How to Structure Reader's Workshop to Make Learning Visible to Both Teacher and Student

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A Master's Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education-Reading

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Major Advisor's signature

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Date

University of Wisconsin-River Falls 2016

Abstract

This study focused on how to structure conferring during reader's workshop. It took place in a Twin Cities suburb over the course of nine weeks in an 8th grade classroom. Students and staff were already familiar with reader's workshop because it was implemented in the district three years ago. During the study, there were four main types of conferences that were addressed: reading habits, skills based, reading log, and monthly reflection conferences. Incorporating different conference styles helps teachers set up an organized method of conferring, so learning is visible to both teacher and student. This study used qualitative methods including observations of students reading, reading habits surveys, conferring notes, formative assessments of Post-It thinking stacks, learning targets, and student reflections. This study yielded the ability to meet with significantly more students than without the structured workshop, and students felt that they had grown more than they had in previous years.

Introduction

In the two years that I have been teaching at Hastings Middle School, they have dramatically overturned their kindergarten through 8th grade ELA curriculum model by turning to a reader's workshop model using the Making Meaning curriculum instead of a classic literature textbook or basal. The middle school is composed of 1400 5th-8th grade students with a 25:1 student to teacher ratio. Since the program is fairly new, students are open to the new curriculum. Additionally, students who have had the program now for three years are more familiar with basic literary terms like exposition, conflict, resolution and making predictions. However, an area of consistent struggle students have is adding textual evidence. Classrooms are structured to allow students about fifteen to thirty minutes of individualized daily reading (IDR) with a leveled choice book. This allows teachers to conference with individual students or small groups, while direct instruction and guided practice make up the rest of the instructional period. For homework, students are required to read their IDR book for twenty to thirty minutes per night. Depending on the grade level and class, students need to meet genre requirements or a certain amount of books per month. At the eighth grade level, we require students to read between six and ten books a trimester, but it can be any genre and any book as long as it is around their reading level. A three hundred or more page book counts as two books for the first two trimesters, and two quick reads, fifty or fewer pages, count as one book. Students have to record their books on a simple reading log that includes author, title, genre, level, date started and date ended. I also require students to write a three sentence review of the book, so we have a starting talking point.

According to the standardized data collected thus far, reader's workshop has shown that it is beneficial because sixty five percent of students' 2015-2016 NWEA MAPS scores grew from

fall to winter scores, and the middle school's overall scores on their MCAs increased by four

percent in reading (62.3 percent to 66.4 percent) from 2014-2015, seven percent higher than the

state average (59 percent).

Although there is significant growth and definite increased motivation to read by

students, there are several issues that I see regarding conferencing and IDR time including

deciding what the best way to confer with students to see the most growth. While reading

"Facilitation Engagement by Differentiating Independent Reading," by Kelley and Clausen-

Grace (2009), it seemed like it would be beneficial to "label" readers on a continuum from "fake

readers", to "challenged" readers, to "engaged" readers. Simply observing and tracking students'

reading behaviors over the course of a week, allows teachers the opportunity to have a basic

reading habits conversation with students. By identifying students who are stagnant and are

reading the same book over and over again versus the students who continuously have a different

book each day, teachers can start to pull other books that might engage the particular student to

help promote growth. Therefore it is important to learn how to reach each student during

conferencing. As part of Hastings School District's literacy steering committee, I noticed many

teachers like reader's workshop, but they felt unsure of how to question students who are

exceeding and meeting grade level during conferences as well as some of their struggling

readers. During these meetings, many teachers ask what everyone else is doing when they

confer, and if their conferring style is okay. These teachers are extremely competent and

confident, but since reading workshop looks different in every classroom, it can be difficult to

know if it is "right."

Since this is my second year teaching in the district, I have had the unique opportunity to

take a half day to observe other teachers confer with students. Some teachers use this time to

reteach with small groups using Readworks articles, a leveled online reading tool, others have students sign up for conferences to discuss their books, and still others have a sort of "Skills Bingo" time where students practice reading skills on Post-Its. This shows how much variety there is with conferring and why teachers are never sure if what they are doing is the correct format.

To help teachers with the questioning and conferring process, our district was given a genre question resource book. However, it is bulky and in small print, so when I have used it in the past, part of my five minutes that I allotted to conferring with students consisted of me trying to find an appropriate question for their book that matches the genre. Sometimes I rely too much on questions like, "Tell me what is happening in your book" or "what was the conflict and how was it resolved?" I want to be able to ask deeper questions of all my students as well as provide opportunities for students to visibly show me their learning and follow-up activities for future conferences, so I know that they are actually thinking about our conference discussion while they read. Porath (2014) suggests that teachers sometimes make up "imaginary students" in front of them and project their own learning experiences onto the student. She discusses how students need to be in control of part of the conference, and teachers should allow the student to say what they want to talk about. From this, teachers can choose talking points like fluency, inferences, and predictions amongst other skills. This is because these points present a shared understanding (pp. 628-631). I think if I have a list of questions for myself to ask on top of allowing students to choose the passage they want to discuss, I can have more effective conferences because I can allow students to lead the conversation, and they will be able to discuss their thinking with me.

By using different types of conferring with students, I feel I have a structured model that I can pass onto my colleagues. Some of the styles of conferring that I tried were reading habits, student led reading log conferences, and skills based visible learning with Post-Its. The specifics of these conferences will be discussed further in the methods section. Since the goal of conferring is to help each student grow on his/her level, I believe that it is important to help students figure out reading strategies that work for them, so that when students gets stuck in a text, they have some tools to use. By teaching them how to self-reflect or use metacognitive skills, they should become better, more critical readers.

Research Question: How can I structure reader's workshop to make learning visible for both the student and teacher?

