

The Effect of Student Sharing on Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

One of the elements of effective literacy instruction is to provide the opportunity for every child to talk with peers about reading (Allington & Gabriel 2012). Book clubs and literature circles have become very popular for students as well as adults. The sharing of literature offers social opportunities that many readers enjoy.

Third grade readers are typically transitioning in their reading from early reading, which involves implementing decoding skills, to reading with fluency and a confidence in understanding how text works. They are reading with automaticity and at a good pace, while developing strategies to figure out most words. The increase in the ability to read with fluency allows transitional readers to move toward comprehending increasingly more difficult text. As a third grade teacher I questioned how an increase in the amount of time spent sharing about what students are reading would affect reading comprehension in third grade readers. This study explores the effect of a structured time for transitioning third grade readers to share about what they have read on the growth in their reading comprehension skills.

The targeted students in this study are those in my third grade classroom who are performing at the benchmark reading level, as defined by the Lead 21 curriculum. At the conclusion of the eight-week period, which incorporated daily reading and having book talks as part of the language arts block, the results showed that the targeted benchmark readers had a combined growth in reading scores of 11.3%. At the conclusion of the study I believe that the time third grade benchmark reading students

spent sharing about what they are reading was valid use of instructional time that helped improve reading comprehension.

Literature Review

In the article, *Every Child, Every Day*, Allington (2012) points to the fact that having time to talk is one of the most underused strategies for furthering students in their reading ability. Sharing about what students are reading costs nothing but time. The benefits to students include increased comprehension, motivation, and even language competence (Allington 2012).

Lifelong readers, after finishing a book, share ideas with other readers, make recommendations to friends, read another book connected in some way to the one read, or simply move on to something else. If teachers wish to create lifelong readers in students, they must consider applying the same principles to their students that they enjoy themselves. Providing time to discuss reading is essential to students. Teachers often provide students with worksheets and project activities following reading assignments that take more time than the actual reading itself. Time is of the essence with the many curriculum demands in today's classroom. If we, as teachers, wish to create lifelong readers in our students we should consider implementing the principles we enjoy ourselves (Serafini 2011).

It is important for educators today to help students develop deeper - level thinking skills. The ability for students to comprehend what they are reading is essential in this development. In the article, *Reading Comprehension: What Every Teacher Needs to Know*, McLaughlin (2012) states that in current thinking, reading comprehension is

viewed as the construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communicative context. The presumption here is that meaning resides in the intentional problem-solving, thinking processes of the interpreter during such an interchange, that the content of meaning is influenced by that person's prior knowledge and experience, and that the message so constructed by the receiver may or may not be congruent with the message sent. (McLaughlin, 2012).

Through conversation based on reading activities students have the opportunity to deepen their comprehension of the material read. Comprehension depends, in part, on personal experiences. By offering students opportunities for conversation in the classroom, teachers can easily help their students deepen their comprehension skills because students may now form expanded ideas through considering the insights of others. Information is synthesized as new information is attached to existing ideas through student conversations (Ketch 2005). Reading and discussing with peers what they have read helps students develop background knowledge that can scaffold independent reading and sustain engagement (McGill– Franzen 2003).

Book talks offer students the opportunity to develop intellectual skills. Through participation in challenging discussions, students come to know they have the capability to undertake the rigorous work of intellectual inquiry. The goal of book discussions is to internalize thought and interpretative response, but in order to achieve that end, a supportive context must be created that furthers students' opportunities and abilities to

observe, communicate, and receive feedback on their literary thoughts, decisions, and choices (Wiebe and Englert, 2005).

Book discussions led by students, rather than teachers, can allow students to engage in exploratory thinking, resulting in more extended and more elaborate mental representations and higher level analytical thinking, as well as, to improve communication skills and attitudes toward reading. Researchers and practitioners point out that as long as students are provided instruction and modeling in effective group process and have interaction guidelines, topics to discuss, and tasks to complete student-led discussions can be quite productive (Worthy, 1998).

Reciprocal teaching is a research based instructional strategy, which supports book talks and their ability to increase student reading comprehension. In the Reciprocal Teaching method students become the teacher in small group reading sessions. Teachers model, then help students learn to guide group discussions. It helps encourage students to think about their own thought process during reading. It helps students learn to be actively involved and monitor their comprehension as they read, and it teaches students to ask questions during reading. Reciprocal teaching involves lots of discussion among students, and focuses on the “fab four” – predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. Face – to – face sharing is one of the implementations of reciprocal teaching (Stricklin 2011).

