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The Texas Journal of Literacy Education is a peer-reviewed journal of the Texas Association for Literacy Education, which is the state affiliate of the International Reading Association. This journal is intended for literacy educators at all levels of instruction and to all groups of students.

Message from the Editors

Greetings,

We hope this issue finds you well and in good holiday spirits enjoying family and friends! As you settle in to read this issue, you will notice a change in format. Since this is an online journal, we have changed the article format from two columns to one column to avoid having to scroll up and down on the same page as you read. This should improve your reading experience as you read the six featured articles in this issue.

Three articles focus on the power of literature to bring build bridges of empathy and understanding. Sara Elley shares her experiences as a first year teacher examining bibliotherapy to help her third grade students develop better social and emotional skills that allow them to work successfully in cooperative learning groups. Children’s literature can help students, teachers and parents better understand dyslexia. Jodi Pilgrim shows us how examining a popular fiction series character, Hank Zipzer, can give us insights into the struggles and strengths of dyslexic students. Best selling novel *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien supports Matthew McConn’s eleventh grade students’ as they develop understandings about themselves and Viet Nam using this collection of short pieces. Through teacher modeling and the use of dialectical journal entries, high school students learn to craft essays that analyze a character from the novel connecting to their own lives, starting with the connections they made to human nature within the novel.

The next two articles highlight positive changes made through K-12 schools and university partnerships. A team of researchers from Texas Wesleyan University share the positive gains for both 1st-4th graders and preservice teachers as they partner with a large urban district to improve literacy through implementing a guided reading tutoring program. Kimberly Welsh responds to a principal’s request to support her primary teachers in “healing an ailing reading program”. You will see amazing changes to the literacy environment as a result of this partnership.

Finally, this issue closes with an examination of the term “close reading”. This was on the agenda for the TALE Executive Board’s task force’s comparison of the TEKS and CCSS. The journal reviewers recommended Doreen Saccomano’s “How Close is Close Reading” to give our Texas readers some insight into what the Common Core State Standard’s emphasis on close reading.

We encourage you to participate in our Question the Author (QtA) sessions on Facebook. Our last issue’s chat generated the biggest Facebook interaction so far!! We will schedule a few for late spring- after the TALE conference- since there will be a Facebook state-wide reading discussions for Donalyn Miller’s *Reading Wild* and Stephen Layne’s *Igniting a Passion for Reading* starting soon!

We close with thanks to our 2014 webmaster, Frances Gonzalez-Garcia, for assisting with our web-based format!! Frances did a fabulous job this year keeping our membership up-to-date with all activities and publications. We wish her well as she moves on to other endeavors. We would also like to thank our authors, reviewers, and our editorial assistant, Mahmoud Abdi Tabari. The next submission deadline is January 31st. You’ll find submission guidelines posted. Please encourage your colleagues to share their best practices and research with our readers. <http://www.texasreaders.org/journal.html>.

Best wishes,

Sheri Vasinda, Susan Szabo, Leslie Haas, & Debra Lee

Examining the Use of Bibliotherapy in a Third Grade Classroom

Sara Elley

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Abstract

This six-week bibliotherapy study was developed to determine if using children's literature books to help students think about, understand, and work through social and emotional issues helped third grade students' develop more social and emotional skills (Sullivan & Strang, 2002). Data collection included pre- and post-surveys, interruption tally charts, pre- and post-sociograms, class meeting videos, student work, and a teacher-research journal. Findings revealed that students had a more accepting attitude of their classmates, had a significant decrease in

interruptions, and had an overall growth in their social and emotional skills.

Key words: cooperative learning, classroom meetings, bibliotherapy, social skills

This action research study began my first year of teaching, on the first day of school. I was an excited novice teacher that not only wanted to help my students get along better but I wanted to improve my teaching skills at the same time (Sagor, 2000).

I wanted to use cooperative learning groups as research has suggested this approach enhances student learning, helps students develop emotional skills, and builds a safe learning environment (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). A cooperative learning classroom creates this safety through activities that are designed to help the students feel accepted, included, and comfortable within their classroom. However, for cooperative learning to work, students need to develop appropriate social skills and coping skills, in order to work well as team members.

Daily Classroom Meetings

The first intervention strategy added was the daily classroom meeting. This informal meeting gave the students time to sit down and have discussions on a personal level about social issues they experienced both in the classroom and in life outside of the classroom (Glasser, 1969; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000).

Lessons Learned. At first, the class meetings went well. However, I soon realized that several of the students began to fabricate details about what they shared. For instance, during one meeting when I tried to get students to choose a color that represented their feelings, Anna said, "I'm on yellow today because I went to Disneyworld last night!" Yellow, which was the happiest color, was used to represent the smiley face. Not to be outdone, Jacob built upon Anna's contribution, adding "Oh yeah, well I'm on yellow because I went to Disneyworld AND a Dallas Cowboys game. Then my dog had puppies."

This trend of building upon and extending what others had said became a trend, and I soon realized it was beginning to damage relationships in the classroom, as students began competing to see who could come up with a more outrageous or more interesting story. In addition, some of my students were painfully shy, even after several weeks of school and countless class-building and teambuilding exercises. I noticed that in a smaller setting, such as with their tablemates, they seemed less anxious but still not completely relaxed and confident.

Thus, even though research suggested that informal classroom meetings could provide students with a safe place to learn about and build social and emotional skills (Glasser, 1969; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000), it did not seem to be a place where my students learned about social skills and how to engage with one another. Thus, I researched for another way to teach social skills in a classroom, and found a body of literature that touted the implementation of bibliotherapy in the classroom (Maich & Kean, 2004; Pardeck, 1993; Prater, M.A., Johnstun, M., Dyches, T. & Johnstun, M., 2006; Regan & Page, 2008; Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000; Sullivan & Strang, 2002).

Bibliotherapy

Learning about this new approach led me to ask the following research questions:

- 1) How does the use of bibliotherapy in a cooperative learning environment impact social issues within a group?
- 2) In what ways does the use of literature impact a student's ability to apply coping skills and social skills outside of the classroom meeting?

Bibliotherapy is recognized as a powerful strategy that has the potential to help children learn how to interact with others (Maich & Kean, 2004). Bibliotherapy is the use of books and literature to stimulate healing across all ages and has been used in educational and psychological disciplines (Regan & Page, 2008). Using the bibliotherapeutic approach for teaching social skills and coping skills provides a non-invasive and non-threatening way to help students think about and understand how their behaviors impact others (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006). Specifically, bibliotherapy gives readers and/or discussants the opportunity to notice and name the impact particular behaviors have in social situations (e.g. tattle tailing, stealing, bullying).

Lessons Learned. Using children's literature during daily meeting times allowed for a more structured, formal approach to talking about both appropriate and non-appropriate behaviors in a non-threatening manner. As seen, in the study write up below, using the bibliotherapy approach to help students build social and emotional skills necessary for working well in cooperative groups was successful.

Research

Setting and Participants

This action research was conducted in my third-grade classroom. The school is a pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade campus that is located in a small rural town. The school population contains 597 students, which consists of 2.8% African American, 81.9% Hispanic, 14.2% White, and 1.1% other. The school is a Title 1 campus, meaning over half of the school's population is considered economically disadvantaged. Being a Title I campus, the school receives extra funds for several things including hiring tutors to better assist our students. At this school, 73.2% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged, and 63.8% of the students are considered at-risk.

My classroom had 17 students (6 boys and 11 girls), 2 self-identified as African American, 13 self-identified as Hispanic; 2 self-identified as White, and 71% of my students were considered at-risk. Seven of my students listed Spanish as their first language and English as their second language.

Procedures

During the six weeks of data collection, classroom meetings were held using the structure bibliotherapy approach. The bibliotherapy lessons were developed around children's literature (see Appendix for list of books). The main purpose of using children's literature was to provide a non-threatening way for students to talk about behaviors exhibited by the book characters, to see how the character resolved the behavior issues, and then talk about other ways children could deal with these issues in real life. I hoped that by providing this structured talk that the students would build trusting relationships, resulting in an increased level of comfort and security in class settings so cooperative learning groups worked more effectively and enhanced the learning experience of all the students.

Critically selecting pieces of literature to use during classroom meetings was essential in order to address specific social skills that the students needed to build. The topics covered varied from poverty to personal space (See the Appendix for a complete list of books used during the six-week study). Follow-up activities were incorporated with the goal of allowing students to think about and practice the needed social skill talked about in the book in a safe environment. Follow-up activities included book talks, independent writing assignments, and role-playing in order to model both incorrect and correct behaviors.

Data Collection

A variety of tools were used to collect data including sociograms, tally charts, anecdotal records, and surveys. Sociograms were given at the beginning and the end of the six-week project in order to identify student(s). The sociogram was utilized to see if any positive gains were made in the way students saw their peers.

An Interruption Tally Chart was created and used both pre/post to keep track of the students' blurts and interruptions within the follow-up activities. Interrupting was identified as one of the social skills targeted in class meetings, as students need to develop good listening skills so they can work in cooperative groups more effectively. In addition, because this survey was a pre/post, the post allowed students to reflect on how using bibliotherapy impacted their behaviors, as well as thinking about how their growth impacted how they worked with others in cooperative learning groups throughout the day and/or week.

Observational teacher field notes were also collected throughout the day on how students behaved and worked with each other. These observational notes were to determine if the students were able to make any connections, and if they could apply this learning while working in cooperative groups. Filming allowed me to go back through the videos and add any significant behaviors to the field notes.

Findings

Findings indicated that bibliotherapy appears to be an effective intervention for teaching a variety of social skills. Implementing this structured intervention in conjunction with follow-up activities helped my students to work better during cooperative learning group activities.

Skill #1 that needed to be built was breaking the habit of students' interrupting each other rather than listening to what each other had to say. To address the issue of blurting out in class, I read *My Mouth is a Volcano!* (Cook, 2008). After reading the book, we role-played interrupting, and then discussed ways to let someone know you have something to say other than by interrupting. I then implemented the following tally chart to keep a record of student's interruptions each week. The figure allowed us to see how students were growing in listening to each other and taking turns to speak. As seen in the figure below, 44 interruptions were recorded at the beginning of the study and only four interruptions were recorded at the end of the sixth week.

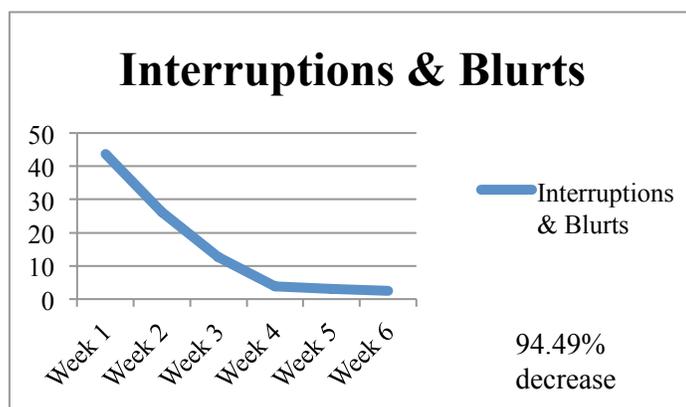


Figure 1: Interruption Record

Working well in cooperative groups, Skill #2, was another area for improvement, as some students were excluding one another and constantly bickering with those they were working with in cooperative learning groups. To address this concern, one of the books I read to the class was *The Crayon Box That Talked*, (DeRolf, 2011). We not only had a teacher-led discussion but I used the Kagan activities, which allowed my students to get better acquainted with one another.

After reading books about getting along and working as a team, the ranking of student partners using the sociograms changed dramatically. The students were asked to list their top three partner choices, one being their most desirable partner, two being the next most desirable, etc. In the sociogram, star students were defined as those students who were listed first by six or more classmates while isolate students were not chosen by any of their peers. The students listed

by one or two of their peers were considered low-range while students who were listed by three to five of their peers were considered mid-range.

The sociogram results seen in Figure 2 showed the majority of students had growth in learning to work together in cooperative learning groups from pre to post rankings, as low-range rankings became lower and mid-range rankings became more. However, it must be noted that the same two students received star ranking from pre to post.

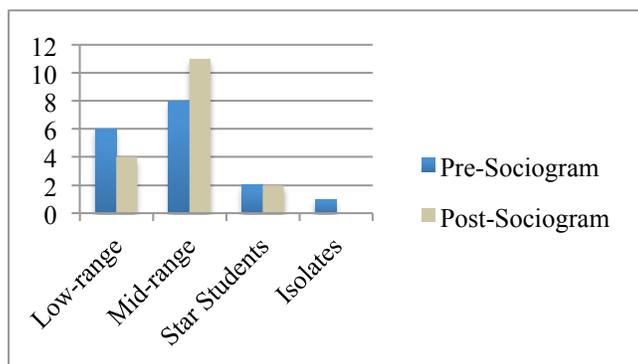


Figure 2: Sociogram Results

Skill #3 helped students reflect on their behaviors to determine how they thought they were getting along with others. A pre/post survey was created and given to the students to determine how they rated themselves in relation to their feelings about others. The students were asked to read the statements and circle the descriptor (never, sometimes, always) that best described their behavior. Statements included but are not limited to:

- I listen carefully to others.
- I take turns and share.
- I obey the rules.
- I compliment others.

	Pre- Never	Post- Never	Pre- Sometimes	Post- Sometimes	Pre- Always	Post- Always
I show concern for others.	0	0	8	2	8	14
I wait patiently for my turn to talk.	1	0	11	10	4	6
I tolerate the views of others.	5	0	4	5	7	11
I respect others' property.	1	0	5	4	10	12
I am honest with my teacher.	0	0	2	1	14	15

Figure 3: Pre/Post Student Self-Reflection Survey Results

Overall, the data (See Figure 3) shows the class had an increase in always exhibiting positive behaviors and social skills. The data showed that students felt they were more tolerant and accepting. While the data I collected cannot be used to make a causal link the changes

indicated, in my opinion, the change was a result of all the books read and discussed. Additionally, the follow-up activities allowed the students to examine and role-play the inappropriate and appropriate ways characters in books handled particular social situations. Role-play led to discussions about real-life experiences and how they could apply these lessons to their lives.

Lessons Learned

In my classroom, literature seemed to be an effective tool to initiate honest talk and self-reflection. Teaching specific social skills using literature and cooperative learning follow-up activities was fun, noninvasive, and nonthreatening for my students.

Originally, I had books selected on a predetermined set of social skills I wanted to specifically address. However, the book discussions and cooperative learning activities lead to openness among my students, and they began to inadvertently divulge more personal information about their struggles. A common theme among my students was a feeling of inadequacy. Thus, I started looking for books on skills that students felt they needed more help developing.

