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**THE NATURE AND INFLUENCES
OF READING CONFERENCES IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM**

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by

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THE NATURE AND INFLUENCES
OF READING CONFERENCES IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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This is a grounded study built on prior research in the area of reading conferences. Although there has been much anecdotal writing about reading conferences, there is limited research on the topic in general, and more specifically, no research honing in on students' reading experiences after engaging in a one-on-one conference with the teacher. This study examined the nature of reading conferences in a third grade classroom and the influence of these one-on-one conferences with the teacher on the students' subsequent reading experiences. Qualitative research methods were used to document and describe (a)the structure and content of the reading conferences; (b)the relationship building that occurred during the conference; (c) the joint meaning-making that developed within a conference and; (d)the reading experiences of third graders during independent reading.

Reading conferences as a part of the classroom reading workshop were observed and documented for eight months, and the classroom teacher was formally interviewed at the start of the data collection. Informal interviews were conducted with the teacher throughout the study in order to clarify observations. Interviews with students were also conducted in order to know what they were thinking about their reading and how they

were applying strategies during independent reading time. Data for this study included field notes from observations, student and teacher interviews, teacher anecdotal notes, audio and video tapes of the individual conferences, and digital images of the students' independent reading selections with notations made in the text by both the teacher and student. The findings of the study indicate that individual conferences between the teacher and student foster the building of relationships. In addition, individual conferences provide a space for joint meaning-making to occur between the teacher and student based upon the needs of the student and in a way that promotes a more solid understanding of reading strategies. The study revealed that individual conferences in reading influenced the independent reading experiences of students. Students were better able to apply reading strategies in their independent reading after spending time working one-on-one with the teacher to make meaningful connections between the strategy and the text they selected and to clarify misunderstandings.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Overview	1
Definitions	1
Reading Workshop	2
Reading Conferences	3
Rationale	4
Research Questions	6
Theoretical Framework	7
Conclusion	10
Chapter II: Review of the Literature	12
Reading Instruction	12
Historical Overview.....	13
Pre 1950s.....	14
1950s – 1960s	17
1970s to Present	20
Individualized Instruction.....	21
Personalized Reading Program	23
Reading Workshop.....	25
Reading Conferences	26
Features of Reading Conferences	27
Types of Reading Conferences	29
Benefits of Reading Conferences.....	31
Conclusion.....	35
Chapter III: Methodology	37
Site Selection and Field Entry	37
Ms. Sloan.....	41
Guiding Principles	41
Preparation and Planning	42
The Classroom	43
Class Schedule	43

Reading Instructional Time.....	45
Assessment.....	46
Focus Student Selection.....	49
Carlos.....	50
Renee.....	51
Liam.....	52
Phases of Inquiry.....	53
Phases One: Field Entry.....	62
Phase Two: Focused Observations and Hypothesis Development.....	68
Phase Three: Hypothesis Refinement.....	69
Phase Four: Exit From the Field.....	70
Quality of Study.....	70
Credibility.....	70
Triangulation.....	70
Member Checks.....	70
Peer Debriefing.....	71
Transferability.....	71
Dependability.....	71
Confirmability.....	72
Ethical Issues.....	72
Strengths and Limitations.....	73
Chapter IV: Findings.....	76
Reading Workshop: Thick Description.....	81
Whole Class Mini Lesson.....	81
Independent Reading.....	87
Individual Conferences.....	89
Conclusion of Reading Period.....	90
The Nature of Reading Conferences.....	91
Process.....	91
Structure.....	95
Content.....	100
Strategy Instruction.....	102
Decoding.....	104

Interest/Book Selection	106
Fluency	107
Post-It Notes	109
Themes	111
Relationship Building	112
Enhancing Strategy Instruction	114
Joint Meaning Making	116
Summary	118
Student Appropriation	119
Book Selection	121
Individualized Instruction	122
Independent Strategy Application	124
Student Language	126
In-text Evidence	131
Conclusion	140
Chapter V: Implications	142
Summary of Findings	145
The Nature of Reading Conferences in a Third-Grade Classroom	145
The Influence of Reading Conferences on Independent Reading	147
Summary	148
Theoretical Interpretations an Implications of Findings	148
Scaffolding	149
Appropriation	153
Theoretical Model	156
Practical Implications	160
Recommendations for Future research	163
Conclusion	164
Appendices	
A. Photo of Classroom Library and Strategy Charts	166
B. Teacher and Student Interview Protocols	167
C. Rough and Expanded Field Notes	168
References	173

