistakes and add expression, and finally read it to their group. The Discussion Director's job was to come up with at least four questions to ask their group. They were also in charge of keeping the discussion going throughout the meeting. The Artful Artist's job was to pick their favorite part in the chapter and illustrate the event. Then they wrote a caption that tells about the event. The last job was the Cool Connector. The Cool Connector connected something in the story to something they've read or something that has happened to them or something they've seen. Students were not allowed to complete the same job twice. They must have a different job for each reading assignment.

Sample and Site

There is a high number of English Learners in the school, as of spring 2009 70% were English Learners and 25% were fluent in English (http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/, retrieved July 19, 2010). The languages spoken at home are 41% speak English and 59% speak Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Filipino, Tongan, Korean, Arabic, Gujarati, French, Japanese, Punjabi, Ukrainian, or Thai (http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/, retrieved July 19, 2010). The classroom used for this action research is a third grade multicultural class. There were eighteen students in the classroom whose reading comprehension ranged from strategic to advanced. Strategic is below grade level standards, proficient meets grade level standards, and advanced exceeds grade level standards.

On any given day the students complete an average of two hours of language arts. Literature circles meetings took place during language arts on Monday's, Wednesday's, and Friday's for twenty-five minutes. During the group meetings each student performs

the requirements for his or her role, then they decide how many pages to read, and finally

determine their new role. All must be completed before the next meeting.

Access and Permission

I am a third grade teacher and used my third grade students to complete the action

research. The principal of the school agreed to allow me to study my own class.

Data Gathering Strategy

A district assigned reading comprehension test served as the pre-test. The scores

were graded and evaluated. Based on the scores, students were placed into small groups

and given a choice of books that were at their reading level. In addition the researcher

conducted classroom observations taking notes during each student-run literature circle.

Student participation was evaluated based on reading the book, listening, contributing

ideas, sharing talking time with other in the group, respecting ideas, and sticking to the

book (not bringing in outside conversations that do not relate). After each group finished

a book, they turned in a literature circle packet (see appendix) and took a Reading Counts

Quiz, a ten-question quiz that measures how well they comprehended what they read.

Data Analysis Approach

The data collected for this research included direct personal observation,

interviews with students, and literature circle packets (see appendix). I conducted direct

observations while the students were in their literature circle groups. I watched and

listened to make sure each student was participating and listening to what other group

members had to say. On a daily basis students stayed on topic and shared their thoughts. I

also interviewed students to see if they understood their roles and what they liked and

what they would change about literature circles. Finally I used each student's literature circle packets to determine if they understood their role and comprehended the reading.

Ethical Standards

As a teacher conducting research I provide a safe and educational experience for all of my students. Student names will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms. My faculty advisor at Dominican University of California, School of Education and Counseling Psychology approved my project.

Chapter Four Findings

At first students struggled with the literature circle roles but as time went on the students became more comfortable with them. Once the students understood the roles the groups became more independent. When student group met to discuss the assigned reading (using the roles) this helped reinforce the reading and/or clarify any confusing parts of the chapter.

In the beginning, before the students were split into reading groups, the class was informed on how literature circles worked and during this time each of the six roles was explained. It was important that the students tried each role so each student was given his or her literature circle packet (see appendix), then as a class the students completed each role. The class used a read aloud a story from their basal books and then all together completed each role. Each student completed his or her literature circle packet by filling in all the roles. Then students were broken into groups of 4-5 students based on their reading comprehension level. After students met in their literature circles many students were confused about how to complete the roles. A likely reason for this was because as a class we only completed one example (one entire literature circle packet). Next time I would complete at least three examples as a whole group before breaking student into groups. That way the students would be more prepared and comfortable with the roles.

Literature circle groups were broken up based on the student's level of comprehension. Each group was assigned a specific book because each group had a different level of comprehension the books that were selected was tailored toward the groups reading level. Based on a class vote students voiced they wanted to read either a funny or mysterious story. I had a limited budget for this research so I tried my hardest to

find funny or mysterious books. In order to be fair, two groups read a funnier book and the other two read more mysterious books. Once students were broken up into groups each group determined how much they had to read before the next meeting (they had a day and a half to complete the reading and one role). The strategic group was reading on average ten pages. The proficient group was reading ten to fifteen pages. The two advanced groups read ten to twenty-five pages. The book selection I made fit very well for each student. All the students were very comfortable with their assigned book and with their group members.

In the beginning each role had it's own challenges. The Wacky Word finder had three parts: find three "wacky words" (or words they've never seen before), find the definition, and then use each word in a sentence. About half of the class has trouble using the "wacky words" in a sentence. Their sentences did not make sense.