From this action research project, I learned the importance of incorporating literature into daily classroom meetings. As I continue to read aloud to my future students, I plan to spend more time on fewer books rather than reading multiple books with similar meanings. We read twelve books over the course of the six-week study, but I recommend reading one book a week in order to have more time to focus on the theme and the lessons. In addition, even though a variety of follow-up activities were planned, role-playing seemed an essential part of the acquisition of social skills through bibliotherapy. Role-playing seemed to give students an opportunity to practice new social skills and discuss social issues in a safe environment. Overall, this project helped to build students' social and emotional skills, which helped to develop a more positive classroom atmosphere. Students worked together cooperatively and effectively while appearing to connect the bibliotherapy lessons to their interactions with their peers. "If one child in a classroom is able to face a social emotional problem with new strength and greater skills, the very use of bibliotherapy will have been its own reward," (Maich & Kean, 2004, p.10).

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Appendix

Children's Literature Books

List of books used for the study: The books used in the bibliotherapy study are grouped by similar themes and listed below.

Title, Author, (Illustrator), Publisher, Year

Theme: Social Behaviors

- *My Mouth is a Volcano!* Julia Cook, (Carrie Hartman), National Center for Youth Issues, 2008
- *Personal Space Camp*, Julia Cook, (Carrie Hartman), National Center for Youth Issues, 2008
- *It's Hard to be a Verb!* Julia Cook, (Carrie Hartman), National Center for Youth Issues, 2008

Theme: Honesty

- *Too Many Tamales*, Gary Soto, (Ed Martinez), Turtleback Books, 1996
- *Princess K.I.M and the Lie That Grew*, Maryann Cocca-Leffler, Open Road Media, 2010
- *Carlos and the Squash Plant/Carlos Y LA Planta De Calabaza*, Jan Romero Stevens, (Jeanne Arnold), Demco Media, 1995

Theme: Friendship/Teamwork

- *The Crayon Box That Talked*, Shane DeRolf, (Michael Letzig), Random House Children's Books, 2011
- *How Full is Your Bucket?: For Kids*, Tom Rath & Mary Reckmeyer, (Maurie Manning), Gallup Press, 2009
- *Teamwork Isn't My Thing, and I Don't Like to Share!* Julia Cook, (Kelsey De Weerd), Boys Town Press, 2012

Theme: Diversity/Self-Esteem

- *A Chair for My Mother*, Vera B. Williams, HarperCollins, 1982
- *Thank you, Mr. Falker*, Patricia Polacco, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2012
- *Those Shoes*, Maribeth Boelts, (Noah Z. Jones), Candlewick Press, 2007

Understanding Dyslexia through the Eyes of Hank Zipzer

Jodi Pilgrim
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor



a character struggling with reading, writing, and spelling.

Abstract

New Texas literacy laws mandate continuing education requirements for educators who teach dyslexic students. Close to twenty percent of the US population display one or more symptoms of dyslexia, and teachers must be equipped to adapt instruction to meet these students' needs. The purpose of this article is to promote an understanding of dyslexia through the eyes of Hank Zipzer, a character in a popular children's book series. Hank's experiences provide insight into the thoughts and actions of

Keywords: dyslexia, struggling readers, learning disability

To all children with challenges—learning might be hard, but you have greatness in you!

Henry Winkler

Introduction

Learning can be hard for children with dyslexia, but “the early identification of students as well as the corresponding early intervention program for these students will have significant implications for their future academic success” (Texas Education Agency, 2014, p. 13). Texas literacy laws help identify and support students who have language-based learning disabilities like dyslexia. In an effort to ensure teachers understand this specific learning disability, the State Board for Educator Certification recently adopted Texas Administrative Codes (TAC) Chapter TEC §21.054(b) and TAC §232.11, which mandates continuing education requirements for educators who teach dyslexic students (Texas Education Agency, 2014). In addition, Chapter 228.35 requires that education preparation programs provide teacher candidates instruction in the detection and education of students with dyslexia (SB, 2011). With approximately twenty percent of the US population displaying one or more dyslexic tendencies (Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011), these laws provide necessary steps toward promoting a clear understanding of the needs of these students. Teacher training is necessary, as current research suggests that teachers may lack knowledge needed to teach struggling readers, particularly children with dyslexia (Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011).

Many teachers continue to hold the common misconception that dyslexia is a visual processing deficit rather than a language-processing deficit. Misconceptions saturate common beliefs in modern society in general, as dyslexia is often misrepresented in media and in literature. Helping dyslexic students requires knowledge of the underlying issues. Children's books may support this knowledge through characterizations of dyslexia. Therefore, the primary purpose of this article is to promote an understanding of dyslexia through the eyes of Hank Zipzer, a dyslexia character in a popular children's book series. A subsequent goal is to present intervention ideas/tools which may help dyslexic learners.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

The word dyslexia consists of two different parts: *dys* meaning not or difficult, and *lexia* meaning words, reading or language. Therefore, dyslexia relates to the difficulty with words (Hudson, High, & Otaiba, 2007). The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) adopted the following formal definition of dyslexia in 2002:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (IDA, 2002, p. 1)

Thus, dyslexia is a language-based learning difference usually resulting in difficulties with word recognition, word pronunciation, reading fluency, spelling, and writing. These problems in word recognition result from an underlying deficit in the sound component of language that makes it difficult for readers to connect letters and sounds in order to decode (Shaywitz, 2006). This difficulty has been scientifically confirmed through brain imagery studies, which show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions (Shaywitz, 2006). In other words, the dyslexic reader's brain systems work differently from that of a non-dyslexic brain.

The research regarding dyslexia is not new. The National Institute of Health released research reported on dyslexia in 1994. The findings included a statement reporting dyslexia as the most researched of all learning disabilities (NIH, 1994). Yet, many myths regarding dyslexia still persist (Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, 2014.). A common myth about dyslexia is that it is visual and that dyslexic children and adults see and write words backwards. Writing letters backwards is a common behavior for many students (not just those with dyslexia), but research does not support the myth that dyslexic students see letters or words backwards or differently.

Dyslexia in Children's Literature

Dyslexic characters in literature appear more and more frequently. In Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, the main character is portrayed as having dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which are comorbid (can coexist). According to Riordan, dyslexic students, including his son, are creative thinkers, and portraying Percy as ADHD/dyslexic was his way of honoring the potential of children he had taught with similar reading conditions (Riordan, 2010). The description of Percy's reading condition, however, led

readers to misunderstand the characteristics of dyslexia. The explanation provided in the book seemed to portray dyslexia as a visual issue because Percy jumbled up the words needed for schoolwork. When reading, Percy comments, “the angrier I got, the more the words floated around on the page” (Riordan, 2007, p. 128). In the movie version of Riordan’s book, the words actually moved on the chalkboard as Percy tried to read them. However, Riordan provided an explanation for the floating and jumbled words in his book, which readers overlooked. Because Percy is a demigod, his problem with English words actually enabled him to translate ancient Greek. Therefore, the jumbled words were a result of his relation to Greek gods instead of a problem with dyslexia. This misrepresentation of dyslexia in literature was unintentional but demonstrates the impact media has on society’s beliefs.

Teacher awareness about dyslexia is important, and the use of children’s literature with dyslexic characters may be beneficial to teachers, students, and parents alike. Children’s fiction and nonfiction increases awareness, understanding, and appreciation of people with disabilities (Prater, Dyches, and Johnston, 2006). Literature often provides a means to illustrate ways people are different and special. The depictions of a group of people, though, must be accurate. Hank Zipzer’s character is the focus of the remainder of this article because his frustrations and successes provide opportunities to clarify the characteristics of dyslexia.

Hank Zipzer

Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver coauthor the Hank Zipzer series, which features a main character with dyslexia. Henry Winkler, well known for his role as “the Fonz” in the television sitcom *Happy Days*, based Hank Zipzer on his own real-life experiences. Henry Winkler found school to be very difficult, no matter how hard he tried. However, Winkler learned that “a learning challenge doesn’t have to stop you” (para. 9), and he wants his readers to realize their greatness (The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 2014). His series of chapter books for young readers contains 17 books that reflect school experiences from the viewpoint of Hank Zipzer, a boy growing up on the Upper West Side of New York City. Written in first person, the reader gains insight into the thoughts and actions of a character with dyslexia, which helps student readers and teachers alike understand the impact certain school tasks may have on a struggling learner.

Hank Zipzer is funny and creative but encounters many frustrations in school. The 17 books in the series span Hank’s fourth and fifth grade years with his best friends Frankie and Ashley. During this timeframe, Hank struggles in school, meets a teacher who suggests he learns differently and should be tested, receives a diagnosis of dyslexia, and uses creativity to solve problems. Each book describes a unique adventure in which Hank always finds a way to get into trouble. Through humor, Hank describes challenges encountered during school and during daily tasks involving math, spelling, writing, and reading.

The series starts with the first day of fourth grade and a writing assignment. Hank spends the rest of the story using creativity to get out of the writing assignment, because he is certain he cannot complete it: “I can’t even write one good sentence. So how am I ever going to write an entire five-paragraph essay?” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 12). Hank shares with readers his trouble getting his thoughts down on paper, which is common for dyslexic students. Dyslexia expert Sally Shaywitz reports that dyslexic students have problems with expressive language (not thinking), which may account for Hank’s weak writing skills (Shaywitz, 2006). Between written expression, handwriting, and spelling, Hank feels completely defeated by the assignment, which may reflect the way many dyslexic students feel in the classroom.

Hank shares his frustrations throughout the book, but it is not until the end of book two that Hank is diagnosed with a learning difference. “Dr. Berger found out my problems were because I have actual learning differences that make it hard for me to learn in the regular way. Finding this out was the biggest relief of my life. It was incredible to know that I wasn’t stupid, I just learn different” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003, p. 14-15). The use of the word *learning difference* versus *learning disability* in the books should be noted as an appropriate way to describe dyslexia, because with proper instruction, dyslexic students do learn. Many bright dyslexic students feel stupid (Hank’s words) because of their struggles with words but demonstrate remarkable abilities in other areas. IDA’s definition of dyslexia maintains that the difficulties associated with dyslexia are “often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities” (IDA, 2002, p. 1). In other words, dyslexic students are bright children who can succeed academically with effective instruction.

Hank feels relieved when Dr. Berger explained that Hank’s brain was just wired differently. Research supports the notion that the dyslexic brain works differently (Shaywitz, 2006; The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 2014). According to Shaywitz (2006), the reading circuitry of the brain includes regions dedicated to processing the visual features of letters and transforming the letters into the sounds of language and getting to the meaning of words. Examination of brain activation patterns in readers reveals that dyslexic readers use different brain pathways than non-dyslexic readers, which results in a slower, more manual process of reading (Shaywitz, 2006). Through the examination of brain patterns of skilled readers, scientists understand these readers use the back of their brain as they read. Dyslexic readers appear to have an under-activation in the neural pathways in the back of the brain, which causes problems with word analysis and decoding.

A lack of word decoding skills typically results in poor fluency during reading. Hank experiences significant issues with reading fluency. For example, the entire third book revolves around Hank’s inability to read the program guide on the television, as it scrolls too quickly for him to keep up. “I’m not the only slow reader in the world, am I?” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003c, p. 70). When reading is slow and labored, it is difficult to read in front of peers—it is embarrassing for many students. Hank shares that standing up in front of people and reading aloud is one of the most difficult things he has to do. Dyslexic learners often report reading aloud in front of peers to be a miserable experience (Hubbell, 2013); therefore, teachers should consider alternatives. For example, a teacher might send reading material with a student to practice ahead of time, or the teacher may choose a one-on-one setting where peers cannot hear the oral reading. The implementation of fluency strategies would help as well (repeated readings, paired reading, choral reading and reader’s theater). To learn more about helping students with dyslexia, review <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/3416>.

Spelling also presents a problem for Hank. “I go over and over and over my spelling words. At the time, they seem to stick to my memory. They seem to be happy in my brain. But then later, like the next morning when I really need them, they seem to have orbited off into space somewhere” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003b, p. 5). The series’ authors use comedy to describe Hank’s struggles, which is entertaining, and many dyslexic students can probably relate. In *I Got a “D” in Salami*, Hank spends extra time studying spelling words in order to do well in the class spelling contest. On the day of the spelling contest, Hank comments, “Last night I knew every one of these words forward and backward. This morning, I’d lost them. From the time I left my apartment until the time I arrived in class, they must’ve fallen out of my head” (p. 27). The book includes examples of Hank’s spelling patterns, which in essence provides insight into spelling

patterns of dyslexic students. For instance, he cannot remember the order in which letters should be arranged, and letters within words are often reversed (he spells *animal* as *aminal*). In addition, Hank uses phonetic spelling, such as “Siense Project in Progres” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003c, p. 83), and lacks knowledge about grammar and spelling rules.

Hank finds it absurd that teachers ask him to look up words in the dictionary, as he states, “I can’t spell words because I can’t sound them out. So how am I going to find them in a dictionary if I can’t spell them in the first place? Do you know my dictionary has one thousand two hundred and fifty-six pages? Words get lost in there” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003, p. 22). According to Hank’s dad, spelling is a no-lose situation if you study. However, this is not the case for many dyslexic students. “Almost all people with dyslexia . . . struggle with spelling and face serious obstacles in learning to cope with this aspect of their learning difference which tends to “persist throughout life” (International Dyslexia Association, 2011, p. 1). As Hank puts it, “I can’t spell to save my life. And it really bothers me, too” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 18).

Teachers can help dyslexic students improve spelling and decoding skills with systematic and explicit instruction. As Hank works with the school specialist, his skills, including finding words in the dictionary, improve. In book six, Hank states, “At the beginning of the year, I couldn’t use the dictionary at all. But I’ve been working with our school learning therapist, Dr. Lynn Berger, after school. She taught me to sound out some words so I can look them up. When I do find a word in the dictionary, I feel really proud” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003c, p. 22). Nontraditional resource tools may help dyslexic learners as well. For example, technology tools include features, which support struggling learners in many ways. Dictionary.com (the website or the app) enables students to use voice recognition to find words instead of searching through pages and pages. This tool also enables students to hear a word they cannot pronounce by using the audio feature.

Hank exhibits many other behaviors related to dyslexia. He says his handwriting looks like “a chicken stepped in tar and ran across the page” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 20). He struggles with memory recall, and he confuses directions such as left and right. Another problem for Hank is the reversal of letters (i.e. b/d; p/q) and numbers. For example, in book two, Hank writes down an address as 541, when he should have written down 451. “The truth is, I flip numbers around a lot. Sometimes I flip letters around too. Most of the time, I don’t even know I’m doing it” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003b, p. 109). To a dyslexic student, “letter formation is tedious rather than natural” (Redford, 2014, para 2), and letter and number reversals are common problems. IDA (2007) cautions, though, that reversing letters does not mean your child has dyslexia, as many children reverse letters before the age of seven.