Literature Review:

For several decades, readers' workshop and conferring with students has become an increasingly popular, responsive method of teaching. As many studies concretely show, there is significant growth when time is carved out for students to discuss their current book, reading habits, reading strategies, and book preferences. Graves (1983, quoted in Akmal (2002)) states, "When the child talks, we learn….when the child talks, the child learns...and when the child talks, the teacher can help" (p. 154). When reading is silent and there is no discussion amongst the students and the teacher, it is difficult to discern whether or not there is any growth or comprehension. Since reading comprehension is less visible than the understanding of a math problem or how to write a paper, the teacher must discuss books and reading strategies with the child. Additionally, if reading conferences are commonplace in a classroom, as Robb (2006)

discusses, it becomes less of an embarrassment for the struggling reader. No one has to know

what a trial reading may be for the reader because everyone has the opportunity to discuss the

reading with the teacher. Moreover, conferring allows the teacher to meet all children's needs

and not allow the compliant, "good" children to melt into the background because the teacher

can build relationships with them (Miller and Kelley, 2014).

Part of making learning visible, is teaching kids to help students self-assess is making

learning visible to monitor growth and success. Hattie (2015) conducted a major study on visible

learning, and he states, "The Visible Learning story argues that when teachers see teaching and

learning through the eyes of their students, and when students become their own teachers then

outcomes and engagement are maximized" (p. 79). Especially at the secondary level, students

need to rely on teachers as guides, and not as the sole source of information. In order to be

successful and expound upon learning opportunities, students need to learn to self-assess where

they are at with their learning, what they do not know, and knowing how to tell if they do not

know, which is a big piece of conferring. Hattie (2013) also discusses how this can be applied

not only to struggling learners but also to proficient learners. If students are overconfident in

their prior knowledge, they will not be able to tell if a reading strategy or their comprehension of

a text is incorrect. If they are struggling learners, they will have difficulty understanding what

success looks likes, so teachers need to set "targets" with students, and they need regular

feedback to achieve this goal. I took Hattie's study to a more focused piece of conferring with

students about reading and helping them self-assess what they do and don't know because his

study focuses on many strategies and many educational settings. For example, if a student does not understand that they need to question during reading, he/she can be given a stack of Post-Its to track his/her questions while reading and bring them with the next time he/she signs up for a conference.

A critical skill for good readers is learning how to use metacognition or self-assessment while they read. As Hattie suggests, teaching all students metacognitive skills is necessary to help them find strategies for when they are stuck. This can be done through modeling thinking strategies while conferring or during whole group instruction. Joseph (2006) thoroughly discusses the necessities of teaching kids to self-assess because "the less successful kids need constant monitoring and reinforcement, and they don't trust interpretation of the text-low motivation. It also gives them the ability to recognize their weaknesses and work through shortcomings without undue frustration" (p. 33). Proficient learners already know how to use this, which is why I used them in my study. By figuring out what strategies of metacognition proficient and exceeding students are able to use, I can help students who do not meet or partially meet standards, use those same strategies.

There are several types of conferring this study used to encourage visible learning and self-assessment. At the beginning of the year, teachers can discuss reading habits with students. One way to begin identifying the types of readers in a classroom is to simply observe children reading over the course of several days. As mentioned before, teachers can assess what category a child fits into on the Kelley and Clausen-Grace's (2006) continuum of readers: fake readers,

compliant readers, challenged readers, to bookworms . It is essential to observe students over the

course of several days in order to weed out the possibility of a student simply being sick or

having an off day. After observing and noting what types of readers make up the class, teachers

can set up action plans with a student. If a student is a fake reader, a teacher can get to the

bottom of why this child is struggling, and then the teacher can help the child create a toolbox, so

he/she can be successful (Miller and Kelley, 2014). Including students is important in this

process in order to meet an adolescent student's variety of needs because successful adolescent

educators will "attend to the cognitive, personal, and social needs of the learner... because the

[relationship with the teacher] is even more critical in this age of increased student isolation and

alienation," (Akmal, 2002, p. 154). Conferencing about reading habits and having regular

conversations will help the student trust the teacher to guide him/her toward becoming a better,

more reflective reader. Teachers can also give students a reading itinerary to complete over the

course of two weeks, so they can analyze the places they read, length of time they read there, and

what they were reading to find patterns (Miller and Kelley, 2014, pp. 18-20). This is not meant

to be an assessment tool, but it is meant to help students figure out why they might like reading

at school. Some questions teachers might ask are: is it quiet there? Are other people reading, so

it makes them comfortable? How can the student recreate some of that environment outside of

school or vice versa if they prefer to read at home?

     To move beyond reading habits, teachers need to use student responses during

conferences to help students see their own growth. Using annotations or student responses can

help set a purpose to a reading conference, and Stuart Jr. (2015) talks about how annotations show "why we're doing the reading in the first place and what we're going to do with the reading after we're done." These annotations set a purpose, and again, it links to Hattie's visible learning because the teacher can show the student where to go next with a particular reading strategy, and the student can also show the teacher what he or she did not understand. For example, a teacher could have a student take an annotation deeper by having the student explain more of what he or she connected to, what other texts does it bring to mind, or what the purpose of the inference was. By having this conversation and being able to refer back to these annotations in some sort of student journal "the student will be able to work smarter" (Stuart, 2014).