List of Tables

1. Historical Overview of Reading Instruction	16
2. Weekly Schedule in Ms. Sloan’s Third-Grade Classroom	44
3. DRA Score Correlation to Grade Level	47
4. DRA Scores for Mrs. Sloan’s Third Grade.....	48
5. Research Phases	53
6. Definitions of Types of Observation Notes	57
7. Transcript Conventions	78
8. Components of Reading Workshop in Ms. Sloan’s Third-Grade Classroom.....	80
9. Book Box Composition.....	88
10. Sample of Focus Student Conferences Over Time	128
11. Student Notations of Student Strategy Use During Independent Reading	138

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Reading instruction offers teachers a unique opportunity to connect with their students through talk about experiences, connections to the stories being read, and joint meaning-making through the application of reading strategies. It is a way for teachers and students to engage in interactions surrounding a variety of texts. Furthermore, reading instruction fosters connections between the curriculum and the diverse lives of the students within that classroom. By way of these connections and through frequent scaffolds (Wood et. al, 1976), the teacher assists the students in the “appropriation” (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986 ; Cazden, 2001) of the material, and students are better prepared to apply their learned knowledge in independent contexts.

As a middle school language arts teacher, I encountered vast diversity in both the academic and personal experiences from the students that I taught. Additionally, I was faced with a classroom of 25 plus students who had an extensive range in their reading and writing abilities. I was also challenged with preparing my students to achieve on the state assessments given in the spring. I had difficulty making connections between the objectives to be taught and the experiences of the students. Additionally, I was never certain that students were appropriating the material that I presented to them. During my third year in the classroom, I began to explore how teachers planned their reading instruction to account for diversity and provide meaningful instruction, and I was exposed to the instructional approach of Reading Workshop (Atwell, 1998; Calkins &

Harwayne, 1991). I learned that this approach provided a structure to the reading period that afforded time to meet with students in small groups and individually to hone in on their reading needs. I was intrigued by this classroom structure and even more so by the component of individual conferencing. In theory, conferencing seemed to be a way to take the mandated objectives and transform them into a curriculum that is meaningful and attends to the individual differences represented in the classroom (Delpit, 1988; Dewey, 1929; Durrell, 1937).

The process of “reading conferencing” is one way of transforming the language arts curriculum into something that both meets the demands of a required curriculum while accommodating the individual needs of students. As defined in the current literature, conferences are literature-based meetings, either on-on-one or in small groups, in which individual students and their teacher have genuine conversations, based upon the student’s needs and interests, that help students make sense of text as they read (Akmal, 2002; Allington & Cunningham, 2002; Barrentine & Stokes, 2005; Bomer, 1999; Calkins, 2001; Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Gill, 2000; Hornsby *et al.*, 1988; Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2000). While some use the label of conferencing to denote both individual and group meetings, for the purpose of this study, I use the term “conference” to mean the times when the teacher sits alone with one student.

Definitions

Reading Workshop

Reading workshop (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991); Atwell, 1998) is an instructional approach and an organizational framework for reading instruction. It

consists of four basic components: (1) a mini lesson on some aspect of literature or a reading strategy, (2) independent reading time, (3) student conferences and (4) time for sharing. The teacher provides direct instruction during a portion of the mini lesson by way of modeling strategies as applied to a common text. Students are then given the opportunity to practice that strategy with the same text as the teacher provides scaffolding via questions and prompts. Following the mini lesson is activity time. During this time, students participate in independent reading, one-on-one conferences with the teacher, and/or guided reading groups. Students hold the decision-making power in book selection for independent reading. They use this text to further practice reading strategies during the conference with the teacher. Often, at the end of the activity times, the class gathers together once more so that students can share their independent reading experiences and applications of the strategies.