Ardith Davis Cole confirms the need for sharing in her book, *Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye*. She also suggests having students sit facing each other while discussing with formal discussion rules (Cole 2003). As Cole affirms in *Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye*, students today

rarely spend traditional family time around the dinner table with authentic conversation taking place. It is necessary for teachers to first help students understand what true discussion looks and sounds like. It is also necessary to help students facilitate authentic conversation by providing them with structures. Post-reading prompts may help students initiate their book discussions. Blum, Koskinen, Punima, and Hluboky (2010) suggest prompts in the article *Thinking and Talking About Books: Using Prompts to Stimulate Discussion*:

- Tell me in your own words what happened in the book.
- Talk about your favorite parts.
- This book reminds me of . . .
- Add something new to the book.

In the article *Promoting Talk: A Framework for Reading Discussions in Teacher Education Courses*, Susan Chambers Cantrell (2002) offered the acronym C. A. R. D. as a framework to help students facilitate literary discussions.

C - Students choose their own reading material.

A – Students use active reading techniques, such as underlining, highlighting, or taking notes on important parts of the text.

R – Students react to the text by creating a written response.

D – Students discuss with others about what they have read (Cantrell, 2002.)

Research shows that it is necessary to establish protocols for student sharing time. These protocols must include structures for how and what students will share, as well as rules for the sharing time. Children are more apt to understand and respect rules

they help make, and it's important that everyone has a voice in the construction of what it means to be a safe, caring, and respectful community (Denton and Kriete 2000).

The task of switching between writing, speaking, reading, and listening helps students to make connections, and solidify the skills they use in each. The rewards of increased student engagement, leading to increased time spent reading and a furthering of background knowledge that serves to improve student reading comprehension, certainly appears to be a great benefit for the minimal time necessary to accommodate student literary discussions in the classroom schedule (Allington, 2012).

Research indicates that by providing time for students to read and then discuss with their peers what they have read, engagement in literary activities will lead to increased reading comprehension in elementary students. As Cantrell concludes:

Sharing what has been read with those who have not read the text also has benefits for both the readers and the recipients. Readers can further synthesize the text as they extract the most important points to share. Furthermore, class members who have not read the text are introduced to additional resources that they might wish to explore independently (Cantrell 2002, p.4).

Methodology

The sharing of literature offers social opportunities that many readers enjoy. Yet, I have found in my third grade general education classroom that in order to meet the rigors required by the curriculum, offering students' time to share about what they have read is often eliminated. The impetus for action research in regard to student

sharing about what they have read came from my earlier first grade teaching experience.

While seeking to engage a group of my high - level first grade readers, I found a group of graphic novels. The novels were presented to my group of high - level readers in their guided reading group for independent reading. The students thoroughly enjoyed reading them. I observed the initial group of students talking with each other about the novels, and sharing them with friends in other reading groups. By the recommendations of the original group of students, almost all of the students in the class asked if they, too, could read the books. I wondered if the same enthusiasm for sharing books would be evident in my third grade classroom, and what effect the sharing would have on reading comprehension.

Common Core Standards

In all areas of my teaching it is essential for me to ensure that my classroom instruction meets the requirements of the Common Core Standards. Forty-six states and the District of Colombia have adapted the Common Core State Standards as of 2014. The Common Core Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills that students need in English language arts and mathematics by grade level that are intended to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. As I approached the implementation of my research project in my third grade classroom I had to examine whether the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts would support student sharing of reading, and if having my students share about what they were reading would help them meet the requirements of the

standards. I explored the standards to ensure that the research project would be a beneficial addition to the classroom curriculum, and be consistent with the objectives set forth in the standards (http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn_ccss). The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts found to support my research:

Standard (SL.3.1) – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Standard (SL.3.1a) – Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

Standard (SL.3.1b) – Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

Standard (SL.3.1c) – Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others.

Standard (SL.3.1d) – Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion (http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn_ccss.)

After ensuring that my research would meet with a number of the Common Core Standards, I sought and received permission from my administrator to begin research in my classroom. A signed consent form was also presented to and signed by all of the guardians of my students.

As a third grade teacher, I realize that benchmark third grade readers, as defined by the Lead 21 curriculum, are typically reading with automaticity, which frees them to focus on comprehending the text. While considering the experience with first grade students, I realized that having a structured time for third grade students to share about what they read may have a positive effect on my benchmark third grade readers’

growth in their reading comprehension skills. In order to ensure the students time to engage in authentic conversations about reading, I made a conscious choice to implement student discussion based on reading activities into the daily language arts instruction block for all of the third grade students in my general education classroom. All general education students in the third grade classroom participated in the book talks.