One of the deeper, metacognitive conferring strategies is to have a "student led conference" where the student asks many of the questions, so they can reflect on what they are reading. They also guide the conference, so if they need to discuss the climax of the book or pick the part they liked, and then the teacher asks a few questions to help with a skill they are missing, then the student is more invested in the conference. Porath (2014) states, "Sometimes students don't fulfill their potential because the active process of conferring becomes a one-sided monologue with an imaginary, idealized student typical conference-teacher initiates conference, student responds, teacher evaluates response" (p. 67). If teachers give students a little more control of the discussion, it can help students process what they are understanding, promote metacognition, as well as give teachers more insight into the child's likes and dislikes with reading. Tovani (2015) also mentions that "when students stop asking questions, they begin

to abdicate responsibility for their learning. Instead, they sit back and let someone else do the thinking for them" (p. 32). Thinking of questions is much more difficult than just answering them. There is minimal research about teachers having students bring prepared questions to a conference, and this could be a way to help students think of critical thinking questions and have something to bring to a student led conference. Again, Tovani's approach promotes strong metacognition and helps students become better critical thinkers, but it must be slowly broached with passive learners who may be used to just being asked the questions and not annotating a text or bringing up questions themselves. She also has some critical thinking questions to follow up with students like, "What background knowledge do you have about the book, topic, author, or characters? Did you notice the title? Any ideas how it connects to the piece? What are you noticing about how the author is using time? Is he jumping forward, flashing back, or moving through events chronologically? What purpose do you think it serves? What types of reading strategies do you want to try next week?" (p. 34). By asking these questions after students have already asked theirs, it will help them continue to extend their thinking.

Although the research is abundant in conferring, an area that I'm noticing that is lacking is how to actually structure a reading workshop, so teachers have confidence in their conferring abilities as well as how to make students use more metacognitive strategies. There are so many styles of conferring with readers, but aside from questioning strategies, it feels like teachers are left with almost too much room to construct a reader's workshop.   By bridging several types of conferences together and trying to create a structure or format to it, I hope I can help other

teachers feel more confident in the process. When teachers have a concrete method to conferring versus only a list of questions to ask and the reason behind why teachers should confer, I think that students will learn more metacognitive strategies that increase their learning potential.

Theoretical Framework

Since much of what I studied is based on active engagement and learning, I used Jerome Bruner's (1957) Constructivist and Discovery Learning Theories. A primary component of this type of theory is that students make meaning themselves with teacher guidance, which is what conferring is meant to do. The students become autonomous learners because the teacher allows the student to ask questions versus the teacher being the only one with answers. It also works with a "spiral method" where learning builds upon itself, and students will be doing general reading habits types of conferences, to more dense, thoughtful conferences throughout the year. It can also spiral back to reading habits if I notice a student's progress declining. Moreover, I can help my students who are already proficient keep building on their knowledge, so they can continue to advance their learning.

Methods

This study took place at Hastings Middle School, which is a 5-8 suburban middle school, Southeast of the Twin Cities Metro. The average graduating class is 350 students with language arts class sizes ranging from twenty to forty-one. Ninety-one percent of students are White, four percent Hispanic, one percent Black and one percent Asian. Twenty-four percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. All participants that were used were given a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The focus of the study was on eight 8th graders; two from each MCA reading level: does not meet, Hans and Christina; partially meets, Leonard and Anna; meets, Mark and Jaiden; and exceeds expectations, Mason and Lucy. Participants were chosen at

random after permission slips to participate in the study were received. None of the students

used had IEPs or 504 plans.

There were several types of conferences that I used over the course of this study. The

first was an initial conference on reading habits and goals. To track student engagement while

reading, I used this independent reading time observation from Donalynn Miller's <u>Reading in the</u>

<u>Wild</u>. [See Figure 1]

Independent Reading Time Observation

Date:_____   Start Time:_____   End Time:_____

Minute	Reading	Reading	Other Observed Behaviors
1	Y	N	
2	Y	N	
3	Y	N	
4	Y	N	
5	Y	N	
6	Y	N	
7	Y	N	
8	Y	N	
9	Y	N	
10	Y	N	

Figure 1

I used a reading travels log for students to help them keep track of their distractions. [See Figure

2]

This was meant to help me see how students see themselves as readers and discuss their

SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely). We discussed what I

noticed when I observed them as a reader, what they like and dislike about reading, and why they

feel reading is important. Students also developed a goal for the trimester that they wanted to

work on. These conferences occurred for the first two weeks of school because most students

had not finished a book at this point, and I was learning about their reading style and interests.

Whenever I conferred with students, I took notes on a conference sheet or a Post-It and stuck it

to the sheet, so I could go back and look for patterns. [See Figure 2]

Reading Conference Summary Record

Student_____   Date_____
Title/Type of Text_____
Task: (e.g. reading/listening; oral/written response; independent/scaffold;
easy/average/challenging text)

	Needs Improvement	Developing	Well Done
Synthesizes Big Ideas	No synthesis of big ideas	Partial synthesis of big ideas	Synthesizes critical content
Recalls Important Information	Little if any key supporting information	Some key supporting information	Most key supporting information
Makes Inferences/Draws Conclusions	Only explicitly stated information	Some text-based inferences	Draws conclusions not explicitly in text
Recognizes reading strategies	Does not recognize reading strategies	Uses reading strategies but does not understand why he/she is using them	Uses reading strategies to advance understanding or figure out a place where the student is stuck
Able to make connections	Makes no connections or connections do not relate to text	Makes connections to self, world, or other texts	Makes connections with self, world, and other texts
Able to ask questions of the text	Asks questions but they are not relevant to the text or do not help enhance thinking	Asks questions of author, prior knowledge or character/text	Asks questions of author, prior knowledge, and of the character/information

Notes:

***Adapted from Valencia, S. (2012)
Figure 2

For two weeks following these initial reading habits and goals conferences, I had students create a reading itinerary log.   [See Figure 3].

Reading Travels Log

Beginning Date_____

End Date

Keep a list of your reading travels this week. Record every place you read and how much time you spend reading.