Reading Conferences

A conference approach to reading instruction involves: discussions between the teacher and the reader about what the student has read, teaching through modeling, and assessment (Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Gill, 2000; Hornsby et al., 1988; Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2000; Williams, 2001). Teachers may either join the reader in their independent reading, or maintain a space in the classroom for these conferences to take place. Conferences may be individual or with small groups of students who share the same interests or needs. A principle element of a conference is its conversational tone. Questions emerge naturally from a discussion about a book being read or a read aloud of a portion of text. Researchers and authors of practitioner materials who support

conferencing as a part of literacy instruction suggest that this type of teaching provides the opportunity for lessons to fit the academic level, needs, and personal interests of the students. More specifically, conferences serve as a means to learn and monitor students' interests, personality, and reading strengths and weaknesses (Akmal, 2002; Barbe, 1961; Bomer, 1999; Durrell, 1937; Gill, 2000; Hornsby et al., 1988; Veatch, 1956, 1967). In order to better understand the process of conferencing, it is essential to study the teacher's involvement in the process as well as the student's participation and how these are influencing their reading experiences. This study examined the meaning-making that occurred through conversations about student thoughts and written responses during conferences.

Rationale

Research tells us that reading is a fluid process that is shaped by both the skill and the affective elements brought into the process by the thoughts and experiences of the reader. These elements come together in a transactional process between the reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1993). As the experiences of each student differ, this relationship between the reader and the text may vary across individuals. As a response to the variety of experiences and the diversity of learners in a classroom, researchers have urged teachers to move toward individualization of the learning process (Barbe, 1961; McDonald, et. al., 1966; Spencer, 1966; Veatch, 1957). Individualized reading instruction is based upon the experiences that the student brings with him/her into the reading process. In order for the teacher to provide guidance and facilitate the interaction between

the student and the text, she must first know the student, his/her needs, and experiences (Dewey, 1938).

Determining a method for engaging with each student around his/her independent reading may prove challenging to a teacher of 20 plus students. The instructional approach of reading workshop provides a tool to approach this challenge. Anecdotal summaries and limited research on Reading Workshop suggest that this structure to the reading period may provide the teacher flexibility while students are reading independently (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 2001; (Swift, 1993).

One element of Reading Workshop, individual conferencing, affords the opportunity for the teacher to work one-on-one with students in the classroom as they work to apply reading strategies. There are many anecdotal texts providing an overview of the structure, content, and benefits of a conferencing approach to reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Hornsby et al., 1988; Taberski, 2000; Veatch, 1967). Likewise, the research on conferencing, though limited, echoes these texts in its summation of what conferences can bring to reading instruction (Bomer, 1999 & 2006; Gill, 2000; Allington & Cunningham, 2006). Although these studies provide a summary of the conference approach to reading instruction and highlight the potential benefits of this instruction, they do not go beyond the method of the instruction into the influences of this method on students' application of learning during the conference. As Calkins (2001) explains

there has generally been no assumption that our work with individuals, or with small groups of readers, will be judged as successful on the basis of whether or

not those interactions raise the level of what our students do afterward. Instead, success is based on whether students read well during the interaction (p.101). We have little to no research on what student appropriation of reading instruction might look like in a classroom.

This study aims to spotlight conferencing in the teaching of reading focusing on what is absent from the current research: what happens *after* the conference with students in relation to student book selection and skill and strategy development in their independent reading. Although my study focused on in-conference interactions between the teacher and the students and what was happening in this individualized period of instruction, unlike existing research, significant time was allotted to speaking with students post conference. Students were observed and interviewed after their conferences in order to reveal the ways in which they demonstrated their use of reading strategies and how the application of the strategies in their independent reading developed from the individualized instruction (Veatch, 1967) they received.

Research Questions

This project involved the study of the actions and interactions of participants during one-on-one reading conferences with their teacher. Merriam (1998) explains that in interpretivist research, “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (p. 6). In the reading conference, students are speaking and reading with the teacher and other students, all who make up the social world of the classroom. Just as the interpretivist paradigm attempts to understand the “complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p.118), this

qualitative case centered on the experiences of the students during reading conferences to discover how they used reading strategies to create meaning from the text before them. The study explored the themes and issues that emerged through conferencing. It attempted to highlight the students' appropriation of reading strategies as they came to understand text through their written and stated responses by focusing attention on the meaning-making that occurred through conversations during the literacy block. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the nature of reading conferences in a third grade classroom?
2. In what ways, if any, does participation in reading conferences influence subsequent book selection and reading?