Myths regarding dyslexia associate reversals with visual processing problems, even though evidence demonstrates dyslexic learners do not see words and letters differently (Shaywitz, 2006). However, authors of children’s literature often provide references to words moving on the page. Unfortunately, the Hank Zipzer series contains a few confusing comments about words on as well. A knowledgeable reader may understand that Hank becomes overwhelmed when reading large amounts of texts and views it as a blur of words. However, due to misconceptions about dyslexia, unclear comments in the book could contribute to common myths. For example, Hank makes several references to letters moving or swimming on the page. In book seven, when discussing the challenge of dictionary searches, Hank makes the following statement: “The letters flip around on the page, and before you know it, there are letters floating in front of your eyes like synchronized swimmers in the Olympics” (Winkler & Oliver, 2004a, p. 117-118). This misleading text contributes to inaccurate myths about the

characteristics of dyslexia. Knowledge about dyslexia is necessary so that readers can make informed conclusions about descriptions of dyslexic traits. Table 1 summarizes Hank’s learning characteristics and the relation to evidence-based research regarding dyslexia. In other words, do Hank’s descriptions accurately reflect characteristics of dyslexia?

Table 1
Dyslexia Through the Eyes of Hank Zipzer

Hank’s characteristic	Accurate? (yes/no)	Hank’s perspective
Poor Self-Image	Yes	It was incredible to know that I wasn’t stupid, I just learn different” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003, p. 14-15).
Weak Writing Skills	Yes	“I can’t even write one good sentence. So how am I ever going to write an entire five-paragraph essay? ” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 12).
Poor Handwriting	Yes	. . . looks like “a chicken stepped in tar and ran across the page” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 20)
Poor Spelling	Yes	“I go over and over and over my spelling words . . . then later, like the next morning when I really need them, they seem to have orbited off into space somewhere” (Zipzer & Oliver, 2003b, p. 5).
Weak Decoding Skills	Yes	“. . . so I guessed that’s what the word was. I do that a lot when I can’t actually read something” (Winkler & Oliver, 2004b, p. 96).
Inefficient Fluency Skills	Yes	“I’m not the only slow reader in the world, am I?” (p. 70).
Visual Issues	No	“The letters flip around on the page, and before you know it, there are letters floating in front of your eyes like synchronized swimmers in the Olympics” (Winkler & Oliver, 2004a, p. 117-118).
Reversals	Yes	“The truth is, I flip numbers around a lot. Sometimes I flip letters around too. Most of the time, I don’t even know I’m doing it” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003b, p. 109).
Creativity	Yes	“Get ready for creativity like you’ve never seen before” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 85).
Auditory Learning	Yes	“I don’t always learn from books very well, but if you tell me something, I’ll remember it forever” (Winkler & Oliver, 2004c, p. 139).

As Hank works with Dr. Berger to improve his skills, he practices strategies that help him learn. For example, he uses taped books, he takes notes, he utilizes visuals, and he receives systematic phonics instruction. Some of the strategies mentioned throughout the series relate to

a method called multisensory teaching. “Multisensory instruction utilizes all learning pathways in the brain (visual, auditory, kinesthetic-tactile) simultaneously in order to enhance memory and learning” (Birsh, 2011, p. 19). In other words, *see it, say it, hear it, do it* works for dyslexic students. Hank learns differently, and Dr. Berger helps Hank understand ways he learns best. As Hank’s grandpa says, “We’re all different and that’s what makes us great” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 132).

The stories of Hank’s frustrations in school and funny adventures provide insight beyond the weaknesses of a dyslexic reader. The reader gains insight into potential talents as well. Hank’s tendency to find trouble offers opportunities for Hank to utilize his creative side to get out of trouble. His friends understand his weaknesses and provide support in many situations, but they also consider Hank the problem-solver of the group. As Ashley says, “Hank, you are covered in creativity” (Winkler & Oliver, 2003a, p. 62). In the *Dyslexic Advantage*, Eide & Eide (2011) emphasized the creativity of dyslexic individuals, attributing possible links between spatial ability and dyslexia to talents in art, architecture, and engineering. Dyslexic students need affirmation of their talents. While teachers should work to improve weaknesses, strengths should be a focus of instruction as well. Both teachers and students must recognize and target learning strengths and weaknesses.

Summary

Hank Zipzer: The World’s Greatest Underachiever, provides insight into the daily frustrations dyslexic students encounter. Hank struggles with spelling, fluency, writing, reversals, and many other skills associated with dyslexia. Some characteristics of dyslexia, such as weak phonemic awareness skills, are not addressed in the Hank Zipzer series. Phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words, is a major predictor for success in reading (TEA, 2014). Teachers must understand how to assess and build these skills in order to help dyslexic students succeed in learning. Therefore, continued reading and learning for teachers is recommended. Mandated professional development in Texas will equip teachers with knowledge and tools necessary to help dyslexic learners. Perhaps Hank Zipzer can help teachers, parents, and students as well. In 2014, Hank Zipzer appeared on a CBBC television series, starring Nick James as Hank Zipzer and Henry Winkler as Mr. Rock. If the producers presented dyslexia accurately (and let us hope they do), the show may contribute to an understanding of dyslexia . . . through the eyes of Hank Zipzer.

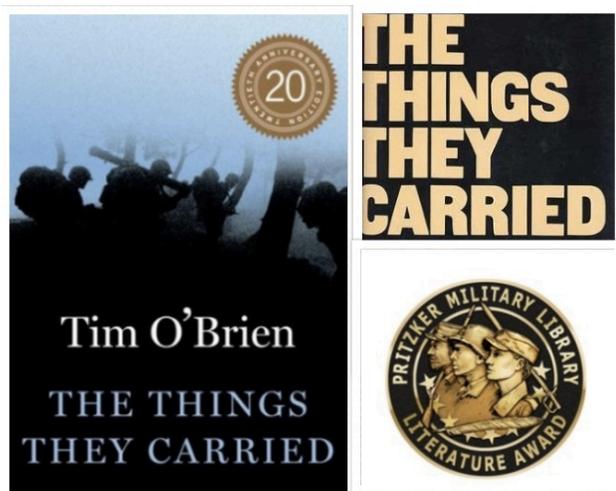
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Connecting Students with the Human Dimensions in Literature: Using Bruner's Modes of Thought to Deepen Literary Appreciation

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Abstract

Many times students are directed to make a personal connection to literature without being guided toward how their connection works interdependently with the structure of the narrative to create a greater meaning, much less directed toward how this connection can hold meaning for their own lives. Through student samples, this article attempts to show how a combination of two different modes of thought gives teachers a framework for literary appreciation that facilitates a deeper understanding of the connections students make to the works they read, as well as the way students apply the literature to their own lives.

Keywords: teaching literature, appreciation, analytical reading, character analysis

I got there early so that I could get a seat close to the front and sat eagerly waiting for the session to begin. On the stage in front of the seated crowd of English teachers was a long table, with two of the authors sitting and chatting as they waited for the session to start. No sign of O'Brien, and the panel discussion was scheduled to start in less than a minute. Did he cancel? But about two sentences into the welcoming, O'Brien walked quickly up the aisle wearing tennis shoes, jeans, a sport coat, and his signature baseball cap. A light applause arose—possibly from the respect bordering on reverence that so many of us felt for him and from sheer relief that he made it! I was certainly one of those who applauded as much out of relief as out of respect.

Tim O'Brien and two other authors of war novels discussed their work with a packed room at the 2011 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention in Chicago. When O'Brien spoke, I hung on every word and wrote furiously to capture some of my favorite quotations to take back to my students who were reading his Pulitzer Prize finalist novel about the Vietnam War, *The Things They Carried*. The session was everything I had hoped, and the

questions from the audience were better than the ones I was too reluctant to ask. One question from an audience member in particular stayed with me, though: “Why do you think your novel impacts so many people who have never been to war, much less the Vietnam war?” As if the question had been asked a hundred times, O’Brien responded, “Books are not just for communication; they are for human beings” (O’Brien, 2011).

The idea that books “are for human beings” is nothing new. We all connect at a level that makes us human—struggles, perseverance, and moments of joy and accomplishment are all human elements that keep us reading. Yet, as I reviewed my notes on the flight home, I could not help but think about this answer and how I would use his novel to support my students’ understandings of the human connections and conflicts. This reflection gave me a new perspective on the connections I encourage students to make with their reading and, more importantly, a new perspective on how I ask students to approach writing that accompanies their reading. I have taught using the novel before, and generally my students comprehend the work but fail to appreciate what it has to offer them as human beings. As I sat on the plane, I realized that I was asking students to make connections to experiences, to external conflicts, instead of to the internal conflicts that make us human. I began to consider that a change in how I approach the novel might help students see how the work is intended just as much *for them* as it is for those people who have been to war.

This change in my approach also challenged how I scaffold background knowledge within my students to help them comprehend the work on multiple levels. We know that background knowledge is an important piece of comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), and the more background knowledge a student has, the better he or she can comprehend the reading (Graves, Cooke, & LeBerge, 1983; Hood, 1981). But what if students have enough background knowledge to comprehend the work, yet do not have the experience necessary to appreciate the work on a higher level? While students can surely connect to some isolated experiences in the novel, meaningful connections that remind us we are all human beings and facilitate a deeper appreciation of the work are unlikely since high school students have no experience with war, much less with the Vietnam War.

However, human nature is universal, and so is the narrative structure of conflict development. The connection to human nature, to the vicissitudes of the human condition or the internal conflict, is a connection that calls forth an archetypal structure as opposed to one consisting of a string of isolated experiences or external conflicts, and holds greater meaning for the student while allowing for more authentic writing. This complex response to reading requires, as I will attempt to show, a conscientious effort to see just how novels are “for human beings.” More precisely, in this article, I intend to argue (a) for using conflict development to create students’ connection to the text through an exploration of human nature; (b) providing students an opportunity to share their own development as it relates to the connection of human nature; and (c) implementing specific instructional strategies.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The appreciation of a novel through the connection of human nature and conflict development may be understood through Bruner’s (1986) perspective on the power of narrative mode. Bruner (1986) lays out two modes of thinking: the paradigmatic mode and the narrative. While he claims that “there are confusions and overlaps” (p.88), he clearly delineates the two. The paradigmatic mode “employs categorization or conceptualization and the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized and related one to the other to form a

system” (p. 12). We see the use of the paradigmatic mode in scientific formulas, mathematics, and logic, such as syllogistic reasoning. The narrative modes, however, deals with the “vicissitudes of human intentions” (p.16) and reach conclusions that are happy, sad, absurd, or any other number of endings. The paradigmatic mode, conversely, is “simply conclusive or inconclusive” (Bruner, 1986, p. 14).

For the narrative mode, Bruner (1986) argues that the same stories can be told in a different order because “there must be transformations of some kind that permits a common base structure of story to be handled in different meaning-preserving sequences” (p.19). He even goes as far as to identify certain aspects of plot development and questions the intent to structure plot development since really what “one seeks in story structure is precisely how plight, character, and consciousness are integrated” (p. 21).

But what if you did define this base story structure as archetypal? What if we define a convention that lattices the two modes and disrupts the binary, allowing the reader to see how an archetypal narrative structure creates universal feelings that give the reader not only a connection to the work through the “vicissitudes of human intentions” (p. 16) that Bruner (1986) claims are elicited within the narrative mode, but also an archetypal structure—internal conflict creates the external conflict or vice versa and a resolution that represents an underlying message or theme—that is formulaic like the paradigmatic mode. The student can then apply this same structure to construct his or her own reality centered on his or her own *vicissitudes* or to see how his or her reality could be different. This latter point would be evident in the purposeful writing that comes from the connection to human nature within the reading and the archetypal structure used to organize their analysis and narrative. By focusing on the development of internal conflict, the vicissitudes of human intentions (narrative), using an archetypal structure (paradigmatic mode), then the student is directed toward a deeper understanding of how the novel is written for human beings and not just for those who have experienced war, or any other context within a novel that does not represent your students’ background.

Responding to Literature

Discussing the power of the narrative and the possibilities it can present, Arendt (2007) points out “that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it...” (p. 9). Philip Jackson (1995) notes that stories “leave us with altered states of consciousness, new perspectives, changed outlooks” (p. 9), a notion which Breault (2010) takes even further, stating that “someone’s story can provide not only insight into that person but might also help that person more constructively reconcile various personal issues” (p. 181). Having your students question the literature in a meaningful way that changes their perspectives is the type of literary appreciation that English teachers seek (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997; Liang & Dole, 2006). At the same time, prior knowledge and experience aid in comprehension and engagement, and guiding students to make these connections can benefit them (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007; Rumelhart, 1980). However, often times when students question the text and make connections to isolated experiences, or external conflicts, within the story, the response sometimes does not make connections to the work as a whole, which hinders a deeper understanding of the work (Langer, 1990, 1995). Therefore, the readers’ analysis of the work becomes weak and strained, and the ability to facilitate a lasting effect on the student becomes remote.

Bruner (1986) also suggests that these isolated connections hinder a deeper understanding of the work. He claims that “[e]motion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the

situation that arouses it” and, referring to emotion, cognition, and actions, further notes that we cannot “lose sight of their structural interdependence” (p. 117-118). Making connections to isolated experiences can keep the reader from seeing the structural interdependence of the narrative and the integral role that the narrative plays in conveying the message, or in this case, the reader’s response. However, making connections to the “vicissitudes of human nature”—internal conflicts instead of external conflicts—provides a very different learning opportunity. When we ask students to make connections to specific emotions (human nature), then what is the sequence, the conflict development that is behind the emotion conveyed? Answering this question will require students to see how the narrative structure conveys a deeper meaning, since he or she will look for internal and external conflicts and how these conflicts are resolved, a process, which leads to a thematic message.

Zigo (2001) suggests that “natural inclinations toward narrative forms of meaning making, in conjunction with text-based lessons” can help with engaging students with “challenging” texts (p. 64). This engagement is important for canonical works of literature that often present stories that students can understand but have a hard time appreciating on a higher level of thinking due to a lack of experience. For example, students may comprehend Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* or Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, but the horrors of World War I and the wastefulness of the elite in the 1920s may very well be hard for them to internalize and appreciate simply because they lack the experience.