As a regular part of the Lead 21 curriculum, which is the school district's approved curriculum, a reading pre-assessment was given to all of the general education students in my classroom. This pre-assessment is used to place students in differentiated reading groups. The information gathered from the assessment was used to identify students reading at the benchmark level, as indicated in the Lead 21 curriculum. The seven identified students were targeted for data collection in the research project. The assessment data collected would serve to answer the question:

How would an increase in the amount of time spent sharing about what students are reading affect reading comprehension in benchmark level third grade students?

Protocols for Sharing

When first considering having students share about what they were reading, I made an appointment with the reading specialist at my school to discuss the research idea. Ms. Jensen agreed with Cole's observation (see p.2) that reading discussions among students are important and often the first thing to be cut from the class schedule. She also presented me with some good points to consider. Ms. Jensen pointed to the fact that many students today have few opportunities to engage in authentic

conversation of any form. She suggested that it might be necessary to provide structures for the students to follow while sharing about their reading (personal interview, March 25, 2013).

The study was explained to the students in the third grade classroom. Together the students and teacher created rules for the sharing time. The rules were posted in the classroom. The student reading share time was now referred to as “book talks.” The students modeled and practiced the book talk procedures. The book talk rules included:

- **KKEE-sit knee to knee and eye to eye**
- **Use a low voice level, use polite words**
- **Stay on topic**
- **Stay in one spot**
- **Share the whole time**
- **Take turns, be patient**
- **Focus on the speaker**

All students were given graphic organizers with book talk discussion prompts: Characters, Setting, Main Events of the story, Big Idea of the Text, Tell Other Things That Happened, Tell Something You Noticed, Tell How the Text Made You Feel, Make a Connection. (Appendix 1) The student/teacher generated rules and graphic organizers helped to inform the question: **What kind of protocols are necessary for sharing in order to increase students’ sharing success?**

The materials used in the study consisted of chart paper and markers for writing and posting the book talk rules. Graphic organizers to assist student in book talks, and

the Lead 21 Third Grade Assessment Tests – Pre-Assessment, Unit 1, and Unit 2, comprehension sections.

For eight weeks, students met daily at the end of the language arts block, in the third grade classroom, to share what they had read. The students used book talk graphic organizers and followed the book talk rules to format sharing time.

After four weeks of student book talks the Lead 21 - Unit 1 assessment was given. Data from the comprehension section of the test was collected and tracked on the targeted students. Daily reading and book talks continued in this third grade classroom. At eight weeks the Lead 21 - Unit 2 assessment was given. The scores from the comprehension section of the test were collected and tracked on the targeted students.

Participants and Setting

The Osceola School District is located in the Western Wisconsin community of Osceola. The population of the Osceola School District is 1700 students. The students are relatively homogenous, consisting of .4% American Indian, 1.5% Asian, .7% Black, 2.1% Hispanic and 95.2% White students. The percentage of white students has continued to decrease by a small percentage each year over the last ten years. Currently, 28% of students are eligible for subsidized breakfast and lunch. Students with disabilities comprise approximately 13.6% of the Elementary, Intermediate, Middle School, and High School population.

This research was conducted in my general education third grade classroom. The students in the classroom are generally eight to nine years old. The number of

students in my class was twenty-one. The targeted students in this study were the seven students who scored in the benchmark range, as indicated by the comprehension section of the Lead 21 Third Grade Pre-Assessment. The setting of the research project was my general education third grade classroom in the school district's Intermediate School.

Procedures

As a part of the language arts block in my general education classroom students read daily. At the end of the language arts block each day, students followed classroom produced procedures as they met to discuss what they had read. The students used classroom-generated rules and a graphic organizer (Appendix 1) to format book talks. I collected data on targeted benchmark readers through the Lead 21 assessment tests – Pre-Assessment, Unit 1, and Unit 2, comprehension sections.

Data Analysis

Although all general education students in my third grade classroom participated in student sharing of reading through book talks on a daily basis as part of the Language Arts instruction block, only the data of students scoring in the benchmark level, as indicated by the Lead 21 Pre-Assessment, was tracked. Data was collected over an eight-week period of time. The data collected was a Pre-Assessment comprehension test, a Unit 1 comprehension assessment at week four, and a Unit 2 comprehension post assessment at week eight.