The above questions provided guidelines for beginning the study. As the study progressed, questions were more sharply focused and defined as they were grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical Framework

This study assumed a view of teaching and learning as social practices in what Wertsch (1991) calls a "sociocultural approach to mind" (p.86). The sociocultural perspective is inclusive of the cultural, historical, and social situation of individuals and attends "to the cultural meaning of the situation in which learning is taking place and to the social practices and power differentials that influence teachers and learners in learning situations (Schallert & Martin, 2003). Sociocultural theory offers a powerful framework for thinking about teaching and learning. Rather than focusing on either specific content to be learned or on the nature of the learner, researchers utilize a

sociocultural lens to hone in on learning-in-context. Their interest lies in how knowledge develops within a particular environment for teaching and learning (Applebee, 1991).

Sociocultural theory recognizes that understanding originates in social, cultural, and communicative processes, not solitary occurrences (Wertsch, 1990, 1991).

Sociocultural theory also encourages a focus on the activities and talk of the students during conferencing. It lends to the question of how these conferences lead to broader understandings and knowledge of content that is able to be independently applied in later and different contexts (Mercer, 2000). These newly understood concepts may be utilized by the student, independent of guidance, in any of the subject areas when the student finds them applicable to the situation. In some cases, the in-school knowledge is later transferred into activities in the life of the student outside of the school environment. This framework is of particular interest to those researching in language arts classrooms for a primary concern is how the particular context of the learning situation brings about the development of knowledge.

Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991) emphasizes the “co-construction” of knowledge between the more expert member of the culture or learning community and the learner. Vygotsky (1986) regarded education as the “quintessential sociocultural activity” and acknowledged the need for interaction between adults and children to close the “cognitive gaps” and encourage the development of higher order thinking processes through “enculturation into the practices of society; through the acquisition of society’s technology, its signs and tools; through education in all its forms” (Moll, 1991). To accomplish this, Wells (1999) proposed a “collaborative community” in

which, with the teacher as leader, the participants learn with and from each other by engagement in “dialogic inquiry” which results in the learner becoming an autonomous participant in the activity (p. 262).

Vygotsky’s (1986) research focused on how language and the need and will to make social contact drive students from internalized (egocentric) to externalized speech (p. 36). Language and its use then become a tool for students to gain access to learning through co-construction with peers and other adults. As learning develops, a student’s understanding is mediated by his/her responses to the speech and behaviors of those around him. As Vygotsky showed, language functions as both a mediator of social activity and the mental activities in inner speech. After experiences with peers and adults that provide him/her with the tool of language, the student eventually situates this understanding within him/her and is later able to apply this tool to contexts other than the one in which he/she was originally exposed.

In elementary classrooms, students often develop their knowledge about literature through interactions with a variety of texts and most regularly do so with the guidance of the classroom teacher. In one-on-one or small group activities, the adult is able to take what the student says and make contributions that are relevant to the child’s focus of interest and attention because “until they [the students] have a personal stake in the knowledge under construction, they’re likely to treat the published writings of others as not only authoritative but also as precluding the need for any constructive effort on their own part (Wells, 1999, p. 90). By participating in a dialogic engagement, students make connections and assertions that lead to meanings that are initially co-constructed. They

learn to use the “semiotic tool of language” appropriate for the current context independently, and eventually adapt this tool for use in other contexts (Vygotsky, 1986). As Wells (1999) elaborates, “... the object of all this learning is not just the development of the learner’s meaning potential, conceived as the construction of discipline-based knowledge, but the development of the resources of action, speech, and thinking that enable learners to participate effectively in creatively in further practical, social, and intellectual activity” (p. 50). This development can best take place in a social environment where the learner is supported at the level where he is currently. From this idea of learning in the social situation, Vygotsky (1978) developed his concept of “the zone of proximal development” to account for the roles of teaching in the child’s learning. He maintained that this form of “assisted learning” should be viewed as a general developmental law proposing that “a central feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). When the child is learning in this context, he/she perceives the learning as functional, personally meaningful, and necessary for something and this learning is most likely to occur through talk that relates the new experience to the familiar experiences of the child’s life (Wells, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

Conclusion

Reading conferencing is an instructional method that allows for personalization of comprehension strategy and skill instruction. The processes that define a conference and

illustrations of the variety of conference types are readily available in current reading research. This paper aims to fill in the research gaps and discuss what happens after the meaning making that occurs during a conference.