However, to increase the ability for students to have a deeper appreciation, the responses can be directed at the elements of human nature first, or the internal conflict—the feeling of guilt, anger, sorrow, etc. These feelings stem from or cause some “vicissitude” and “human intention,” as Bruner (1986) would note, within the narrative, which can fit neatly into the paradigmatic mode of conflict development. When students identify this development after identifying the connection to human nature—the feeling that they share as a human being instead of an isolated experience that may or may not hold meaning to the text—then the student not only begins to have a deeper understanding, but naturally begins to develop an ability for discussing and writing analytically about the novel. More important, the student adds to the reality of how these human interactions, these vicissitudes, are resolved. This gives the student possible realities that can be constructed for his or her own narratives, and a possible model—or world, as Bruner (1986) would label it—for the student to replicate in reality.

Expanding Our Worlds through Writing

Egan (1999) argues that a story is “one of the most powerful and effective sustainer of cultures across the world” (p. 16). We learn about our past from stories, about different cultures and ideas. Literature allows us to see through many perspectives and takes us on journeys that are otherwise impossible. These experiences, as I have argued earlier, have the ability to change us, and simply participating in narrative discourse practices leads us to a better understanding of who we are within our own cultures (Miller, 1994). I presume that Bruner (1986) would agree, since he claims that literature gives us “human possibilities rather than settled certainties” (p. 26) and “opens us to dilemmas, to the hypothetical, to the range of possible worlds that a text can refer to” (p. 159).

Along with scaffolding the writing structure for the students, this approach also instills a purpose for writing their own stories, a purpose that can be self-fulfilling, or as Bruner (1986) would point out, can create possible worlds. Talking about these possibilities, Pipher (2006) argues writing “enlarges readers’ knowledge of the world or empowers readers to act for the

common good” (p. 7). Bruner agrees: “Psychological reality is revealed when a distinction made in one domain—language, modes of organizing human knowledge, whatever—can be shown to have a base in the psychological processes that people use in negotiating their transactions with the world” (p. 9). He further notes that “our experience of nature is shaped by conceptions of it formed in discourse with others” (p. 88). Having students see the development of human nature through an archetypal structure gives them the opportunity to see multiple possibilities for their own story structure and to choose a possibility that will play out on their own pages and, maybe, eventually become their reality.

Leading students to find the power behind stories often takes place when they have their own stories to tell. If we could use the reading connections within both modes of thinking, then not only do we raise an awareness of the themes within the work, but we also instill a sense of purpose for writing within the student. Here, the connection to the literature becomes not only the starting point for a possible story, but the archetypal structure also scaffolds the organizational pattern. The connection to human nature and an understanding of the conflict development becomes the prewriting for two different writing assignments: a literary analysis and a personal narrative. The former analyzes the conflict development of a character—how an external conflict creates an internal conflict, or vice versa, and how the resolution reveals the theme—and the latter is simply the development of the students own vicissitudes within a narrative that allows the students to explore possible resolutions.

Putting this into Practice

Reading and writing help us access one another, as well as help us access and articulate ourselves. The lesson that follows attempts to facilitate this process using the novel *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien. Using student samples, this section of the article shows how the students took their connections and the structure of conflict development to create their own literary analyses and narratives. In an attempt to connect literature and writing instruction in a way that produces better readers and writers, this lesson also highlights writing as an act of composing rooted in and analyzing students’ own lives, starting with the connections they make to human nature within literature.

Background

In my tenth year of teaching, I taught the following lesson to six on-level eleventh-grade classes at a Title I school in Houston, TX. The lesson came within the unit titled “The Aesthetics of War in Literature” during the second half of the first semester. The students had done analytical writing leading up to this point, and the majority of the reading for the lesson was done in class. For part of the unit, the classes read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, a novel about the Vietnam War. O’Brien tells the story through a collection of vignettes, which include many soldier characters. Each character is dealing with the unthinkable stresses and horrors of war that produce internal conflicts and weigh heavily on the soldiers.

Prewriting and the Dialectical Journal

Once the students had a basic outline of the issues surrounding the Vietnam War and the impact the war had on the soldiers, I read aloud the first chapter of O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, stopping from time to time to check comprehension and discuss anything that might be interesting or confusing. During this time, I also modeled the dialogue I wanted students to have with the author by questioning the text as we read. With a renewed perspective that books “are

written for human beings,” I also asked them to make a personal connection to the human feelings that they shared with the characters who appeared in their responses.

The examples in Table 1 show the students questioning the text concerning character development, as well as the connections they made to the feelings the characters exhibit. Each of the selected examples were passages chosen by the students.

Table 1
Student examples: dialectical journal entries

Passages from the text	Comments & Questions
<p>“He hesitated for a second. ‘And do me a favor. Don’t mention anything about – ‘No,’ I said, ‘I won’t’” (O’Brien, 1990, p. 29).</p>	<p>What was Jimmy Cross hiding? I think Jimmy wanted to seem like a complete good guy in the story and he still loved Martha, hoping one day she would read the story – and didn’t want her to know what he had done, what ever it was. I have stories and feelings that I don’t want people to know because I’m scared they might think differently about me.</p>
<p>“No safe ground: enemies everywhere. No front or rear. At night had trouble sleeping...” (O’Brien, 1990, p. 60).</p>	<p>What is he truly scared of? Is he scared of what Strunk is going to do to him or scared of dying in the war? I think he is feeling isolated. I’ve felt isolated even when I’m around people because I fear they don’t like me or that I don’t fit in.</p>
<p>She had crossed to the other side. She was part of the land. She was wearing her culottes, her pink sweater, and a necklace of human tongues. She was dangerous. She was ready for the kill” (O’Brien, 1990, p. 110).</p>	<p>Mary Anne went from being a sweet loving and caring girl to this trained killing machine. War changes even the weakest of people into crazy heartless monsters. What happens to a person in war that makes them change? One thing that changed me completely was the death of my grandfather. I realized how important our time together was.</p>

These dialectical journal entries were later used for students to see how the characters cope with their internal conflicts, and, in the end, how the resolution of their internal struggles connects to the novel’s theme. (This is evident in the student samples in Table 2.) Essentially, this became the organization of their literary analysis and their own story.

Organizing the Development

After reading the novel, I presented the students with the following essay challenge: Choose a character and examine how the development of internal conflict conveys the author’s message about the impact war has on the human spirit. I asked them to look for a character that

exhibits feelings of human nature or an internal conflict that elicited a connection. Did you note feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, or any other feelings that you're grappling with in your life, or have grappled with in the past? I asked them to go back into the text and their dialectical journals and find areas where the character's internal conflict was created by an external conflict or if their internal conflict created an external conflict. (This fleshes out any connections that are not developed, which inherently will not connect to theme.)

Once the students chose their characters, I had them look at ways to organize the development of the character using the handful of journal entries and textual evidence they had collected. Considering the complexity of essay assignment, I provided models of the end product, along with my own brainstorming of possible organizational patterns. I then asked them to organize the development and expand on their analysis in a discussion or short written responses. For example, in Lt. Cross's mind, Jimmy Cross's unrequited love for Martha (internal conflict) is responsible for Lavender's death (external conflict). It could also be argued, as the student below presents, that the sense of loneliness stemming from the external separation due to war is just as much a part of it. I review similar examples with the students and show them model essays I have written on the many different approaches that can be taken—similar to the two mentioned here.

However, what proved to be the most helpful in getting students to organize their thinking about their chosen character was to have them answer specific questions: (a) What internal conflict is your character dealing with? (b) What external conflict is causing or is caused by the internal conflict? (c) To what extent, if any, does the internal conflict impact the character? (d) To what extent, if any, does the character resolve the internal conflict?

Expanding on the samples from the students in Table 1, Table 2 displays the organizational patterns of conflict development of the chosen characters. These outlines were created as a result of the questions above.

Table 2
Student samples of organizing conflict development

Characters	Outline
Jimmy Cross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The war separates Jimmy Cross from Martha and creates loneliness • The loneliness distracts Jimmy Cross as Lavender is shot • Death of Lavender creates guilt within Jimmy Cross • Resolution = still grapples with the guilt today
Dave Jenson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jenson and Strunk make a pact out of the need to show no fear, which is a product of the war • Strunk loses his leg, and Jenson disobeys the agreement out of compassion for Strunk • Resolution = death of Strunk, which brings relief to Jenson • Death is the only escape from the perils of war

Mary Anne Bell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Anne symbolizes the transformation that war creates. • Mary Anne is first curious to explore the war • She starts losing love for Fossie and gains love for war • Her love turns into obsession, and she eventually disappears • Resolution = all soldiers leave a part of them in war behind and come back changed.
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Drafting

As I moved from student to student, I read essays that were focused on the development of the internal conflict and how the resolution contributes to theme. While it may seem highly structured, the approach allows the analysis to be more accessible for the students. Writing about Jimmy Cross's inability to resolve his internal struggle, a student states:

He has no one else to blame but himself. He wishes to replace his sense of shame and hatred for himself but disappointingly he can't, and has to live with it. After Lavender's death, Cross continues to blame himself, and the absence of forgiveness illustrates the effect war has on his spirit. This marks the beginning of his never-ending guilt. Even though, during any war, death is expected to pay a couple of visits every now and then, witnessing its arrival is always startling, harsh, and frightening.

The student then concludes the essay, "The incessant and permanent guilt of Lavender's death will forever remain with Lt. Jimmy Cross."

The second student who chose to write about Dave Jenson and his dilemma of following through on a promise writes:

There was fear of death; but the fear of shame would kill them five times over. Jenson would be the blame of Strunk's humiliation because he didn't go by his word and pull the trigger. Lee Strunk's death saved Jenson's life. In Tim O'Brien's words, 'Later we heard that Strunk died somewhere over Chu Lai, which seemed to relieve Dave Jenson of an enormous weight.' And it did. (O'Brien 63)

What I also enjoyed seeing was that this student creatively organized the essay using subtitles. The title of the essay is "Death is the Only Escape," and after the introduction, she uses the subtitle "Pact of Machismo" before describing the agreement both Strunk and Jenson make. The next section is titled "The Injury," which presents Strunk losing his leg and further develops the internal conflict of Jenson having to make good on his agreement. The final section of the essay is titled "Relief in War," and shows how the true internal conflict of Jenson was his own recanting of the agreement, and how the death of his friend relieved him of that guilt.

Mary Anne Bell's character is one of the more difficult to write about because students have a hard time grappling with the abstract idea her character represents. However, the third student writes well about her internal conflict and the abstract resolution: "This internal conflict she had been dealing with was finally resolved. She may not have been at peace with herself, but she was at peace with Vietnam, she became a part of it." The student continues and shows a deeper understanding of the character:

Being in the war environment made her glow in the dark. She couldn't get enough. She didn't only need more of the war; she desired it and started craving it. Mary Anne's

tongue necklace represents her desire to be a part of the war culture. She is brainwashed, and is willing to be taken in by the jungle and to learn more.

I believe the insight in these samples comes from an understanding of how the structure of conflict development works interdependently to create an underlying message, which allows them to expand on their thoughts.

Application

Once I handed back the papers and had the students write their final drafts, we moved on to the next unit, which included elements of narrative writing. After a few weeks of reading various short stories and personal essays, I had the students go back to their writing portfolios and pull out their character analysis essays over *The Things They Carried* and look at the full process, from the dialectical journal entries to their final draft. I had them look at the internal conflicts they discussed in their essays and the feelings they made connections to in their journal entries, such as guilt, fear, anger, hate, love. I also had them look at the external issues that were causing these internal conflicts, such as death, violence, rejection, separation.

Then I asked them to answer a few questions: What were the outcomes of the characters you wrote about who dealt with similar internal conflicts? Does that resolution sound appealing? If not, how can you avoid it? What's important during this process is that the students now analyze their own internal conflicts so that they can develop it within a narrative that properly conveys their struggles. Students then mapped out possible outcomes and looked at how the choices they made are to blame for their consequences or the consequences that could be attached to a current path they are on.

The three students whose examples have been used throughout this piece all wrote narratives that came from the connections they made to the reading. The student who wrote about Jimmy Cross examined some of the choices he has made based on what others think of him and how those choices could possibly change him in the future. The student who wrote about Jenson's fear wrote about the development of her own fear that stemmed from inadequacy, which created a false reality. She went on to realize that much of her fear was her own making, and that in reality, she was very well liked by the students around her. The third student wrote a beautiful story about coming to terms with his grandfather's death. Throughout the prewriting and drafting stages of this process, I noticed that all of the students had at least one story to tell, and many had multiple stories. But what impressed me most was that the stories did not feel contrived. Instead, they were authentic, natural. The students also had an easier time finding the right moments to detail, and their conclusions had more depth and showed an understanding of resolve.

Closing Thoughts

While only those who have been to war can truly understand its impact, I do hope that this novel gives my students a better understanding of the horrors the soldiers endure. Applying O'Brien's point that "books are for human beings" not only gives my students an understanding of the experiences of war, but also an understanding of human nature and how people cope with their trials. As teachers, we seem to constantly struggle to make those connections to experiences, and we forget that those experiences, whether the reader went through something similar or not, create feelings to which we can all relate.

At the close of the NCTE session, I waited in line to get Mr. O'Brien's autograph, and when I approached the signing area, I was star struck, to say the least. I wanted to tell him that I

had read his novel in a Vietnam War Literature class and decided that I wanted to talk about beautifully written novels for the rest of my life. I wanted to tell him that I had read plenty of novels, but not until his work did I decide to use my English literature degree for something other than law school. I wanted to tell him so much, but I left it for another time.

Instead, I asked him something else. I knew I only had time to make a statement or ask a question, so as he signed my book I said, “My students have to know, did the narrator keep his promise at the end of the chapter ‘Love’?” He smiled and said, “I don’t know. I think the possibilities are endless. It’s fiction.” He chuckled as he continued, “I’m not sure you should even tell your students that.” We shook hands, and I left feeling like I missed an opportunity to share with him just how much his work means to me. However, looking back, I’m so glad I asked him the question my students wanted to know, because its answer holds so much more for them.

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Guided Reading in First-Fourth Grade: Theory to Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of collaborative efforts between a large metropolitan school district and the school of education at an area urban university. A reading clinic, in which university students conducted small guided reading group lessons with elementary students reading below grade level, was established through this partnership. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data revealed the positive outcomes were twofold. Elementary students participating in the reading clinic achieved progress on two different reading assessments, and university students benefited from the training provided by the district literacy specialists, guidance by the university professors, and the real-world application of best practices in guided reading instruction.