Date/Day_____

Place_____

Amount of Time 1-15 min. 16-30 min. 31-45 min. 46-60 min. Other

Were there any distractions:_____

Figure 3

This tracked the amount of reading time given and distractions in the class and the distractions as well as at home. The purpose of this log was to help students realize the importance of active reading and reflecting while reading as well as use it as a baseline piece of data for how to maintain focus amongst distractions. Moreover, we used this data point to notice what was the most distracting to them, so they could learn to remove themselves from those distractions if possible.

Another type of conference I used throughout was a skills based conference. There were two reasons I would have a student participate in a skills conference. One, a student may not have signed up for a conference for a few weeks, so I wanted to make sure that he/she was applying the reading skills we were implementing in class. Two, a student may have shown he/she struggled on a particular skill from a formative assessment like the learning target sheets

If I noticed a student struggled on a formative assessment, I put that work aside in a pile, so I would remember to meet with him or her. An example of something students struggled with initially was making predictions and using text evidence. With my lower four readers, I gave them a stack of Post-Its, and they wrote their predictions as well as text evidence that supported them. At times, this was to help students understand a concept and other times it was meant to help push students farther in that particular skill.

Finally, students were required to sign up for conferences when they finished a book, and these were primarily student led. During these conferences, students would bring their reading logs, which contained a book review, and as the school year progressed, I had students bring questions that they wanted to discuss versus me simply starting the conversation with, "Tell me about your book," or "Tell me a question you had." We also looked at their letters to the teacher, so I could continue to ask them about their reading habits or help them if he/she was stuck with what to discuss. For example, one of the letters to the teacher asked students to explain the difference between a critical and low level thinking question. When students brought questions up, we would analyze what category those fell into. Another way I helped students if they were stuck, is I asked them, "Why do you think that?" or "Where is the text evidence?"   I noted what each of the eight students I used for this study talked about and the frequency that they signed up for these conferences on a blank roster. The reason behind doing these types of conferences is to make sure that I am doing most of the listening versus most of the talking.

Throughout the study, students wrote reflective journals about how reader's workshop was going, how they were growing as readers, and their understanding of the unit's skill. Both examples are listed within the analysis. Some of the questions include: How have you grown as a reader over the past six weeks? What kind of reader do you think you are? What are your

strengths and weaknesses as a reader? How can you use text features in other classes? How do you choose books? I wrote letters back to them and kept copies of the letters to look for patterns in self-assessment.

To help make learning even more visible, I modeled how to use a "thinking stack" of Post-Its while reading. When we read <u>The Giver,</u> I showed students an inference I had made about my book using "a because" statement. A because statement simply reminded students that they had to make an inference, but they needed to provide a reason why they were making that inference. Then I had them make an inference about Jonas, the main character. Subsequently, I wrote a direct quote from my book that supported my opinion. Then they did the same. Finally, I wrote what I thought the inference might relate to: conflict, foreshadowing, theme, or symbolism and why. Students did the same. Although they hated doing this, they had a lot more to say, and they were able to do it with their own books. The thinking stacks were also invaluable with how to create questions and answers, predictions and text evidence, and finding examples of foreshadowing. Without keeping the stacks of Post-Its, students would not have been able to see their growth as easily. By doing this, reading became an active process and helped provide clarity to their opinions. These Post-Its were stored in students' binders in their "Reader's Thoughts" section. When I met with them again, I wrote observation notes on whether or not they were able to do deeper thinking with the strategy without my help.

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Analysis

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My analysis consisted of looking at the notes I had taken from observations and reading conferences and student work. For ease of reading, I broke the analysis down into the four

different conference types I discussed in the methods section: reading habits, skills based, reading logs, and monthly reflection conferences.   In each section, there are examples from students to support the findings.

Reading Habits Conferences:

While observing each of the eight students, the results were unsurprising. Hans continuously paused from reading to drink from a water bottle, looked around regularly, and tried to whisper to friends. He maintained about five minutes of reading time over the course of the three days I observed him. I classified him as a *challenged reader* because he wants to do well, but he struggles to maintain focus. Unsurprisingly, no one recommends books to him, he thinks the only importance of reading is to learn more words, and he has an intense dislike for reading. When we discussed what kind of reader he thought he was, he didn't think that he was a reader at all because he hates it and finding good books was difficult.   His goal was simply to read more books. When Hans tracked his distractions, he only found four over the course of the week. He wrote that only other people talking distracted him; however, I noticed significantly more distractions, which shows his lack of awareness as a reader.

Similarly, Christina, the other student who performed below average, did not distract others, but over the course of three days, she managed to only read three pages. Instead, she stared off into space and twirled her hair. On her reading survey, she stated that she also dislikes reading, but that it was important, so we could understand things. Her main goal was to read more and understand what she is reading. Since she tried to read at times and never complained or moved around, I classified her as a *challenged reader* as well because she seemed like she wanted to do well from our conversation. When Christina tracked her distractions over the course of the week, she said she got more distracted at home by her phone because she had

access to it, but she had nine distractions at school. She seemed to be slightly more aware of her difficulty with reading than Hans.

With my partially proficient readers, they read slightly more and found a little more joy in it, but they had difficulty staying actually focused. Leonard seemed to be actively reading the whole time, but he had difficulty sitting still. He would regularly tap his foot and shift in his seat, and he never managed more than four pages in ten minutes. After he took his reading survey, he said that he liked reading more than average, and he understood that he could have an easier life if he read better. His mom, librarian, and friends recommend books to him, and his goal was simply to read fluently and like it more. While tracking distractions, he was significantly more distracted at home because he had six distractions over four days at school and much of that was at play practice because of people talking. At home, he had ten distractions in 16-30 minutes of reading. Since he tried to read but was frequently distracted, I classified him as a *compliant reader.*

On the other hand, Anna despised reading. She stayed on the same two pages each day I observed her, but she knew very specific behaviors to make it look like she was reading: putting her head toward the book, her hand on her chin, and never looking at other people. When she wrote about her feelings toward reading, she just wrote how much she hates it because she has troubles, and no one ever recommends books to her. When she tried to write a goal by herself, she could not come up with one, but she at least knew that reading was a useful skill. After talking to her about her extreme aversion to reading, she explained that she mixes up words, but when I gave her a fluency check, she could read with ninety-eight percent accuracy. However, she seems to be an exceptionally slow reader, and we talked about how she does not make any time for reading at home unless it is required. While she tracked her distractions, she regularly

noted each day how she could not focus because of book conferences and at home, her pets distracted her. Since she has learned how to look like she is on task, I classified her as a *fake reader*.