Students did a good job acting as the Super Storyteller because they understood how to identify the main characters, the setting, and write a short summary. The only trouble with this role was the grammar in their summaries.

The Passage Performer was a popular role, only because it required very little writing. In this role students picked their favorite passage and had to practice reading it with expression (helped with fluency too) and then they had to read it aloud for their group. The problem with this role was students were not practicing. Many students read aloud their favorite part using their normal voice, which defeated the purpose of reading with expression.

The students enjoyed the Discussion Director role. The Discussion Director was in charge of the group. Many students said liked this role because it made them feel like

they were the teacher of their group. This role also required them to develop four questions about the reading. Students were able to come up with good questions because the packet provided them with examples on how to start meaningful questions (see appendix, Discussion Director).

The Artful Artist was by far the favorite role. The Artful Artist picked their favorite part in the reading, then illustrated it, then wrote a small caption. The students said this role was the easiest because they enjoyed drawing and coloring.

The last a role, and hands down the most difficult, was the Cool Connector. The Cool Connector had to answer, "This chapter made me think of…" then student had to somehow connect it to another book they've read or something they've done in the past or something they've seen. This was extremely hard for them. Most of the students could not understand how to connect. Very often I had to help students with this role.

All through out the research I observed each literature circle group and once they began to understand each of the roles, students did a very good job of discussing and reflecting on the reading. In the beginning there were many times when students talked over each other and would not listen. To address this, each group was given a marker and the rule was, the person whose holding the marker is the only person who could talk, everyone else should just be listening. This helped alleviate part of the problem, but didn't completely solve it.

In the end to measure comprehension each student took a Scholastic Reading Counts quiz. This is a ten-question quiz taken on the computer and the questions are tailored specifically to the book they were assigned. Overall 100% passed their quiz.

73% passed the quiz the first time, 17% passed on the second try, and 10% passed on a

third try (with assistance from the teacher).

Chapter Five Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The research showed that with the right book selection the students participated and were engaged during literature circles. The packets (see appendix) helped me monitor if they understood their roles. In the student's first packet it showed they struggled with some of the roles. Parts were left blank or the written work didn't make sense. As a class we reviewed and the roles and this helped a lot because in their second packet the students were much more detailed in their work. After finishing the book students were all able to pass their Scholastic Reading Counts quiz, which proved they comprehended their book.

I found that it was very important to be very organized during the beginning of literature circles. I felt that I rushed the students into their literature circle groups. I should have completed at least three or four more examples as a whole group before breaking them up into groups. I think providing more time to practice as a group would have helped them better understand how to complete each role. I also found that book selection was extremely important. Each student was confident in the book they were reading because it was tailored to their comprehension level and met their interests. Lastly I found that through student discussion and reflection it helped their reading comprehension.

The assessments were based on my observation, student packets, and Scholastic Reading Counts quiz. In my oberservation students were engaged most of the time. There were times where students talked over each other and I had to stop and remind the class that the only student that can talk was the one holding the marker. But overall the groups

stayed on topic. Students turned in two literature circle packets. The first packet showed me that the students were not understanding a few of the roles: discussion director, cool connector, and the super storyteller. After collecting and reviewing the first set of packets I decided it was important to re-review how to complete the roles with the class. Then students received a second packet. After completing their second packets students did a much better job at completing the roles. Their written work was much more detailed which showed they understood their role. Finally in the Scholastic Reading Counts 100% passed their quizzes. 73% passed the quiz the first time, 17% passed on the second try, and 10% passed on a third try (with assistance from the teacher).

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature

This study has the following limitations: It was completed with just my third grade class. This limited my research because my findings are based on only eighteen students, In addition, the class only had time to complete two rounds of literature circles during the time of the study. Another limitation is that as a teacher, I was just learning how to implement the program. The results may have been different if the students had been using the model for an entire school year, and if I, as teacher, had more experience in implementing the program. However, the purpose of action research is to continually modify instruction, based on ongoing assessment of student goal attainment in the model being studied.

Implications for Future Research

Based on this study I think other researchers should focus on why students have difficulty understanding the Cool Connector role. Why do students struggle to connect?

Another idea for researcher is what is a good grade level to introduce literature circles. I also think researchers should study the social aspect of literature circles. Can a shy/quiet student become more social after participating in literature circles?

Overall Significance of the Literature

This project was significant because it supported the idea that, with the right book selection, students were engaged and having fun running their own literature circle. It also proved these third grade students were mature enough to stay on topic with out the teacher having to refocus them. Finally the project showed that with active participation in literature circles the students passed the book's comprehension quiz.