Keywords: guided reading; university clinic; best practice

Introduction

In this article, the authors share insights stemming from an ongoing small-group guided reading partnership involving a university and an elementary school, both located within a large, urban, metropolitan school district. All involved benefited from the experience, while reaffirming the importance of building strong collaborations between university faculty members and area school personnel. This partnership emphasized the importance of extensive classroom experience for university students to build a strong foundation for teaching early and intermediate reading. The highlights of the partnership included: the reading progress made by the elementary student participants, the resultant confidence instilled in both the elementary and university students, and the expanded instructional repertoire and improved teaching competence noted in the university students.

Background of the Problem

Shortly before the beginning of the 2013 fall semester, literacy specialists and administrators from a large metropolitan school district reached out to university faculty members with the idea of creating a collaborative partnership in the form of a reading clinic. The intent of the reading clinic was for preservice educators, with support from district literacy specialists and university reading professors, to provide small group instruction to first through fourth grade students reading significantly below grade-level.

Theoretical Framework: A Comprehensive Literacy Program

A comprehensive literacy program includes a number of literacy experiences, such as small group guided reading (SGGR), which are carefully planned for students to interact with whole text in a number of ways, and with varied levels of support (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). These opportunities to read, write, speak, and listen as a whole class, in small groups, or independently, build on each other and work together to provide students independent control of literacy tasks. Within a comprehensive literacy framework, teachers provide varying levels of support during instructional activities, which scaffold the control of the student (Bruner, 1982). This combination of activities facilitates a gradual transition from the students' zones of proximal development or what children can do with assistance, to full and independent control (Vygotsky, 1978).

In reading, these scaffolded opportunities include read aloud or modeled reading, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. During read aloud experiences, the teacher is usually in full control of the text, modeling fluent reading and focusing on comprehension, while building academic vocabulary and literary knowledge. In shared reading, the teacher uses a big book or displays the text electronically, modeling reading to the students, utilizing 'think out loud' techniques, demonstrating effective word solving practices, within an interactive context and eliciting student participation (Allen, 2002; Fisher, 2000; Parkes, 2000).

In guided reading, the teacher plans the teaching/learning interaction carefully, considering small group composition and text selection, selecting intentional lesson objectives, and supporting strategic behavior with teaching prompts, demonstrations, and questions. Independent reading provides students with opportunities to extend their reading control, strengthen their strategic behaviors, and effectively process information or comprehend (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). These are all important pieces of the literacy instruction puzzle. One of the most important pieces, and perhaps the most difficult to master for new teachers, is SGGR

For struggling readers, SGGR is critical and supplemental SGGR outside of the general classroom is often indicated as intervention or treatment for elementary reading struggles (NICHD, 2000; National Early Literacy Panel & National Center for Family Literacy, 2008). In particular, young children who do not progress in reading at the same rate as their peers will likely continue to have difficulty in school (Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, & Morrison, 2008; Torgesen, 2004), with meta-analyses showing 5-17% individuals later manifest indicators of a reading disorder (Bishop, 2010; Shaywitz, Morris, & Shaywitz, 2008). Therefore, early literacy intervention in the form of supplemental SGGR is necessary for young children who initially struggle in reading (Iaquinta, 2006; Pinnell & Fountas, 2008).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to simultaneously ascertain if implementation of SGGR in the reading clinic collaboration improved the reading skill of struggling elementary

readers and 2) to determine if the reading clinic experience provided additional benefits to the preservice educators. In order to examine the effectiveness of the reading clinic, the following research questions were addressed:

- Will reading performance of struggling elementary readers improve when participating in SGGR twice per week with preservice teachers in a guided reading clinic?
- How will the reading clinic experience impact preservice educators?

Treatment Description: SGGR

SGGR is an instructional approach, which allows teachers the ability to strategically plan the differentiated early literacy instruction needed for each student in their classrooms. Whether a teacher is facilitating the reading development of an emergent reader, fostering the progress of a transitional reader, or supporting the comprehension of an advanced reader, small guided reading groups are designed to accommodate the unique developmental path of each child (Clay, 1998). In SGGR, teachers plan effective reading lessons for small groups of children taking into account their unique areas of strength and needs.

Guided reading is significantly different from the traditional ‘round robin’ reading groups (Clay, 1991; Holdaway, 1979). During SGGR instruction, students read whole meaningful texts either silently or in a ‘whisper voice.’ The small guided reading groups are dynamic and change in composition, depending on the progress of the students. Students are grouped according to their current use of reading strategies or processing controls. Ongoing assessment, frequent in-depth analysis of student behaviors, intentional and systematic teaching, strategic lesson planning, and careful text selection are the key components of guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

In guided reading lessons, instructors teach strategic behaviors such as: problem solving to decode new words, maintaining fluency, self-monitoring, searching for information, self-correcting, predicting, summarizing, and analyzing text, among others. In addition to teaching for strategic problem solving, instructors also teach for comprehension posing critical thinking questions, and explicitly address phonics, word analysis, and vocabulary as needed (Pinnell & Fountas, 2008). Typically, students also write reading responses and engage in thoughtful, meaning-focused discussions with their peers and/or the teacher.

For purposes of this guided reading clinic, lesson plan templates and guided reading protocols were provided to the university students to guide their lesson planning and offer them specific strategies to use based on elementary students’ needs. The guided reading protocols, which were directly correlated to Fountas and Pinnell (2008) reading levels, included text features, word work, and reading strategies, as well as activity examples to use before, during and after reading. Students were encouraged to follow the lesson plan template as a guide and incorporate their own ideas and activities as they related to each lesson.

Data Collection, Instrumentation, and Initial Analysis

Quantitative Data (Elementary Students)

Quantitative data from two instruments, *The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (FP-BAS)*, and *Istation’s ISIP-ERA Early Reading Assessment (ISIP-ERA-ERA)*, was provided by school district literacy specialists. *The FP-BAS* is a comprehensive one-on-one assessment, which matches students’ instructional and independent reading abilities to leveled texts. During this assessment, the student reads continuous text, while the teacher takes a running record for later analysis and reading level determination (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

For purposes of the present study, *FP-BAS* reading levels were converted into grade level equivalent scores using a correlation chart included in the *FP-BAS*. *ISIP-ERA* is a computer-administered assessment for PK-3rd grade students. *ISIP-ERA* is computer-adaptive, dynamically adjusting items administered to individual students in order to measure phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Scores from the *ISIP-ERA* represent a combined factor of all reading areas tested with higher *ISIP-ERA* scores representing better overall reading ability (The Imagination Station, Inc., 2014).

Two dependent variables, *FP-BAS* reading level and *ISIP-ERA* scores, were examined at two points in time, prior to and after implementation of SGGR. Normally distributed descriptive data from SPSS 22.0 shown below in Table 1 demonstrate mean improvement of both dependent variables across time. No differences in terms of gender or ethnicity were noted, indicating treatment effectiveness across the sample. As expected, though, differences by grade level for *FP-BAS* reading level (grade level score) and *ISIP-ERA* scores were present.

Table 1
Variable Mean (SD) Scores

DV's	Grade 1 <i>n</i> = 15		Grade 2 <i>n</i> = 6		Grade 3 <i>n</i> = 4		Grade 4 <i>n</i> = 12	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>FP-BAS</i> Pre	.5	.42	1.5	.31	1.9	.11	3.1	.17
<i>FP-BAS</i> Post	1.01	.35	1.9	.51	2.0	.26	3.2	.67
<i>ISIP-ERA</i> Pre	189.6	5.82	209.8	7.78	221.0	3.5	NA	NA
<i>ISIP-ERA</i> Post	198.3	6.80	218.6	11.39	219.8	6.9	NA	NA

A repeated-measures one-way MANOVA was also run in SPSS 22.0 to determine statistical and clinical significance of the SGGR treatment in terms of *FP-BAS* reading level and *ISIP-ERA* score (Field, 2008). Results of the MANOVA, $F(1, 36) = 14.588, p = .01$, indicated a significant difference between pre and post *FP-BAS* reading level scores, with the SGGR treatment accounting for 29% of the variance in elementary students' instructional reading level. In terms of *ISIP-ERA* scores, results of the MANOVA were also significant, $F(1, 24) = 28.829, p = .00$, with the SGGR treatment accounting for 49% of the variance in elementary student *ISIP-ERA* scores.

Qualitative Data (University Students)

Qualitative data was collected from university students via multiple sources. Most importantly, all university students participated in an end-of-semester focus group to discuss concepts learned from the reading clinic experience. The researchers functioned as participant-observers, facilitating and audio recording focus group discussions, and later transcribing, and coding linguistic data for themes. Other qualitative data, including university student reflective journals, notes from classroom discussion, and feedback from involved district personnel was triangulated with the focus group data to provide evidence of reliability and validity. Several themes emerged as a result of the focus groups, but no unique themes emerged for either the fall or spring semester, again contributing to the reliability of qualitative findings across time.

Findings

Quantitative (Elementary Student)

As use of a non-treatment control presented ethical challenges, inferring direct causality between significant growth in *FP-BAS* reading level and *ISIP-ERA* scores from SGGR treatment was impossible. Thus, quantitative data was examined in terms of treatment duration (length) and responsiveness to intervention by age.

Treatment Duration. Aggregate treatment response of the sixteen (43.3%) students afforded yearlong treatment was compared to the treatment response of the twenty-one students (56.7%) afforded treatment for only one semester. Students who received the yearlong treatment ($n = 16$) improved more substantially ($p = .005$) than those who received the semester-only treatment ($n = 21$), with treatment duration accounting for 21% of the variance between groups (in terms of *FP-BAS* reading levels and *ISIP-ERA* scores). In fact, the average semester-only participant grew only one month in *FP-BAS* reading level, while a typical year-long student grew approximately 6 months in *FP-BAS* reading level (in accordance with Denton, 2012; Gersten et al., 2008; Ramey & Ramey, 2005).

Necessity of Early Treatment. The present study also provides added evidence to the growing body of research indicating reading treatments provided at earlier ages convey better response to intervention (e.g. Braet et al. 2012; Denton et al., 2011). Specifically, mean *FP-BAS* and *ISIP-ERA* scores in Table 1 show less robust improvement over time as grade level increases, reflecting Holt's (2008) model of decelerated reading growth across the elementary years. Moreover, other recent data suggests older elementary students may even be treatment resistant (Corrin, Somers, Kemple, Nelson, & Sepanik, 2008; James-Burdumy et al., 2009; Kemple et al., 2008), as shown by decreasing *ISIP-ERA* scores in grade 3 and the relatively flat *FP-BAS* reading level scores across time in grades 3 and 4 (see Table 1). As such, reading intervention for older children may necessitate a longer and more intensive course, or increased frequency of guided reading sessions, thus encouraging early identification and treatment of reading problems.

Qualitative Findings (University Students Outcomes)

Several themes emerged during coding and triangulation of qualitative data. The most prevalent themes: increased confidence, hands-on experience, and differentiation, indicated the collaboration between the university and school district provided a positive, productive, and eye-opening learning experience for the involved pre-service educators. Even negative commentary from students, such as coping with classroom teachers resistant to pullout, was fodder for learning about the realities elementary school dynamics.

Increased Confidence. An increased feeling of confidence occurred among many of the university students who implemented SGGR for the reading clinic collaboration. Qualitative findings indicate college student uneasiness diminished while confidence improved as the semester progressed. One student reflected, “I know at the beginning, I was ... really scared, terrified. I finally feel like I get it, and it’s the end. Now I have something to offer.” By the end of the semester, students felt competent enough to fully explain the components of a comprehensive literacy program in future job interviews and confident enough implement SGGR, in particular once in their own classrooms. One student asserted, “[the reading clinic] helped me with my confidence with guided reading because I haven’t done this before.” Yet another student attributed confidence gained in the reading clinic led to success on her certification exam, commenting, “I passed it my first time.”

Hands-On “Real” Experience. Another positive theme for university students was the real-world, hands-on experience gained from being able to develop and subsequently implement their own SGGR lesson plans, while continuously adapting instruction across the semester according to elementary students’ needs and interests. Conversely, in reference to writing lesson plans for previous courses, students expressed frustration at not having an opportunity to teach planned lessons, thereby never being able to ascertain actual lesson effectiveness. One student explained how the practice of continually shifting lesson plans according to student response changed her pedagogical approach, commenting, “sometimes something is not going to work like you want it to, so just realizing, oh, okay, if I switch this, it could go better, and you learn from that and keep going.” Another student reflected:

I think that the biggest difference for me was usually when we make lesson plans in class we are just making them out of our imagination, like this is something we can possibly do, but here, we’re actually using them with kids, so basically like when we start, it’s like imagining in your head, well this is what it’s going to be like; I’m going to be able to get through all these things. But then when you come and you do it, you’re like, okay this is what needs to go, this is what needs to be changed, this is what works, this is what didn’t work, so I think that’s the difference between [writing lesson plans in] our other classes, and using the lesson plans in this class.

Preservice teachers also learned about the very real need for constant vigilance in terms of time-management during the instructional day. As SGGR lessons were limited to thirty minutes, preservice educators were required to remain continually focused and on-task. One university student reflected having only thirty minutes, “helped me to organize and to pace myself.” Another said, “In the classroom, I’m going to have to time myself to be able to get everything done throughout the day.”

Finally, several preservice teachers contrasted abstract learning from literacy textbooks with the realities of working directly with students. One said, “You read about how it will be in the book, and you imagine what it will be like, and when you’re actually doing it, it’s a lot different.” Furthermore, the scenarios presented in the textbooks may not present a realistic picture of instruction in an actual reading classroom, particularly in terms of instruction for struggling readers. One student indicated the textbooks make it seem like all of the students are on the same level and “improving at the same rate,” while this experience painted an entirely different picture.

Differentiation within Small Groups. The guided reading field experience allowed preservice teachers to work through challenges presented by working with students of varying ability levels. Although the students were placed in small groups based on previous *FP-BAS* reading levels, the university students discovered students with similar reading levels may have different reading needs. One student said, “My students were so different. They were both on the same level, but they were so different. I had to work with each of them, just helping them. That’s where I am growing.” More specifically, preservice teachers recognized students of the same level with different reading strengths and needs necessitate differentiated instruction, even within a small group of two or three. Many university students commented on using the strengths of each student to help the others learn. Furthermore, preservice educators learned how to choose leveled books and apply strategies to aid students. One student said, “I will be able to go into the classroom, level my books, and pick out a book and know what to teach from that book, and know what strategies are useful.” Another expressed, “I feel comfortable grouping my students, perform[ing] SGGR strategies and I can regroup my students and level them.”