Chapter 2 will include the literature from two bodies of research that form the framework for this study: approaches to individualized instruction, and reading conferencing. In chapter 3, I describe the methods of data collection and analysis utilized during the study. In chapter 4, the findings will be presented. Finally, chapter 5 will articulate the implications of these findings within the field of reading research and education.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A number of literatures are important when thinking about reading conferences and will be reviewed in this chapter. First, understanding how the process of reading is defined and the frame from which I am theorizing about reading are significant as I review the literature. The history of personalized instruction will be explored to provide a historical context for the instructional method of conferencing. Finally, it is important to know how the curricular model of reading workshop fits within the broader reading curriculum. Included in this contextualization will be a discussion about gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), which is a key component in the conversation about conferencing. Following the discussion of the research, I address how these three areas interact to guide us towards a better understanding of a conference approach to reading instruction.

Reading Instruction

An understanding of the process of reading is an important component in my review of the literature. The appreciation of the fluidity of the process of reading influences the frame from which I viewed the literature. With this understanding of the fluid interaction between the reader and the text comes the recognition that reading is “shaped by reader, text, and context – a series of momentary, changing, synthesized patterns (Rosenblatt, 1998), p.899). The reading process takes into account both the skill of the reader and the affective elements that are brought in by the reader’s thoughts and prior experiences. These experiences lead to a “dynamic” and “transactional” process of

learning; an active relationship between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 2004). In relation to the reading experiences of primary aged students, this transactional process involves the student applying a variety of comprehension strategies as he/she reads. In addition, the student draws from his/her experiences to interpret the text – the combination resulting in meaning making. Therefore, a reading curriculum that is responsive to this transactional process is more than a set of discrete skills added one upon the other. It engages students in opportunities to watch the teacher, associate focus skills and strategies with practice, and then personalize the skills learned in the application of them during conferences and independent reading.

Historical Overview

When approaching research with a sociocultural lens, a focus on the history of a topic is important in determining how one developmental process influences the next stage in development and growth (Schallert & Martin, 2003; Wertsch, 1990, 1991). In this study, individualized instruction as a curricular approach underlies the process of conferencing, and so it is necessary to understand its history. Personally meaningful and functional learning have been long standing foci in education and are a part of the history of this type of reading instruction. In this section, I will first provide an overview of the history of reading instruction using Table 1 to demonstrate the overarching changes and developments in the methods, content, and research of reading instruction beginning in 1865 to 1950. I will then detail the evolution of the term “individualized instruction” within the research, referencing aspects of the time periods noted in the table. Finally, I will lead the reader to a general understanding of what individualized reading instruction,

and more broadly, reading instruction, looks like in a present day primary classroom.

Through this overview, the reader is able to situate the concept of individualized instruction as it pertains specifically to the reading classroom. The summary spotlights the method of individual conferencing within its historical context. Following the overview, the description of reading in a primary classroom will contextualize the findings of the research study as it takes place within a third grade classroom.

Pre 1950s. Overviewed in the table below, reading instruction in the 16th through 19th centuries was more focused on the content of the lesson than the individuals to whom it was being taught. Religion, politics, and cultural development were the catalysts for content in education and thus, were also the guiders of content in reading. Additionally, research in reading was not notably present. In the early 20th century the aims of reading became better defined, procedural methods for instruction were introduced, an interest surfaced in the field of research, and the notion of individualized instruction emerged. The trend in instruction changed from skills-based to a more holistic approach during the Progressive Movement, and as a result, the focus of classroom reading instruction shifted to include a recognition of the difference in ability present in reading classrooms (Harris, 1964). (Durrell, 1937) recognized that although children may be of the same age in a classroom, they differ in abilities and interests in reading, and it is necessary to provide for the individual needs in the classroom (p. 325). He also made the important point that, under an “excellent” instructional program, the range of differences in reading will increase rather than diminish (p. 325). This statement made clear the need for a method of instruction within the reading classroom that catered to the needs of all the students as

they developed in their skill ability and as their interests changed. Durrell advocated small group instruction as a means to this end and explained, “The merit of instruction for small groups lies in the opportunity provided for making the lessons more neatly fit the level, rate of progress, and interests of the individual pupils. . . giving the child a feeling of greater individual responsibility” (p. 345). Details of the emergence of individualized instruction are discussed later in this chapter and are connected with the present day conception of individualized instruction in reading – individual conferencing.