Findings and Results

Student	Lead 21 Comprehension Pre-Assessment	Lead 21 Comprehension Unit 1 Assessment	Percentage of Growth Unit 1	Lead 21 Comprehension Unit 2 Assessment	Percentage of Growth Unit 2
#6	83	85	+2.4%	80	-3.7%
#10	80	80	0%	90	+12.5%
#12	83	80	-3.6%	95	+14.5%
#17	77	90	+16.9%	80	+3.9%
#18	77	75	-2.6%	75	-2.6%
#19	60	90	+50%	75	+25%
#20	63	65	+3.2%	90	+42.9%
Pre-Assessment Targeted Students Class Average		Unit 1 Targeted Students Class Average		Percentage of Growth Pre-Assessment to Unit 1	
75%		81%		8%	
Unit 1 Targeted Students Class Average		Unit 2 Targeted Students Class Average		Percentage of Growth Unit 1 to Unit 2	
81%		83.5%		1.3%	
Pre-Assessment Targeted Students Class Average		Unit 2 Targeted Students Class Average		Percentage of Growth Pre-Assessment to Unit 2	
75%		83.5%		11.3%	

Interpretations

Five of the seven-targeted, or 71% of the targeted students, showed a positive growth from the Pre-assessment comprehension test to the Unit 2 test. Two of the seven-targeted, or 29% of the targeted students, showed a decline in their skills. In the first four weeks of the study the Unit 1 comprehension test scores showed four of seven, or 57% of the targeted students had a positive growth, one student remained the same, and two of seven, or 29% of the targeted students showed a decline in their skills.

Overall, the class-combined percentage of growth was 11.3% from the Pre-Assessment comprehension test to the Unit 2 comprehension test. This growth was typical of the students at other reading levels in the class.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to the research seemed to be time. The curriculum requirements of the third grade classroom are very demanding. Often the time allotment for the book talks was only five minutes per day. I would have liked to have more time for students to elaborate and share ideas on their reading in book talks.

Although I observed the students enjoying the daily book talks, I also noted that the students were beginning to become bored with the structure of the book talks. I decided that it was necessary to provide new and exciting ways to share, in order to keep third grade students' interest. I provided the students with a more engaging graphic organizer during the middle part of the research. The new graphic organizer had similar book talk discussion prompts, but the organizer allowed the students to roll a dice to indicate which area of a book talk the student would share. (Appendix 2)

For example:

- Roll 1 - What is the story mostly about?
- Roll 2 - Who are the main characters?
- Roll 3 - Where does the story take place?
- Roll 4 - When does the story take place?
- Roll 5 - What happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?
- Roll 6 - What questions do you have about the story?

The students loved the new graphic organizer. They often asked for dice and the new organizer in order to conduct their book talks.

Conclusions/Discussion

Although some of the targeted students made individual gains and some of the targeted students had a decline in their skills, overall the research data shows that as a class the targeted benchmark students showed a combined growth of 11.3% from the Pre-Assessment comprehension test to the Unit 2 comprehension test. This growth in student achievement serves to answer the question: **How would an increase in the amount of time spent sharing about what students are reading affect reading comprehension in benchmark level third grade readers?** It is evident that meeting daily to have book talks does have a positive effect on reading comprehension scores of benchmark level third grade students.

Because this study was not a controlled study, the results are not conclusive as to the extent the book talks had on the positive growth in student test scores. All of the third grade students also received daily literacy instruction using the Lead 21 curriculum during the research time.

At the conclusion of the study the students were asked for their comments in regard to how they felt about the book talks. I was very pleased by the comments my students made in regard to their feelings about the book talks. Their comments confirmed my hypothesis that sharing about what they had read would help students become more engaged in reading, which, as the research shows, helps to improve student comprehension ability.

Comments from the students included:

- “I think book talks are good because it makes you want to read more, and you find out about your partner’s book.”
- “Book talks help you understand the meaning of the book.”
- “The more you do it [book talks] the more you want to read books.”
- “It helps you learn more about the book and it makes you go deeper into the book.” “If you don’t know a lot about the book you will, if you do the book talk.”
- “ I talk about the book and it helps me understand.”
- “Book talk = FUN!”
- “Book talks help me because they help me learn more.”
- “Book talks will encourage you to read, and you will have a better future.”

Implications for Further Research

The third grade students were very enthusiastic about the time they spent sharing with each other about what they had read. It would be interesting to know how book talks would affect the comprehension scores of third grade students in other differentiated reading levels both lower and higher. Another area of further research may be to consider the amount of time students spend in authentic discussion about their reading (McIntyre, 2007). Would increasing the amount of time students have to share about their reading increase reading comprehension? Would this deeper engagement in reading improve their academics in literary subjects as well as other content areas? It would also be interesting to research what the effect would be of daily book talks on the comprehension scores of students at other grade levels? Would book

talks be an effective tool for helping students at the secondary level comprehend literary texts as well as texts in content areas?

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Appendix 1

Characters	Setting
Main Events of the Story	Big Idea of the Text
Tell Other Things That Happened	Tell Something You Noticed
Tell How the Text Made You Feel	Make a Connection

Appendix 2



roll & retell

-  What is the story mostly about?
-  Who are the main characters?
-  Where does the story take place?
-  When does the story take place?
-  What happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?
-  What questions do you have about the story?

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