Both of my proficient readers were consistently focused while reading, picked up their books when they finished work early, and found pleasure in reading. During the three days I observed Mark, he was constantly reading and engaged with his book; he was fidgety sometimes, but he never took his eyes off the page. He confirmed this when he did his reading travels log because he wrote that he had four distractions, but it was just from trying to find a good book. When the class earned choosing their own seats for reading time, he chose to lay down and read, and he has not been fidgety since. When we discussed his reading survey, he said that he liked reading a seven out of ten, but some books just aren't good. He said no one recommends books to him, but that he thinks we read to teach people how to concentrate. I found that intriguing because he is extremely focused when he is working on any task, including reading, and he associates that with the purpose. His goal was to read harder books than last year, so he has been reading more science fiction books like The Maze Runne*r* by James Dashner and poetry like Crossover by Alexander Kwame instead of Mike Lupica books. From watching him initially, I would have said he was a *stuck-in-one-genre reader*, but now I would say he is a *bookworm.*

Similarly, Jaiden is probably my most active reader that I have all day. She comes in at 7:30 in the morning and reads until the bell rings, through morning meeting, and through our independent reading time. Whenever she finishes work early, she always picks up her book and even tries to sneakily read. Clearly she does not get distracted easily and only had one distraction because of her book conference. On her reading survey, she rated reading a ten out of ten because it takes you to another place, gives you empathy for others, and she likes shipping

couples, a slang term that describes rooting for a particular couple to fall in love and stay together. She was one of the only students who wrote that reading is important for jobs in the future because no one will hire someone who cannot read well. Her friends and family recommend books to her, and her big goal was to learn more words. Clearly, she can be classified as a *bookworm.*

Interestingly, my students who exceeded expectations on their MCAs seemed to be less focused than my proficient readers. During my three day observation, Mason kept trying to whisper to his friends, so he kept having to move during reading time away from them and was reminded of the deadline for reading logs. He also kept staring off into space without this reminder of the deadline. His biggest motivating factor is deadlines, and he is not necessarily intrinsically motivated to read on his own. Even though I noticed distractions, he did not. Moreover, his extrinsic motivation was backed up by his reading habits survey when he wrote that his goal was to read as many books as he was supposed to, and that reading was a six out of ten because sometimes it just gets boring. He said that the purpose of reading is everything in life involves words, and it is just a life skill. When asked who recommends books to him, he said his friends do, but the book a friend recommended to him was the slowest book he finished; he has finished books I have recommended much faster. I classified him as a *compliant reader* but not a bookworm even though he is an excellent critical thinker.

Lucy had some similarities to Mason but more with Jaiden and my proficient readers. When I observed her, she read slower than other students, but she was focused on her book and picked it up when she had extra time. Her only distraction was internal because she was anxious about a science presentation since she is an introvert, and she could not focus one day. On her reading habits survey, she rated reading as a ten out of ten because when she was stressed, she

could use reading as an escape mechanism. She believes that the importance of reading is so a person has a strong grab on life, meaning that they can think more about what is going on. She did not think anyone recommended books to her, and her initial goal was just to read more often. I helped her restructure that because I noticed she was stuck in one genre with Harry Potter, so I wanted her to broaden the types of genres she was reading.

Skills Based Conferences

Throughout this study, students worked on, were introduced to or reviewed several basic reading skills: questioning, making predictions, making inferences, and visualizing while reading. All of these skills were modeled, and students showed what they learned through formative and summative assessments. One of the key formative assessments I used were Post-It thinking stacks and learning target sheets [See Figure 4] to promote visible learning. For example, after students independently read at the beginning of class, they had to write down something that had to do with the previous day's learning target to show their application to their own books versus guided reading. If the learning target had been "I can make a prediction about a text using evidence," they would have to make a prediction about their books using "a because" statement. While I walked around, I would point out if students simply made a prediction versus adding the actual text evidence, and they would have to immediately go back and fix it. Students also had to show their understanding of the learning target by writing down a way they could show me what they learned. So again, if the learning target was making predictions using text evidence, the wrap up asked them to explain the importance of text evidence. Students wrote down answers along the lines that it makes your prediction stronger, and then there is proof to your opinion. Additionally, the learning target sheets gave me a quick check to see who I needed to check in with the next day because if a student wrote that we make

predictions to show us what is going on, that is not answering the wrap up question. With these assessments, I could efficiently have data on students and ensure they did not fall behind.