While conducting SGGR, university students took annotated records of reading behaviors to continually differentiate future small group lesson plans. These notes helped the preservice teachers to realize the importance of being, as one student conveyed, “an observer of the student,” in order to assist the learning process. Another student was able to use anecdotal information to alter her approach in prompting learners, commenting, “You get to know their little personalities; you learn what prompts to use with which students. One of my students was vulnerable and very shy so I knew to sweeten my words and use prompts that are softer, and my other student was very cool and full of confidence and he could handle a little more prompting from me.”

Perhaps most importantly, getting to know individual students was an eye-opening experience for many of the university students who entered this field experience with conceptualizations of teaching as a whole-class, teacher-led experience rather than thinking about elementary students as individuals with unique needs. One student relayed this realization quite well:

One of the things I noticed because of this experience is that we go into guided reading thinking about the benefits that the kid gets, what the students get from us, but then I never realized what a powerful tool it is for the teacher to be able to work with such a small group of kids because you get to know them and it’s not just their reading; it’s *them*. I was only working with one student towards the end and I really got to know him. Everything he brings into the classroom, his experiences, his stories, he connects it to himself, so I learned a lot about him. And I didn’t think that guided reading could be the time where the teacher could learn about the student. I thought it was just where you look at the reading and you help them read, but it’s more than just that, you have to go beyond that in order to help. And that’s something I didn’t know. And now, I go into classrooms where students are needing me and I notice each student individually. It’s not like whether you’re done with the lesson. That’s something I learned with this, it’s not about getting through; it’s about working with them where they need it.

Implications for Practice and Conclusions

Many teacher preparation programs require field experience and observation hours prior to the student teaching experience; however, some experiences are much richer than others as related to the pedagogical knowledge gained. Results of the present study showed preservice teachers immersed in hands-on, real-world experiences gain much more than those who are not given a chance to apply theory to practice. This collaboration made a positive impact on the elementary participants, the university students, the literacy specialists, and the involved university professors. This experience gave the university students a clearer picture of what to expect when they move on to student teaching and their subsequent teaching careers. The involvement in the reading clinic has strengthened their confidence and the hands-on practice allowed them to reflect and strengthen their pedagogical skills.

Opportunities for collaboration such as this should be considered by all teacher preparation programs and school districts to provide all-encompassing learning opportunities. Sharing expertise with future teachers regarding research-based practices such as SGGR has an undeniable impact on the type of teachers they will become. One consideration for future research in this area is the impact this type of pullout program has on the general education teacher, particularly during testing months. Teachers should be included in the planning and preparation of targeted skills during small-group instructional sessions. Although the literacy specialists were able to alter schedules so that students were pulled out during their normal reading time, students who are below grade level may need more support and consistency to ensure their academic needs are being met.

The main purpose of this collaboration was to improve reading skills of elementary students who were previously identified below grade level in reading. Quantitative assessment results generally demonstrated a positive impact on the reading growth of the elementary students involved in the reading clinic, especially those students who were younger and those that had participated for two semesters. However, these advances were not the only benefits of this collaboration. Training provided by literacy specialists, along with guidance by university professors resulted in benefits to university students and all members involved.

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A Long Road to Recovery: Healing an Ailing Reading Program

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Author Note

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Abstract

This one-year exploratory case study attempted to discern which adjustments in culture, physical classroom environment, and instruction were needed to improve reading instruction in ailing K-2 classrooms at Lion Elementary School. A holistic approach was created to diagnose the problem surrounding poor early reading achievement. After proper diagnosis, a targeted professional development plan was created in order to provide a common language and experience within the teacher learning community. A Language and Literacy framework was crafted to include more time for integrated reading and writing. A matrix was prepared to show how skill instruction could be embedded within authentic literacy experiences. Initial anecdotal results have shown that the treatment plan increased teachers' knowledge of reading, produced more authentic classroom environments, and created a shift toward student centered literacy instruction.

Keywords: professional development, literacy coaching, school reform

Introduction

How does one begin to fix a school that is critically wounded in terms of reading instruction? That was the question I faced over and over again as I worked with Lion Elementary School (pseudonym) after an being approached by the principal to support campus change in literacy practices. It was not a case of simply providing professional development that would eventually change instruction. The root of the disease was much deeper than instruction. All the teachers at Lion Elementary agreed that readers learn to read by reading (Allington, 2002). Yet, despite the breadth of research that has been done to support this claim, most students spent less than 12 minutes a day engaged in the actual act of reading a book (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Students spent the majority of the reading block in isolated skill instruction as opposed to gradually becoming skilled, independent readers (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The cognitive load for knowledge rested solely on the shoulders of teachers,

and readers were denied an opportunity to shape and refine their thinking and learning (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009). Like many ailing elementary schools in need of reading improvement, this deficit was the culmination of ineffective instructional decisions over time.

Upon my arrival, there was an immediate need for triage to determine priority of need for three areas: culture, physical classroom environment, and instruction. The principal asked me to diagnose the problem. In the medical field, iatrogenic disease is characterized as, "...the primary pattern of behavior that characterizes this is actually a result of the conditions created initially by the system..." (Hancock, 2013, p. 97). Lion Elementary School was dying from iatrogenic disease. The top down mandates for reading instruction at the district level failed to produce any gains after a six year treatment plan that included scripted programs, one-size-fits-all promises, over zealous assessing, and fidelity directives. The unintended consequences of district-diagnosed prescribed programs left Lion Elementary School with teachers whom had little sense of efficacy and a lack of expertise as to what constituted effective literacy instruction.

In desperation, Lion Elementary School realized a need for adjustment after scores on the state and district's assessments flat lined. Balanced literacy was brought back with renewed enthusiasm; however, its inception came too quickly, and rather than being transformed from a guiding belief about how readers and writers negotiate text (Parr & Campbell, 2012), it was implemented more as a rote routine during the reading block. The district believed centers were the answer to differentiated instruction. Using a district designed and prescribed schedule, teachers created a plethora of literacy centers including planning sheets for students to record their responses and activities. Little did the district or the teachers realize that differentiation was not when all students complete the same tasks, with the same expectations, as opposed to being responsive to individual student needs (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Teachers were spending every available moment creating materials to fill up time during the reading block. Suddenly, 90-minute reading blocks were broken down into 15-minute increments of time in which students rotated through centers and guided reading groups. Just like the previous six years of ineffective treatment, there was no professional development or research that led up to the curricular change.

Like many who look for quick fixes, Lion Elementary School had responded to the symptoms of their wounded early literacy instruction, but had not explored the deeper root causes. Morale had plummeted and teacher efficacy waned even lower. To compound this problem, novice teachers who were hired during this long treatment phase had not received any quality professional development and were unprepared to teach reading in a way that was responsive to individual student needs.

Conceptual Framework

When a school community builds a strong foundation of coaching, collaborating, modeling, reflecting, and support, teachers are equipped to adjust their instructional delivery to meet each child's specific reading needs. This type of model requires ongoing extensive professional learning that is individualized according to teachers' level of comfort, trust, and expertise (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Equipping classroom teachers with instructional resources and building a collective campus guiding principle about literacy can create optimal conditions for improved instruction (Fullan, 2010). "Reading instruction can be taught, either by setting up learning conditions in the classroom so that growth in comprehension is enhanced or by teaching strategies for coping with text directly and explicitly" (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1990, p. 2). Gladwell (2002) states that there are relatively simple changes in the presentation and structuring of information that can make a big difference in how much of an impact it makes. I was interested in discerning which

adjustments in culture, physical classroom environment, and instruction were needed to improve reading instruction in ailing K-2 classrooms at Lion Elementary School.

Methodology

This study was an exploratory case study. “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). This exploratory case study focused on a community of teachers (K-2 at Lion Elementary). Case studies of communities can be defined as, “The systematic gathering of enough information about a particular community to provide the investigator with understanding and awareness of what things go on in that community; why and how these things occur; who among the community members take part in these activities and behaviors, and what social forces may bind together members of this community” (Berg, 2004, p. 261).

The Journey

In order to truly understand the learning context, rather than just diagnose the problem, I decided to utilize a holistic approach (Figure 1). I walked the halls, listened, observed, and casually interacted with students and teachers. I tried to informally assess the climate and tone of classrooms. It was fairly easy to accomplish this step since the K-2 teachers are all housed on one wing of the campus. There were three teachers in kindergarten, and four each in first and second grade for a total of 11 primary teachers. I took anecdotal notes about conversations that were occurring between teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, and student-to-student. I recorded how long each teacher talked during instruction and whether the talk was inquiry based or directive. These notes were used to determine teacher talk time versus student talk time. Next, I did classroom visits when the students were in music or Physical Education (PE), and took pictures of classrooms. I took pictures of what was on the walls, how the seating areas were arranged, the teacher’s space, the classroom library (or lack of), and any other pertinent areas or learning structures that were in the room. When students were present in the classroom, I watched and recorded instruction during reading time. I positioned myself as an observer in the classroom and merely took notes recording what was said, what students were required to do, what questions were being asked, and what outcomes of learning were evident. The last phase was examining student work. I looked at what tasks students completed as readers within the reading block. I wanted to see what evidence was being produced as a result of reading instruction. How were teachers tracking student progress and student needs? At this point, I was gathering information from field notes, observations, and photographs to see if there was a common thread that ran through all the areas of instruction, culture, and the physical classroom environment.

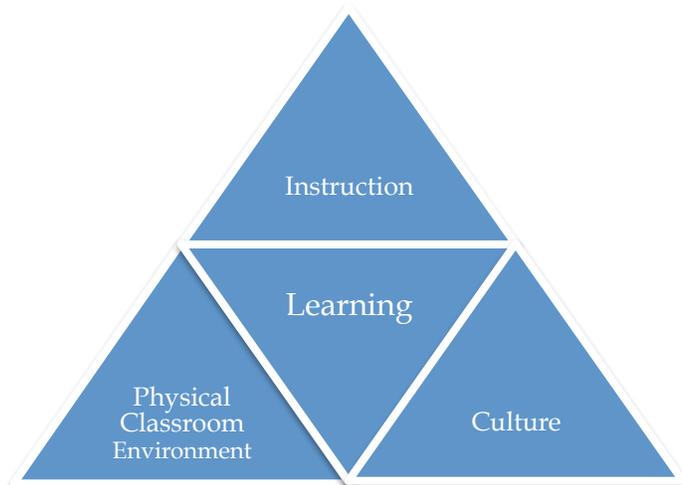


Figure 1. Holistic approach to diagnosing the problem.

Setting and Culture

Throughout my 22 years in education and studying the literature on reading instruction, I firmly believe that literacy instruction is much more than just effective teaching. It is a belief in the capabilities of the readers and writers that permeates the entire curriculum. This belief is infused in teachers' conversations, actions, and non-verbal gestures throughout the day. Students learn in a risk free environment that supports their growing abilities and knowledge about themselves as readers and writers. Their thoughts are honored and students value what their peers' think and say. Mistakes are made, but together, the learning community constructs new knowledge and to move forward in a more productive manner. "Wonderful places are not that way simply because they are physically appealing. They aren't really wonderful until the people who live in them care about one another" (Hindley, 1996, p. 2).

The principal required that doors were to remain open during instructional hours, so each classroom was clearly visible from the hallway. What I observed and heard did not support this premise. Teachers barked orders loudly and sometimes in tones that were demeaning. Conversations that should have been private between teachers and students were broadcast in front of classrooms. Behavior charts were used with zeal and were displayed in the open for students, as well as anyone else who entered the room, to see. It became immediately apparent that systemic changes in the environment needed to be addressed before we began our instructional focus.

Physical Classroom Environments

Lion Elementary School was 50 years old and had very little remodeling to its physical structure over the years. Interactive white boards were installed in the front of each classroom as a way to provide digital learning experiences. Classrooms varied in size and unused metal lockers lined the back of each classroom. Each classroom had a row of windows along a long side of the rectangular room. Instead of countertops being areas where children could manipulate math tiles, piles of clutter were on every available countertop taking up valuable learning space. There were large rugs for students to gather on for whole group lessons and in the first and second grade classrooms desks are clustered together to form tables. The kindergarten classrooms all had tables for children workspace.

Each classroom had a designated classroom library of varying adequacy and efficiency. One kindergarten class had a selection of less than ten books for a class of 22 students with duplicates of the same books. For classrooms that contained more substantial libraries, books were haphazardly placed on shelves or cubbies. Additionally, all kindergarten classrooms had lofts that were intended as an independent reading space. Out of three lofts in kindergarten, none were safe for student use. Instead, the lofts were used as storage for teacher materials, extra school supplies, or general storage. Even the space below the loft that was the perfect cozy spot to curl up with a good book was inaccessible due to an overflow of teacher supplies and tubs of classroom materials.

Rather than displaying children's work or co-constructed anchor charts, walls were covered in commercially mass produced posters. These posters were hung up to the ceiling with no sense of division among content areas. Ten of the classrooms chose to close all of their window blinds thus necessitating the use of overhead florescent lighting. Only one classroom had the overhead lighting turned off and the window blinds opened up to provide a nature extension of the classroom to the outside environment. The pictures below represent a beginning point for moving forward with our transformation process (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Classrooms prior to professional development.

Instruction

Instruction tended to be very traditional and teacher centered. Although desks were grouped together to form collaborative groups, there was still a strong teacher presence at the front of the room and the teacher was viewed as the sole provider and holder of information. The teachers shared that in the previous year's effort to move toward balanced literacy, literacy stations had been set up and students rotated through the stations while teachers met with guided reading groups. Unfortunately, this left students having to be engaged and exhibit self control for almost an hour during the reading block while teachers were busy with small groups of students. This independent learning was not being scaffolded, and students wanting to further their own learning were not being challenged or encouraged to go deeper with their thinking.

Teachers were still the only ones asking questions and students were only answering questions that they did not ask. Comprehension instruction was limited to asking literal level questions about story elements that were explicitly stated in the text. Round robin reading was still a common practice for reading. All students were reading from the same text unless they were meeting with the teacher in small groups. Small group differentiation consisted of grouping students around a text that was determined by instructional levels. While the teachers found this small group time to be valuable, they admitted that students who were not meeting in the small group were not being engaged as much as they would like them to be. During planning, teachers pulled isolated skills from the reading curriculum and taught them apart from an authentic context rather than keeping comprehension as the focal point (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, Miller, 2013, Pearson & Fielding, 1994). Skills were still being taught with flashcards, isolated skill worksheets, read and respond drills, and phonics drills. When resource materials were provided to assist in their planning, teachers saw it as 'one more thing to add to their lesson planning' rather than as aids to complement teaching. The idea of teaching according to individual readers' needs was a foreign concept since a 'one size fits all' curriculum had prevailed for so long.