References

Bender, W. N., & Larkin, M. J. (2003). *Reading strategies for elementary students with learning difficulties*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Retrieved July 7, 2009

Block, C.C., Gambrell, L.B., & Pressley, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Improving reading comprehension instruction: Rethinking research, theory, and classroom practice.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

California Department of Education (2009), *School Summary Data and Number of English Learners by Language*. Retrieved July 19, 2010 http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

Constructivist Education (January 21, 2007) Piaget's theory of learning and constructivism. *Piaget's theory of learning*. Retrieved July 3, 2009 http://constructivism.wordpress.com/2007/01/21/piaget%E2%80%99s-theory-of-learning-and-constructivism/

Daniels, Harvey (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Daniels, Harvey & Steineke, Nancy. (2004). *Mini-lessons for literature circles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Denton, C.A. & Fletcher, J.M. (2003). Scaling reading interventions. In B.R. Foorman (Ed.), *Preventing and remediating reading difficulties: Bringing science to scale* (pp. 445-464). Timonium, MD: York Press

Grande, M. (2008). Using dialogue journals and interest inventories with classroom

    volunteers. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 41*(2), 56-63. Retrieved from

    Academic Search Complete database, July 7, 2009

Guthrie, J.T., Wigfield, A., Barbosa, P., Perencevich, K.C., Taboada, A., Davis, M.H.,

    Scafiddi, N.T., Tonks, S., (2004). Increasing reading comprehension and

    engagement through concept-oriented reading instruction. *Journal of Education*

    Psychology, 96 (3), 403-423. Doi 10.1037/0022-0663.96.3.403

Nation Institute of Child Health and Human Development, (2002). National Reading

    Panel (NRP). Retrieved July 10, 2009. www.nichd.nih.gov

Pollack Day, J., Lee Spiegal, D., McLellan, J., Brown, V., (2002). *Moving forward with*

    literature circles. New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books

Oczkus, L. D. (2003). *Reciprocal teaching at work: Strategies for improving reading*

    comprehension. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Retrieved July

    7, 2009

Scharlach, T. D. (2008). START comprehending: Students and teachers actively reading

    text. *Reading Teacher, 62*(1), 20-31. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete

    database. July 3, 2009

Appendix

Story Title _____

Author_____ Illustrator _____

Artful Artist

Your Name: Zidane _____

Your Job:

- Read the book. Pick your favorite part of the story.
- Illustrate this event. Your illustration should **completely fill the box below!** Your picture should show what is happening in the story and include background.
- Write a caption (2-3 sentences) that tells about the event of the story that you illustrated.
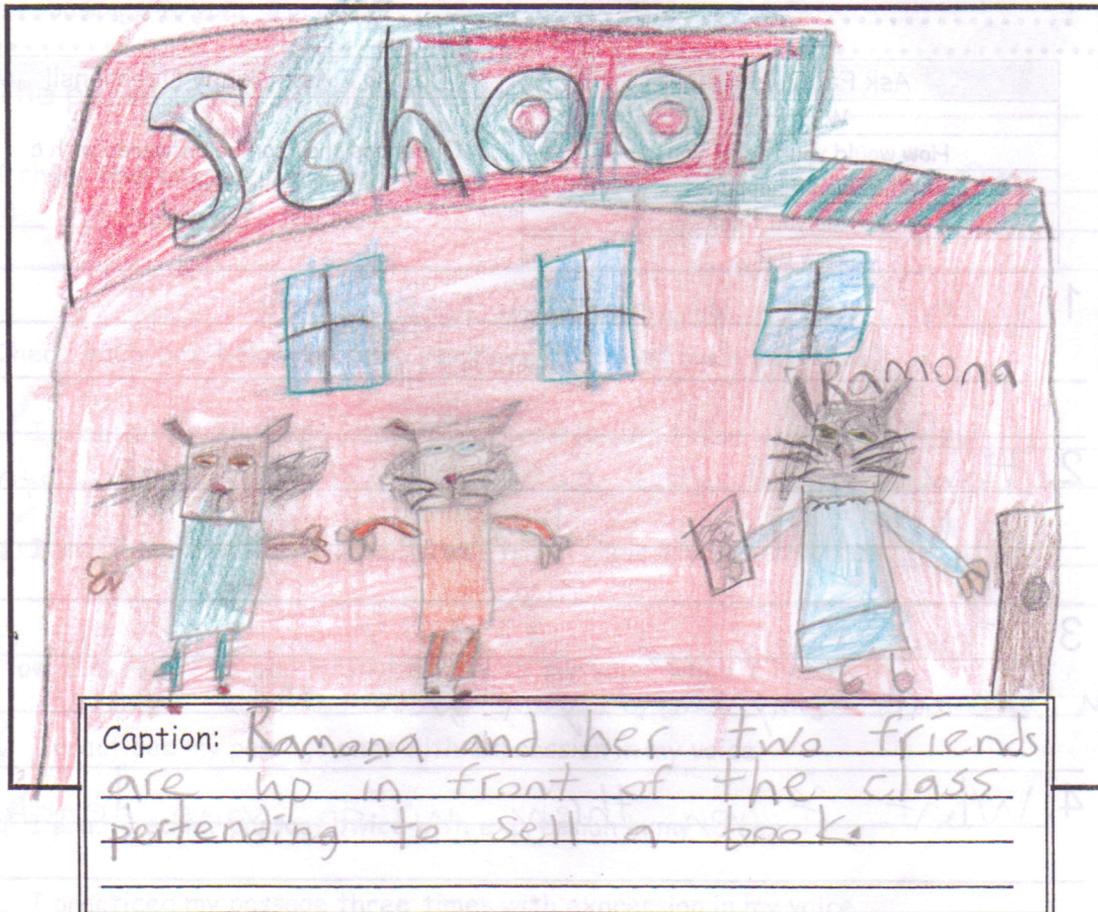
Caption: Ramona and her two friends are up in front of the class pertending to sell a book.