When I used Post-Its as thinking stacks, I modeled how to do this when we read <u>The Giver</u> by Lois Lowry. To illustrate how students did, Anna wrote that on her first Post-It, "I think that Jonas will be last and is getting a special job/assignment because she skipped him and will go back at the end and tell the audience and him his job." Her second Post-It provided her proof, and it stated, "At each announcement, his heart jumped for a moment. This quote indicates his nervousness." On her third Post-It, which showed what her inference could represent, she said it represented a symbol of Jonas's specialness. Compared to her initial learning target sheets where she did not put "a because" down and simply wrote that she thought that Ivy would go into the dark house for her book <u>Welcome to the Dark House</u> by Laura Faria Stolarz, this showed significant growth. Similarly, Jaiden, a proficient reader, wrote "I think that Jonas will go at the end because he has a really important job. I also think that because they skipped him" on her first inference Post-It. Her text evidence was, "But Jonas knew, even as he had the thought, that she hadn't. The Chief Elder made no mistakes." On her final Post-It, she wrote that, "This represents foreshadowing because they saved the best for last." This particular skill stretches both lower and higher readers because it shows them that a because statement is the beginning of a strong inference. The text evidence builds upon their "because statement", and the possibility of what it might represent is what really stretches the higher reader's thinking, but it also helps lower readers realize there is a point to making inferences.

Furthermore, using thinking stacks was extremely helpful for my students who did not meet the standards on their MCAs. For example, Hans, who is reading at a 4th or 5th grade level, struggled with making inferences and predictions for quite a while. When I first

introduced Post-Its and tracking his thinking to him, he would simply write down, "I think that Mike is going to get out of jail." There was no because statement, so it was a weak prediction. However, I would have him go back and write at least "a because" to show why he thought that. After a few times of weak predictions, he realized on his own that he had to provide evidence for his predictions. Since we kept all his predictions about his book inside the front cover, he could see obvious growth. Although they are not as elaborate as Jaiden's, Hans's predictions now look like, "I think the team will win because their record is already 5-0." This is without prompting, and that is a huge improvement for him. Post-Its had the same effect on Christina. At the beginning of the year, she was reading books that she did not understand, and she had trouble abandoning them. When we conferred about Inside and Out by Thanhha Lai, she had no idea what the book was about and could not even tell me what the problem or who the main characters were. I told her to abandon the book, and we chose the first book in the Hazelwood Trilogy, Tears of a Tiger, by Sharon Draper. I gave her a stack of Post-Its to write questions on as well as to keep track of the characters. When she and I met later, and she showed me her Post-Its, her questions were better, and she knew exactly what happened in the book, which helped give her excitement about reading. An example question that she had was, "Why would Andy kill himself?" She did not have an answer on the Post-It, and that is something we are still working on, so that she actively questions, predicts, and infers while she is reading.

Name:_____
This Week's Learning Targets & Reading Reflections

Monday Date:	**Tuesday** Date:	**Wed** Date:	**Thurs** Date:	**Friday** Date:
Learning	**Learning**	**Learning**	**Learning**	**Learning**

Target:	Target:	Target:	Target:	Target:
Reading Time Activity: Book Title _____	**Reading Time Activity:** Book Title _____	**Reading Time Activity:** Book Title _____	**Reading Time Activity:** Book Title _____	**Reading Time Activity:** Book Title _____

Final Thought(s):

_____

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Friday**
Warm Up	**Warm Up**	**Warm Up**	**Warm Up**	**Warm Up**
Wrap Up (How can you show that you understand the learning target)	Wrap Up (How can you show that you understand the learning target)	Wrap Up (How can you show that you understand the learning target)	Wrap Up (How can you show that you understand the learning target)	Wrap Up (How can you show that you understand the learning target)

Figure 4

Reading Log Conferences

After students finished a book, they had to sign up for reading conferences with me

where I would try to have them lead more of the conference than just me asking all of the

questions. At the beginning of the year, this was not successful because only two of my eight

students really could ask themselves questions, and the other six did not know what to say, so they would just summarize their books. There were several ways I addressed this, so they could become more metacognitive in their thinking. One, students had to write a three sentence review about their book when they signed up for a conference on the board. [See Figure 5] Before we would start talking, I read what they thought, and then asked them to tell me about a particular aspect. For example, Mason had a lot to say when we talked about The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie when I just pointed to the part of his summary that said it was funny and sad, so he would recommend it. He talked about the grandma's death, but how Junior keeps going. I asked him to find a sad part he could visualize, and he picked her funeral when it says, "Each funeral was a funeral for all of us. We lived and died together." To push his own thinking farther, we discussed Indian and White relations in the context of sports. I asked him how Arnold felt being at the White school, and he knew that Arnold felt weird because he was the only Indian. When we talked about contemporary examples, I asked him how Native Americans might feel about the Redskins, and he said bad, and we talked about why that might be. Throughout the year, Mason's goal is to make text to world connections because he is already a strong critical thinker, and he needs guidance to push himself further.

The book conferences also went well with my lower students because we were able to talk about what strategies they used. When Hans read "The Recruit," which is a sixty page quick read, he could not remember very many of the characters or what happened, whereas he remembered his other two books significantly better. I asked him why he might have remembered those books better, and he stated that it was probably because he used Post-Its to ask questions and keep track of the characters. He desperately wanted to read Pop by Gordon Korman even though it is above his reading level, so he has been tracking characters, questions,

and predictions, so he can have a better understanding since he struggled with a simpler book when he was left to on his own to use metacognitive strategies.

Similarly, Leonard could pick reading strategies he used while he read <u>Catching Fire</u> by Suzanne Collins. When we talked about the action and suspense that made him like it, he mentioned that it was similar to <u>Hunger Games</u> also by Collins, but it was more stressful because it was everyone's second time in. I asked him simply to tell me about that, and he talked for about three minutes about how no one wanted to go, but the capitol made them, and how unfair it was. When I asked him what reading strategies he used, Leonard talked about how he had seen the movie, and he would picture the scenes in his head, but also the differences and the details that he was able to add from the book. Being able to visualize what an author is saying should push Leonard further in his reading.