There was not a space for students' voices to be heard and students were passive participants in a teaching process (Freire, 2000). The main voice in the classroom was the teacher's and it was usually in the form of declarative sentences as she imparted the information onto the students. The main lesson structure was teacher talk then student independent work. Independent work was in the form of worksheets that were literal level questioning and low engagement. It took minimal time and effort for students to complete the worksheets. When students finished their work, they were told to 'color' the worksheet if there were any drawings on it or to draw on the back of the worksheet if it did not lend itself to coloring in pictures. The average time spent on the coloring aspect of the worksheet was fifteen minutes. This form of pseudo-reading clearly had not served Lion Elementary School well over the past several years.

Moving Toward Change

The first step toward changing the lens in which the teachers viewed reading instruction was to begin a voluntary book study after school. The principal and I met frequently to discuss the direction of her campus, the needs of her students, and the support that was needed for her teachers before deciding on a text that would be a good fit. In May, the principal and I gathered all of the primary teachers together and I gave a book talk over our text for the book study. The touchstone text that we utilized was *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*, 2nd edition (Miller, 2013). Our key focus was comprehension instruction and how to plan, model, provide time for practice, and conferencing, within a Reading Workshop.

The principal purchased the book for all the teachers prior to the end of the school year with the expectation that they would read it over the summer and be familiar with it when they returned in the fall. We did not expect them to launch reading workshop since they did not have training, but we wanted them to have some schema to draw from when we started our book study.

During the summer, I purchased a Choice Literacy© web resource subscription for all of the primary teachers, the principal, the curriculum coordinator, and the reading coach with grant funding from a university grant donor. This online site was invaluable in providing professional development videos and articles related to literacy. It provided a common space for everyone to view the same video then discuss the instructional implications. Every other week I sent the teachers a new link with a video title or an article title for them to read. All of the extra readings and videos tied into our touchstone text that we read in the fall as springboards for conversations. When school started and we began meeting, the book felt familiar and the content did not seem so overwhelming as it did in the spring. My goal was for each teacher to begin to see reading instruction through a completely different lens and consider the possibilities of greater student success in their own classrooms in terms of reading achievement and developing readers as opposed to teaching students to read. We met once a month, for an hour and fifteen minutes, and the principal provided refreshments and a casual atmosphere for our dialogue. During our after school book study time, the teachers responded to a guiding question posted on chart paper and posted their thinking about this question. After our discussions, they posted any revisions to their thinking by the end of our time that day. Although it was voluntary, every K-2 teacher participated and engaged in the process (Figure 3). This effort was greatly enhanced by the principal's encouragement and active participation during the book study. She did not serve in the role of the leader; she served as a learner and that made a very large learning impact on the rest of the participants.



Figure 3. Voluntary, after school book study professional development.

Conference Periods

In addition to the after school book study, I met with each grade level, once a month, during their 45 minute conference period. Also, this same group of primary teachers was receiving professional development from another literacy coach, once a month during their conference period, on writing workshop that mirrored the reading workshop they were learning about in our after school book study. During this 45-minute conference period time, each grade level began to explore how to integrate the teaching of reading skills into writing and other

content areas. The teachers expressed concern over how to continue teaching all the reading skills they have been teaching while now trying to ‘add in’ comprehension. In the early grades, comprehension was not seen as the goal of reading. Students were being taught isolated phonics in order to blend sounds to decode words resulting in the development of word callers. They did not expect books to make sense. Teachers were still seeing each reading skill as a separate, isolated teaching unit and not seeing how they could be integrated together. Metacognition was neither an academic vocabulary term nor a professional term within the school culture. Over the course of nine months, we worked to craft a Language and Literacy framework that encompassed three total hours. These three hours were not intended to occur altogether and the five components could be taught throughout the day. The components included: interactive writing/morning message, writing workshop/word study, a read aloud, reading workshop, and shared reading (Figure 4).

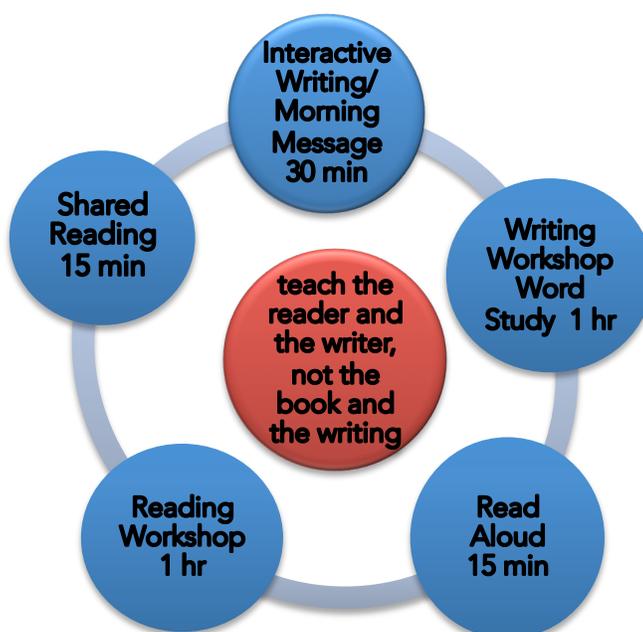


Figure 4. The Language and Literacy framework components.

This monthly conference time was invaluable for checking in and clarifying teachers’ understanding during this year of rapid growth and understanding of reading instruction. Again, the principal showed support by attending the monthly conference times as she attended the book study, with a learner’s stance, rather than with administrative oversight. Her teachers witnessed her vulnerability, and her sense of eagerness and excitement fueled their motivation. Teachers were encouraged to try new instructional methods, to observe each other’s attempts, and to invite me to model in their classroom if desired or needed. In addition to creating the Language and Literacy framework, we explored issues such as classroom environments, child centered instruction, language and literacy, documenting readers’ thinking with anchor charts, and organizing and maintaining classroom libraries. Each 45 minute conference time began with a two minute entrance ticket reflection activity, followed by a brainstorming session focused on an overarching needs-based question stemmed from my observations and our discussions over the past month. We explored instructional implications for students from each of their classrooms.

Even though we began crafting the Language and Literacy framework early in the year to show the integration of literacy skills, the big question that continued to surface during our 45-minute conference time was, “How do we approach individual skill instruction?” Teachers were still very nervous about the perceived lack of focus on the individual skills (i.e. phonics) and wanted to know where these skills would be embedded within the Language and Literacy framework. In order for the teachers to see that the Texas standards were still a part of the curriculum, I created a matrix showing all of the individual skills and how they were now embedded within an authentic context for learning (Table 1). This matrix provided a visual for them to see how all the skills would fit into the bigger context of the framework.

Table 1

Skills Matrix to Show Skill Integration within Language and Literacy Framework

Language and Literacy Framework Component	What the Teacher <i>might</i> be doing	What the Student <i>might</i> be doing	Skill (correlated to K-2 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills TEKS)	Min/180 %
Interactive Writing/ Morning Message	writing	writing	phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding, sight words, punctuation, oral language, print awareness, vocabulary development, poetry, oral and written conventions, spelling, handwriting, letter formation, written and oral academic language, parts of speech	30 min
	sharing the pen	sharing the pen		
	modeling	listening		18%
	speaking	speaking individual whiteboard writing in the air (sky) writing		
Writing Workshop/ Word Study	teaching mini lesson	writing	writing process, working with words within context, poetry, language experience approach, handwriting, punctuation, writing conventions, spelling, media literacy, research	60 min
	modeling	conferring/teacher		
	conferring/writers	working in small group		33%
	informal assessments observations	sharing writing		
Read Aloud	Reading	active listening	modeling prosody, think-alouds, metacognitive strategies, increasing vocabulary, access to various themes and genres, poetry, listening, ask and respond to questions, prediction	15 min
	modeling prosody	turn and talk		
	conducting think aloud	stop and jot		8%
	questioning sharing joy of reading			

Reading Workshop	teaching mini lesson	reading	comprehension, flexible range of metacognitive reading strategies, purpose for reading, question the text, fix-up strategies when meaning breaks down, inferencing, retelling, making connections, critical reading, exposure to various genres	60 min 33%
	modeling	responding		
	reading mentor text	conferring/teacher		
	conferring/readers meeting/focus groups	meeting in literature circles		
	anecdotal records	meeting in book groups		
	informal assessment	sharing response to reading		
	observations			
Shared Reading	using big book	holding individual book	fluency, vocabulary development, literary genres, parts of speech, listening and speaking, recognizing capitalization, punctuation, dialogue, concepts of print, sight words	15 min 8%
	small book/magnified	looking at big book		
	modeling prosody	reading with teacher		
	using pointer	reading with expression		
	sweeping finger			
	using text as examples for teaching points	using Wikki Stix® using highlighting tape		
<i>Note.</i> Components can be done in any order throughout the day.				

Classroom Environments

The most visible change in teachers' growth was classroom environments. With the assistance of two professors who specialized in Home Interior, years worth of Rubbermaid bins, juice boxes left over from prior years' field days, paper clutter, outdated textbooks, wall mounted televisions, and distracting commercial posters, were cleaned out of classrooms. While this exercise was extremely difficult for the teachers to discern what was valuable and what needed to go, it became the catalyst for the bigger change. Once the big obstacles were moved out of the way, teachers seemed to be able to focus on instruction. The biggest surprise during this process was how many teachers had quality children's literature stored in Rubbermaid bins. They had been stored on top of the lockers for years because the teachers had no idea as to where to start with organizing them. Rather than just making them available to students in an unorganized fashion, they had chosen to keep them stored. We chose to organize them according to the system described in *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades* (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Although we did not utilize the structure outlined in the book for instruction, we found the classroom library planning tool a perfect fit for the primary grades. Once the classrooms were cleaned out, the principal bought tubs for uniform storage of all their classroom library books since we were sorting them according to genre, topics, and series

(Figure 5). As an added surprised, she provided them with new large group rugs for the students to gather on for Reading Workshop. The difference in classrooms from the start of the year to the end of the year was astonishing! Teachers began to slowly transform their classrooms from cluttered, traditional classrooms that once showcased ‘teacher space’ to ones that were inviting, warm, child centered, and conducive to curling up with good books (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Uniform tubs that were purchased for classroom libraries.



Figure 6. Warm and inviting environment that invited children to curl up with a good book.

Findings

Because Lion Elementary School needed a new direction quickly and wanted deep and lasting change, we implemented many new goals simultaneously. While this is not typically the best way to implement lasting change, we did not want another quick fix. We wanted best practices done well, so we jumped in with both feet. Although this healing process is still in the initial treatment phase, the transformation of three key areas - culture, physical classroom environment, and instruction - was evident.

The academic discourse professional development style, as opposed to a “sit and get” style, supported teachers as active participants in their own learning. For the first two months of my work at Lion Elementary School, teachers did not ask any questions and did not seek out additional resources other than what I gave them to read or watch. However, the year ended with teachers who emailed me with specific questions regarding students’ learning and questions

about where they could find more information regarding literacy topics. They became advocates for their own learning and advocates for their individual reader's needs.

While it is only anecdotal at this point, I believe the added space for the reading of professional articles, videos, discussions, and readings played a large role in teachers evolving in their professional dialogue with each other and with children. Children are now invited into classroom libraries that contain multiple areas for relaxing, comfortable chairs, soft natural lighting, and organized book bins to choose books from. Students know how to select books that are interesting, relevant, and challenging from the classroom library. Students, who had not previously been successful in reading, are choosing books and staying with the same book since they are motivated and engaged. Students now read for meaning as opposed to being word callers. They recommend books to each other and ask for more independent reading time. Scripted reading instruction has been replaced with a beginning reading workshop approach.

The goal for the first year was to have teachers try and facilitate a whole group mini lesson followed by students reading independently for increasingly extended periods of time. Guided reading was replaced with individual conferring that was targeted toward individual student needs. Teachers developed closer relationships with their readers as a result of the one-on-one conferring. A veteran teacher summed it up by stating, "I always prided myself on knowing my students, but I'm embarrassed to look back and realize that I never knew them as readers. I now think of specific readers when I find a good book for our classroom library." Literacy centers were replaced with extended time and opportunities to read and write in authentic contexts. When I walk the halls during reading instruction, I now see and hear students reading as opposed to teacher talk. Further work is still needed to assess long-term implications as to whether or not the students (and teachers) will continue to be avid readers and experience reading growth.

Summary

Primary students deserve teachers who are reading experts. The teachers at Lion Elementary learned to recognize themselves as readers and use their own reading experiences to assist and model strategies for their students. There are no one-size-fits-all approaches to the teaching of reading. Reading is highly individualized to the needs of each student. Lion Elementary School teachers added breadth and depth to their teaching of reading repertoire and now have the decision making ability to discern which instructional strategies to use and why. Professional development will continue to provide frequent opportunities for practice and refinement of new skills, ways to create and maintain a literate environment, and increasing respectful and accountable dialogue. The primary teachers of Lion Elementary School have expressed a desire to continue learning about effective and evidence based reading instruction. It is their goal that the reading program will continue to heal and flourish over the next several years as a result of sound instructional decisions.

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How Close is Close Reading?

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Abstract

Close Reading is a strategy that can be used when reading challenging text. This strategy requires teachers to provide scaffolding, and create opportunities for think-alouds and rereading of text in order to help students become active readers who focus on finding text-based support for their answers. In addition, teachers must also be aware of the risks as well as the benefits of using Close Reading to make wise instructional decisions.

Keywords: close reading, scaffolding, comprehension

Introduction

Close Reading is a strategy that can be used to understand challenging text (Boyles, 2012/2013; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Close Reading comprehension involves the reader developing a deeper understanding of text, not a quick read for the gist of the passage (Shanahan, 2012).

Close Reading requires both the teacher and the student to analyze a reading passage and examine it for details, some of which include understanding how the text works, the author's message, providing text evidence to support thoughts and predictions the reader is developing, and making connections between the reader and the text itself (Frey & Fisher 2013; Shanahan, 2012). By working with Close Reading techniques, picking critical parts of the text to take a close look at and being able to think analytically teachers provide students with a foundation for developing critical thinking skills.

Supporting Educators

There are many organizations, such as the International Reading Association (IRA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and Foundation for Critical Thinking (FCT) that provide guidance for the teacher in addressing reading, writing, speaking/listening, language, foundational skills as well as literacy in history/social studies, science and technical

subjects. These organizations provide comprehensive resources for teachers to understand how to incorporate Close Reading strategies and activities into the daily lessons. They also help teachers to gain a strong repertoire of teaching strategies to meet the needs of their students.

Teacher's Knowledge

First, teachers need to understand the purpose of the readings they have chosen for their students (Lapp, Moss, Johnson, & Grant, 2012). Teachers ask themselves: What is their goal for using this particular piece of text within their content area? What is the author's purpose for writing this piece of text? Do the two complement one another or are they contrary to one another?