Story Title _____

Author_____ Illustrator _____

Cool Connector

Your Name: _____

Your Job:

- Read the book. As you read, think of something the story reminds you of. It may remind you of another book you've read **or** something you've done in the past **or** something you've seen.
- Write about what the story made you think of **and** why it made you think of it.
- Draw a picture about the connection you made with the story.

This story made me think of _when I cooked breakfast._
Ramona Reminded me how she & her sister
cooked dinner. She cooked dinner but I cooked breakfast

This is the part of the story that made me think of a connection. (Example: They went into the snowy woods to hunt for owls.)	Here is a picture of the connection I made to the story. (Example: I went into the woods with my brother when it was snowing to look for animal tracks.)

Contributed by Amanda Madden http://www.teacherweb.com/sc/blythe/madden/   More worksheets @ www.busyteacherscafe.com

Story Title _____

Author _____ Illustrator _____

Discussion Director

Your Name: _____

Your Job:

- Read the book. As you read, think of questions you could ask your group about the story. Remember to think of "fat" questions.
- Write at least four questions to ask your group at the next meeting.
- You will be in charge of the talking stick during group meetings. Be sure that only the person with the talking stick is sharing ideas. Everyone else should be listening!

Ask Fat Questions!!	Do **NOT** Ask Skinny Questions!!
What if.....	Questions that can be answered with a Yes or No or just a few words
How would you feel if you	
What would happen if....	
Why do you think....	
How did....	

1. How would you feel if you were told to clean up your room?

2. What if you wanted to know something but you didn't know what it was?

3. What if you can't go to somewhere but you really wanted too?

4. How would you feel if you came home & everyone was mad?

Story Title _____

Author_____ Illustrator _____

Passage Performer

Your Name: _____

Your Job:

▫ Read the book. Pick your favorite passage (part) of the story. Make sure it is only 1-2 pages long.

▫ Write the pages you picked and tell why you chose this passage.

▫ Practice reading this passage over and over until you can read it with no mistakes. Now read it with EXPRESSION in your voice. You will read this passage to your group.

The passage I picked is on page(s): _____159 - 161_____

I chose this passage because ___Ramona's teacher didn't really want to admit she called Ramona a nusienee-___

Check each box below to show you have practiced your passage.

▫ I practiced my passage **once**. I had trouble with these words:_____
_____

▫ I practice my passage **twice**. I still had trouble with these words: _____
_____

Now I'm ready to add EXPRESSION to my voice when I read.

▫ I practiced my passage **once** with expression in my voice.

▫ I practiced my passage **twice** with expression in my voice.

▫ I practiced my passage **three times** with expression in my voice.

Story Title _____
Author_____ Illustrator _____

Super Storyteller

Your Name: _____

Your Job:
- ☑ Read the book. As you read, you may want to make notes of story events.
- ☑ You will identify the **main character** and **setting** of the story.
- ☑ You will also write a **story summary**. You should tell the main events of the story in 4-5 sentences. You will share this summary with your group.

Main Character(s): Ramona Beez Mom

Story Setting: School office, school, & home, & taxi

Write your story summary in the box below. Remember a summary does not tell every detail of the story. You should be able to tell the important events in 4-5 sentences.

Ramona was at school. In the middle of the class she didn't feel good. But she didn't want to tell her teacher. Then Ramona threw up. So Marsha brought her to the office. The vice principal let Ramona sleep on the cot. Ramona's mom came & brought Ramona on a taxi. Ramona mother brought her home. The next day Ramona's friend came by. Ramona got letters. She had a book report. When her dad came home she told him about the book report. Her dad said to make it intrating. Ramona thought her dad would say Ramona's so sad cause she's sick.