Since Anna feels like she mixes up words, and focus was a struggle for her, we would talk about her reviews during book conferences, but we would also focus on strategies she was working on. One of the strategies she consistently cited during book conferences was that she consistently reread parts that confused her. Although it took her longer to read a book, she knew how to accommodate her needs as a reader. Christina also focused on this strategy because she also has always struggled with reading, so she told me how she would reread parts, and after her first book fiasco, she would abandon books if it took her too many times to reread, and she still did not understand.

The best role model for metacognition was actually Jaiden because she was consistently able to tune out distractions, ask herself and the author questions, and always knew what book she was going to read next. Her reviews were thorough, and she consistently wanted to talk about her books for several minutes with little prompting from me. However, even though

Jaiden is already an advanced reader and uses metacognition, it is still beneficial for her to see ways she can elevate her reading. To stretch her while she read the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan, I asked her to bring concepts she learned about Greek mythology. She took that a step further by actually researching Medusa and satyrs. Additionally, when students were told that they needed to bring a question on a Post-It to the reading conferences, she did that, but without prompting, she asked if I wanted her to keep doing that each time she met with me for a book conference.

Finally, Lucy was similar to Jaiden in that she needed little prompting to do critical thinking. Both girls knew that they were asking questions while they were reading and could easily come up with a question and possible answer when we met during book conferences. The other six students came up with questions eventually, but sometimes they needed modeling, and the other six students and I talked about how that was a really good strategy, and it showed they were actively reading versus just passively looking at words.

Reading Log

Name_____ **Trimester:**_____

Title of book	Author	Genre	Date Started	Date Ended	Teacher Signature	3 sentence review(needs to include why you would or wouldn't recommend it with a specific example. Not just it's boring.)
1.						
2.						

3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						

Figure 5

Monthly Reflections on Reading

One of the most telling parts of this study was that my students were starting to understand metacognition and how they view themselves as readers came from their monthly reflection letters. The unit one letter asked the following questions:

1st Paragraph= Explain, in detail, why you chose the book(s) on your reading log so far. Include important factors that you used in selecting the book.

2nd Paragraph= In the past or even this year, how much of a reader do you consider yourself? Include why you do or don't consider yourself a reader, how reading time is going for you, and where you think you have strengths and weaknesses in reading.

-**3ʳᵈ Paragraph**= Think about a descriptive moment in your "Just Right" book. You may need

to look back at previous chapters. Explain in your own words what happened, and why you like

this part of the book.

 You need to highlight the topic sentences in green or underline them.

The unit two letter asked the following questions:

LETTER SHOULD BE ¾ OR MORE IN LENGTH
Underline a transition word. At least 5 sentences per paragraph.

Date

-**1ˢᵗ Paragraph**=Discuss how text features will help you in your other classes. What will it do for you in Science, Social Studies, Math, and other subjects.

-**2ⁿᵈ Paragraph**= In what ways have you gotten better as a reader over the past 6 weeks? What strategies have you used that are helping you? Anything else you need to say about reader's workshop....

-**3ʳᵈ Paragraph**=
- What is the difference between a critical thinking question and a lower level question? Write an example.

- Look at a book from the box on your table. Write down 2 prereading questions and possible answers.
- Do the same with your own book. What is ONE question you have & a possible answer.

LETTER IS DUE TOMORROW!

In the first letter, both Christina and Hans put very little detail into their descriptive image, and they both said they weren't readers, and reading is too boring. While Hans said he picks books based on length, Christina stated she was picking books based on the classroom book pass and what looked interesting. In contrast, both of them wrote significantly more in their second letters, and they both felt they had improved as readers. Hans stated that he was reading faster because it was becoming easier. Similarly, Christina realized how essential it is to slow down when reading, and that if she tries to understand what she reads versus just trying to finish, she can actually explain what happened in the book. To emphasize how far she had come, she struggled through <u>The Giver</u> by Lois Lowry even though we read it aloud, so after a book conference, we went over the plot points, and she added a few things to that on her own. Since she still was not getting it, she was aware of herself enough as a reader that she asked to stay for help in comprehension. Both of them also understood the difference between critical and lower level thinking questions, but they struggled to actually write them down.

Both Anna and Leonard had similar skill sets as well when looking at their letters. Leonard started reading <u>The Hunger Games</u> because his mom liked it, but he did not want to read it too fast because he was nervous that <u>Catching Fire</u> would not be as good. He and I discussed his fears, and I confirmed that both books kept the fast pace alive, and we came up with a list of books he could possibly read afterward since he has trouble finding good ones. The strategies he felt like he used were simply asking his mom if he did not know a word, and we talked about using words in context as well. Since Leonard comes from an educator family, his parents ask him about books while he reads, so he expressed that that is how he has improved in his second letter. Additionally, he uses the five finger rule, a way to measure if a book is just right by how many words one knows on a page, and he tries to designate one day a week at home to read.

With his critical thinking question, he wondered if the capitol was going to kill Katniss after she tricks them into having both Peeta and her win, and he had a great prediction because he stated, "No because the capital needs her for the victory tour." Whereas, Anna has never felt like a reader because it is difficult for her. She picks books by the title, cover, and description, and she can use descriptive language and explain why she likes it. When she wrote her second letter, she was able to say that she was picking books that she somewhat liked instead of hated, but she still said she did not have any strategies that she used. Something we are working on is recognizing that the strategies she mentions in these letters are actually reading strategies and trying to build confidence. When she asked her question, "Where did Michael disappear to?" she had trouble answering it with an inference, so we talked about the use of Post-Its and actively reading. Whenever she has come up for a book conference and cannot think of any questions, I typically pull her letters out of her file, and we discuss how she made her questions for the letter. Another improvement that she has made is that she has been asking her friends what to read instead of just relying on the cover.