Secondly, teachers guide their students beyond that first impression of the text. Skimming and scanning are good techniques but not when doing a close read. Questions are formulated and answers sought to those questions during the close read. Time for discussion and interaction with the text provides students with the opportunity to see how their peers create meaning. These systematic and explicit teaching of concepts is planned so that a logical progressive sequence is in place to outline for students how to attack a close read (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

Instructional Approach

Over the last decade, teachers have been using the transactional reader response approach (Rosenblatt, 1968) to activate schema (Anderson, 1977) in order to promote understanding by developing meaningful connections and creating metacognitive readers (Flavell, 1979). However, this approach "left readers with the notion that the text was simply a launching point for their musings, images that popped into their heads, and random questions that, in the end, did little to enhance their understanding of the text" (Boyles, 2012/2013, para. 6).

Using Close Reading procedures, teachers need to change their instructional practices (Boyles, 2012/2013; Frey & Fisher, 2012). Teachers work with finding text-based answers and using evidence based conversations to find thoughtful, precise answers to questions. Here teachers focus on helping students read carefully to draw evidence and knowledge from the text. This close read requires students to examine texts of adequate range and complexity while being taught strategies to develop understanding and comprehension (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p.1).

In Close Reading, the teacher's focus is not on the amount of reading the student is doing but on the difficulty of that reading. Support is provided through scaffolded instruction (Vygotsky, 1987) and think alouds (Saye & Brush, 2002; Holton & Clarke, 2006) to help students attain meaning from the text. The goal is to give students the responsibility to be active participants in constructing their understanding of the read text, for the rereading of text, each time discussing a different idea and/or question, and getting students excited and thinking about points of view and text support. In addition, vocabulary is stressed, not as memorized words, but as a way to access words that are often encountered but again, may not be understood (Lapp, Moss, Johnson, & Grant, 2012).

Close Reading in the Classroom

Close Reading encourages students to develop a deeper understanding of challenging text they are required to read. Teachers guide students through the meaning of text layer by layer. Importantly, and almost contrary to popular teaching practices, introductions are not frontloaded. All too often we strive to build students background knowledge about a topic to the point where

reading the text is no longer necessary to gain the information for the lesson. According to Fisher and Frey (2012) “teachers must be aware of the risks as well as the benefits of pre-teaching to make wise instructional decisions about when and why they can judiciously use it. Pre-teaching should be avoided when planning inquiry-based instruction and close reading of a complex text (p.84).”

With Close Reading, teachers provide enough information to begin the reading but not so much information that students do not need to read the text. Teachers plan in depth stopping points throughout the text to examine and discuss pivotal moments crucial to developing that understanding of the authors meaning (Allam, 2012). Key terms, phrases, vocabulary and authors purpose are noted and examined based on the evidence presented within the text (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). Finally, teachers ask students to write about their interaction developing even deeper understanding of the material.

Close Reading and Gradual Release of Responsibility

The gradual release of responsibility, a theoretical model for instruction proven effective for improving literary achievement (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978), sets the stage to explain how to deliver a close reading lesson. Teachers begin by modeling for students what they eventually want students to be able to do by the end of the lesson. As seen in Figure 1, teachers teach “to” the students by offering direct explanation for how to attack the reading, explaining how “I do” the reading. Teachers use model text to work through the written text verbalizing their thinking and marking notations in the manuscript for students to see a representation of what is happening with the teachers thought process. Students are watching how this process unfolds.

Next, teachers move toward working “with” students and this Close Reading process. Here students collaborate with the teacher as “we do” the work together. Students try out their thinking and practice what they have seen the teacher do via think alouds. This guided practice is a time for reteaching as the student and teacher work together to construct the meaning of the text. Slowly the responsibility of developing meaning moves toward the responsibility of the student.

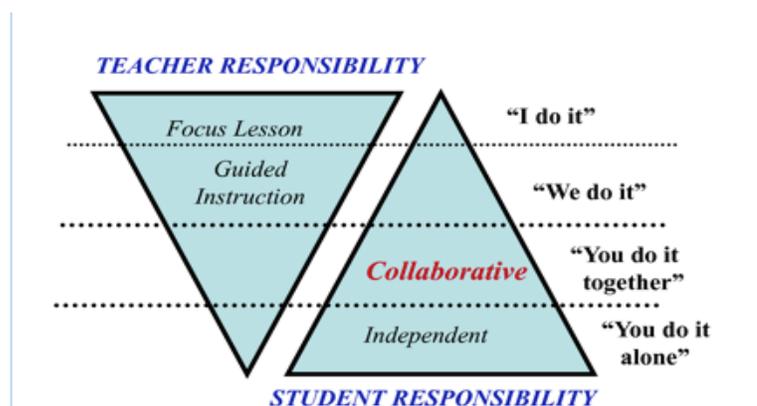


Figure 1. Gradual Release Model (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Student collaboration with his peers marks the “you do it” portion of the instruction as students work together to think through their new learning. A large part of developing this new knowledge is hammered out as the student works and has conversations with peers. This student conversation helps to clarify misunderstandings and allows student’s time to process the text. As the conversation unfolds, teachers can circulate around the room listening in on the dialogue to help refine the thinking process of the students. This guided practice time is valuable for both student and teacher as students gain a better understanding of what is happening within the context of the passages being read and teachers gain a better understanding of what is happening with the students thinking (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Marzano, 2007; Zeleman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

Finally it is time for the application of this new learning. Now students will work independently. Here teachers work “by” the side of the student as the student takes control of the understanding, “does it alone,” and shows that he knows how to process text. Teachers stand by watching the thinking unfold as the students take complete ownership for understanding the text.

Direct Strategy Instruction

“Close Reading and gathering knowledge from specific texts should be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments. Reading strategies should work in the service of reading comprehension (rather than an end unto themselves) and assist students in building knowledge and insight from specific texts. To be effective, instruction should occur when they illuminate specific aspects of a text” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 9). To achieve this goal there are techniques teachers can offer students through direct instruction using the gradual release model that will make teaching how to do a close reading more manageable (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Zeleman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). When students practice these strategies they begin to embed them in their everyday reading, as they become more proficient readers.

Exemplary reading practices include direct instruction of reading strategies. This direct instruction teaches students that when offering answers to questions, the reader needs to be able to cite and refer back to specific lines in a text as support for their thinking. To accomplish this goal, there are some very easy, commonly used techniques that can be stressed and practiced each time a student begins a close read.

First, teachers can help students by numbering each paragraph, section or stanza in the left hand margin so students can easily refer back to the text for evidence for answers and their classmates can locate the place in the text to which is being referred. This simple act of numbering points all readers to the same area of text when it is referenced during a discussion. Finding the specific evidence that is being referenced becomes much easier when all readers are working with numbered text allowing students to focus on the discussion, not get lost in trying to locate the information.

A second strategy that teachers can offer students is showing them how to chunk their text. Full text can be overwhelming, especially for students that struggle. According to Marzano (2007) students can only process so much new information at one time, but when you present smaller ‘chunks’ of information that information becomes easier to process. By drawing a horizontal line between chunks of paragraphs the text becomes more manageable. When this skill is first introduced to students the teacher can chunk the text before handing out the assignment. The more familiar the students are with the content the larger the chunk can be. Then as the year progresses the teacher can tell the students which paragraphs they should chunk

and finally students can chunk the text on their own. It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to chunk the text, but we do want our students to be able to justify why they chose the chunks they did.

“How Does a Hurricane Form?”

Hurricanes are the most awesome, violent storms on Earth. They form near the equator over warm ocean waters. ⁴ Actually, ² the term hurricane is used only for the large storms that form over the Atlantic Ocean or eastern Pacific Ocean. ¹ *I don't live near the equator and I have hurricanes*

The generic, scientific term for these storms, wherever they occur, is tropical cyclone. ¹ Other names they are given, depending on where in the world they are born, are typhoons, cyclones, severe tropical cyclones, or severe cyclonic storms. ² *Damaging like the roller coaster?*

Whatever they are called, the same forces and conditions are at work in forming these giant storms, which all can cause damage or devastation when they hit land where people live. *SANDY!!!*

² *What are the ingredients?* *two ingredients*

Tropical cyclones are like engines that require warm, moist air as fuel. So the ^{#1} first ingredient needed for a tropical cyclone is warm ocean water. ¹ That is why tropical cyclones form only in tropical regions where the ocean is at least 80 F for at least the top 50 meters (about 165 feet) below the surface. *warm air*

³ *What is the process?* *The process*

The ^{#2} second ingredient for a tropical cyclone is wind. In the case of hurricanes that form in the Atlantic Ocean, the wind blowing westward across the Atlantic from Africa provides the necessary ingredient. As the wind passes over the oceans surface, water evaporates (turns into water vapor) and rises. ² As it rises, the water vapor cools, and condenses back into large water droplets, forming large cumulonimbus clouds. *moves west*

These clouds are just the beginning.

⁴

Meteorologists have divided the development of a tropical cyclone into four stages: ¹ Tropical disturbance, ² tropical depression, ³ tropical storm, and ⁴ full-fledged tropical cyclone. ***

⁵ *1 2 3 4*

Figure 2. Modeling Coding of Text (Expeditionary Learning, 2013).

Another valuable Close Reading strategy to teach students is how to code text. Student’s code text when they underline and circle with a purpose, highlight or use sticky notes to flag ideas. Asking students to code text such as underline the important information, is a vague statement. When given a directive such as this, students are not looking for concrete ideas with which they can identify. It is important to direct students to learn how to code very specific items. The focus should be on information you want the students to take away from the text.

They should be looking for specific elements within the text and those elements will change depending on the task they are given.

One way to code text is to use pre-taught symbols (Zeleman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). For example, when studying argument students can use a check mark for what they already know and a question mark by something that raises a question. They can also use double question marks when a statement confuses them as well as a star for something that seems important to their reading and/or an exclamation point for something new or interesting. In addition, students can underline statements by the author that support their thinking. When working with poetry students could underline the sentences that provide imagery. When working with key terms students could underline definitions found within the text, or circle strategic terms or repeated words throughout the text. When coding text with a purpose teachers are helping students focus their attention on an area that is more specific than just the important information (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Text coding can continue with margin notes- marking notations in the passages' margins, as another close reading strategy. Instead of telling students to make notes in the margin tell students to use the left side margin to answer a particular question, compare/contrast characters, etc. for each chunk of text. Demonstrate for students how to do this with a short sentence or a small visual. In the right hand margin model for students how to summarize each chunk in one or two words using a descriptive word to illustrate what the author is writing about. Use sticky notes if the students cannot write on the text or provide a bookmark with chunks pre-outlined so students can follow along as they read and annotate. Figure 2 is an example of a piece of text that has undergone a close read.

Text Dependent Questions

Using Close Reading strategies will allow students to answer questions with evidence directly from their text, no longer relying solely on information from outside resources (Boyles, 2012/2013). Using these strategies teachers can help students move away from reading for a general understanding of the material to delving deeper into the text to determine items such as author's purpose, inferences, opinions and arguments. Using Close Reading strategies requires students to use the content of the material to develop understanding.

When developing questions for close reading, teachers want to move beyond the general gist of the passage to focus on more in-depth understanding. Questions developed should require the reader to:

- Return to the passage to find supporting evidence for their thinking.
- Locate details required for understanding the text. These details should build toward the essential understanding of the passage as a whole.
- Examine the text structure of sentences throughout the passage. The structure of these sentences will give the reader a better understanding of the author's message if they understand how the sentence is constructed (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

The types of questions developed by the teacher will also lead students into the practice of reading. For example, if a teacher asks all literal questions, then students will do a very surface read of the material skimming and scanning for answers. However, if a teacher asks questions that require a student to synthesize information from different sources to arrive at a conclusion then students will be required to do a close read. This higher order thinking will be

accomplished when we ask students to examine selected passages within their text and help guide them to find that information through strategy instruction and questioning.

Conclusion

The use of strategies and questioning outlined above help students understand how Close Reading of text helps them to gain a deeper understanding of the content being read. Close Reading allows challenging text to be chunked into manageable pieces for rereading and in-depth study. Using strategies, such as formulating questions, analyzing key events, analyzing text structures, determining word meanings, determining central idea, drawing inferences, determining why the author wrote the text, and evaluating the text with what we already know enables students to think more deeply about their reading and in turn enhance their discussions with peers while returning to the text to cite evidence to support their thinking (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Thus, Close Reading strategies help students read to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension. As students practice this close reading, they develop a model within their thinking that will enable them to apply this new skill to other texts (Boyles, 2012/2013; Frey & Fisher, 2013). Close Reading will provide our students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be career and/or college ready (Achieve, 2014), as Close Reading provide a foundation for developing critical thinking (Critical Thinking Community, 2013).

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Submission Guidelines for the Texas Journal of Literacy Education (TJLE)

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All original literacy related submissions that are not under consideration for publication elsewhere are welcomed and encouraged. Submissions may be sent electronically as an email attachment to talejournal@gmail.com at any time with subject line: TJLE Submission. Please prepare two files: a blinded manuscript and a cover letter. Blinded manuscripts must:

- Include the title of the work
- be written in 12-point font, double-spaced, preferably Microsoft Word;
- follow APA (6th edition) formatting guidelines;
- be between 3,000 and 6,000 words, including main text and all references;
- include an abstract of 100 words or less (research submissions only);
- have all references to author(s) removed by referring to your own and to coauthors' published work simply with "Author (year)" in text and in reference list (that is, delete publication titles), and mask any city, state, institutional affiliation, or links to personal websites.

Guidelines for images include:

- tables should be embedded in the manuscript and figures should also be formatted as be submitted as separate, original image files (e.g., jpg, pdf, tif, eps) with a resolution of at least 300 dpi;
- Photo and work sample submissions must include a completed Photo / video release form.

Cover letter should include:

- the title of your submission
- your name and affiliation (as you would have them published) and your mailing and e-mail addresses and any coauthors should be listed in preferred order, with name, affiliation, and contact information

Manuscripts submitted to the TJLE are first reviewed internally by the co-editors. If it is determined that a manuscript fulfills the mission of the journal, it is sent to at least two peer reviewers for review. Our current acceptance rate is about 45%. The decision-making process is 4-6 weeks from submission deadlines. Publication date of accepted manuscripts is determined primarily by the amount of material already awaiting publication.

Criteria for evaluating manuscripts are:

1. Relevance and applicability to Texas educators
2. Clarity of writing
3. Blend of theory and practice;
4. Content- accurate and well-reasoned

Next submission deadline is January 31, 2015.