When looking at my proficient readers, Mark mentioned he was not a reader at the beginning even though I would have classified him as one of my most engaged readers. Yet, he wrote that he read a lot when he got into a book, and he is not falling asleep this year. He said he chose sports books because he plays sports, and the characters relate to his life. After checking in six weeks later, Mark said he was a reader now, and he can stay more focused and dialed into his books. He mentioned that he found more series that he likes like The Maze Runner by James Dashner, and he has fewer distractions at home. When he wrote his critical thinking question, it was not really a critical thinking question, but he had a thoughtful answer: "Will the gladers Teresa, Aris, Thomas and group B all safely make it to the safe haven? They will but some

gladers and group b members will get killed or injured so they will have to be left behind."
When he and I have talked during book conferences, he has been able to add to some of this by
telling me about how he is able to have a running log of questions in his head, and he thinks
about them as he reads to see if they get answered. Moreover, he is able to pick up on cues that
the author lays out for what a chapter might be about because when he read Crossover by
Alexander Kwame, he looked at the chapter titles and made inferences about them. Similarly,
Jaiden considered herself a reader, but she did not until 6th grade, which is when reader's
workshop started at the school. She picks various books in multiple genres like fantasy, action,
romance, and a friend recommended Percy Jackson. In her second letter, Jaiden wrote about
how much faster she has gotten as a reader, which is definitely true since she has signed up for
seven book conferences in nine weeks. She also knows what more words means since she looks
them up and uses context clues, and like Mark, she has a running list of things she thinks are
foreshadowing, and she said she was usually right. Both students were able to use specific
literary terms and keep track of them in their head versus needing to write them on a Post-It.

Like my proficient readers, both of my "exceeds expectations" readers were cognizant of
why they liked reading and the strategies they used. Lucy tried to read whenever she could and
always wanted to read more. Both she and Mason got recommendations from friends versus my
lower readers who did not receive recommendations from anyone. Unlike Lucy, Mason knew
that he was a slower reader, so he needed to designate more time and focus to reading, but he
loved reading at school because he was able to focus there more since there was not a TV. In
their second letters, both students felt like they had improved as readers and were using more
reading strategies. Like Jaiden, Lucy mentioned she had a stronger vocabulary because she also
looked up words and used words in context. Her critical thinking question and answer was,

"Why is Torrey so rude to Luis? She wants to fit in with the cool crowd." Her understanding of her books was thorough because she is able to actively read like the proficient readers. Mason also said he has been slowing down while reading instead of just trying to finish reading for a reading requirement. He also said he could tune out distractions more at home and at school, so that has helped him stay focused. However, he only wrote a critical thinking question without an answer, which is something we are working on.

Strengths and Limitations

After structuring reader's workshop this way versus the haphazard mess that I had last year, I actually felt like I was helping kids this year to be more cognizant of their thinking while they were reading. Since all of my participants were able to explain one way they had improved in just six weeks and had a strategy that worked even if they did not always use it, I would say this study was overall successful.

Another strength of the study that helped me as a teacher was to observe my students as readers, have them write down what was distracting them, and analyze their feelings about reading without having a book conference prior to that. This helped me get to some of the root causes of their discontent, and it helped me know which of my kids were faking reading versus actually engaging with a book. By calling them out on not reading, they seemed to be more inclined to actually read their books since they felt like I was invested in their reading.

Giving students time to reflect about their growth also helped me know where students felt they struggled and where they felt they succeeded. This study also had successes in the fact that the thinking stacks of Post-Its actually showed participants what strong inferences and predictions looked like, and it conveyed that they were actually thinking. Nothing is better than

having students actually feel like they improved and get excited about the fact that they can explain how instead of just saying I got better.

Finally, having students sign up for conferences was beneficial because I see students at least twice per month since I have larger classes, and I typically try to see them three times a month. When I did not have students sign up for conferences, I did not meet with students as much, and I was left guessing about whether or not they actually finished their books because they wrote titles down, but they did not even have to write a review. By having participants talk to me about their books before I sign off on it on their reading log, they know they have to read the book, and some of them actually look forward to being able to sign up and talk about their books.

Although I feel like there were many successes, there were some limitations. I still feel like I could have improved with organization and the overwhelming nature of Post-Its. To take the structure of visible learning and reader's workshop further, I would want to experiment with different conferring apps to see which was best. I think some of the apps for Post-Its and thinking would also be valuable because sometimes it is stressful to have three hundred Post-Its sitting on your desk and know that you have to respond to all of them, and sometimes they fall apart.

I also would have liked to initiate some of the skills that I had students start a little earlier. Like having students keep track of questions they had and bring them to their book conferences. I might make that part of a reading log next year because it helps students actively read versus passively read.

However, overall, if there was anyone new to reader's workshop, I would recommend that he/she structures it this way because there was significantly more organization, and my

students just seemed happier with reading this year because it had specific direction versus just independent reading time and maybe a book conference today.

Implications for Future Research

In the future, I would like to focus on which types of iPad apps or technology tools help with conferring. For example, I know that Fountas and Pinnell, the leveled reading program we use at school, has a conferring app, but I did not know that until late October. By doing a comparison of the pros and cons of different apps, I think it would help streamline this process further. I am also curious about if online Post-It apps like Wall Wisher would be more beneficial for students with visible learning than regular Post-Its that can fall off or get separated.

Additionally, a focused study on having students bring their own questions, foreshadowing, and predictions to a book conference would explain the gains that can be made by doing that style. By comparing a single style of conferring to multiple strategies, it would help educators understand why the should or should not include a style if they are limited on time.

Finally, I would like to focus a study like this solely on proficient and advanced readers, so they continue to stretch themselves. The results of this study helped me see strategies I can use to assist struggling readers, but all too often, proficient and struggling readers are forgotten about. Reader's workshop is one of the best places to keep pushing them to grow as readers, but I know that there are more ways than what I did for the course of this study.

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