Table 1:

Historical Overview of Reading Instruction; adapted from N. Blanton Smith's *American Reading Instruction* (2002)

Time Period	Methods/Approaches to Reading Instruction	Content of Reading Instruction	Research on Reading
1607-1776	Subject matter was a more important consideration than was the method of instruction.	Church in control of the content of the reading material; reading experiences via the indoctrination to the church	N/A
1776-1840	Development of good citizens the spotlight; methodology not a focus	Politics replaced theology as the focus of intellect; reading content to develop loyalty to a new nation and build good citizenship; eloquence of oral reading paramount.	N/A
1840s-1880s	Termed an "evolutionary period" due to the decrease in focus on religion and morality. Dates are not well defined; much of this period mirrored the previous and transitioned into the following.		
1880s-1910	Well-defined aims and the use of supplemental texts (classic literature) in addition to the "readers" of the previous periods. Introduction of "Pollard's Method" which was a procedure that made use of a child's interest to teach reading.	Concern for cultural development; focus on developing permanent interest in literature.	Emergence of an interest in reading research; focus on causes of reading difficulties; first time attention given to assistance in the acquisition of reading skills.
1910-1925	Silent reading methods; introduction of Individualized Instruction *.	Transition from oral to silent reading; comprehension a primary concern.	Focus on diagnostic studies to determine more specific needs of individual students.
1925-1935	Reading taught in connection with various activities and interests; organized into units by themes connected to other activities; grouping according to individual needs *; focus on Creating an experience to connect with text	Broad objectives for instruction lead to 3 aims: (1) extend the experience of students & stimulate their thinking powers (2) develop a permanent interest in reading (3) develop attitudes, habits, and skills for reading; a recognition of difference in reading abilities and focus on development of these abilities.	Application of research from previous time period; new investigations focused on reading interests, purposes, and habits
1935-1950	Re-emphasis on systematic reading instruction; differentiation through flexible grouping;	Contribution to democracy a focus	Overall reduction of research and instructional materials; attempts to break down the general meaning of the term, "comprehension"

1950s-60s. Previous to this era in reading instruction, differentiation to address the individual needs of students focused predominantly on the homogenous grouping of students (Smith, 2002). Differentiation was later expanded by the inclusion of ability grouping, where students were moved within and between groups as their individual reading needs changed. During the 1950s and 1960s instructional methods developed beyond flexible grouping to the dissemination of suitable materials and the inclusion of individual conferences and individual silent reading within the reading period. Students were given texts appropriate for their diagnosed reading level and opportunities were provided during the reading period for conversations about reading texts, strategies, and skills between the student and the teacher (Durrell, 1937). (Veatch, 1967) developed the idea of an individualized program stating that it

is based upon the idea that children can and do read better, more widely, and with vastly increased interest, when allowed to choose their own reading materials . . .

The self-selection principle discards the well-known idea of planned, sequential development of level of difficulty programs of basal readers (p.160).

This idea of self-selection was a cornerstone of individualized instruction and has been embraced in many classrooms over the years. It is from these and similar ideas that personalized reading and conferencing have emerged as processes to achieving individualized instruction in reading.

In his 1964 article, Albert Harris discussed the progression of reading programs and instruction in the early 20th century, focusing on the Progressive Education Movement and its call for “reading for a purpose over reading for its own sake” (p. 128).

The emergence of the movement promoted a focus on individualization throughout the subjects in education. As a fundamental element of the school day, the reading class was affected by this push for individualization. Reflected in even earlier educational texts, Goodykoontz (1937), in the 36th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, noted the place of reading in the curriculum stating, “But different as the emphasis was in one period and another, reading always carried an important share of the responsibility put upon the schools by society” (p. 42). It is with this responsibility in mind, along with the promotion of a democratic society, that leaders in the progressive movement emphasized “individualization” as a focus for all instruction in all areas of the curriculum.

In a 1966 study, MacDonald, Theodore, and John conducted an intervention study in all first grade classrooms in a small town. The purpose of their study was to determine if children, using typical basal reading material, experience a one-to-one instructional relationship with the teacher rather than ability grouping, then achievement in reading will be significantly greater and attitudes towards reading and school learning will be more positive (p. 643).

During the study MacDonald defined “one-to-one reading instruction” as all formal reading instruction taking place between the teacher and the child individually through conferencing (p. 643). Within a conference, the student was assessed on reading completed since the last conference and given individual assignments relating to interest or need (p. 644). The children were not limited to what they could read and were encouraged to read beyond the minimal requirements between conference periods. The

researchers found that with the addition of individualized attention to the basal program already being used in the classroom, “attitudes and social preferences most probably are, as our study appears to indicate, more closely allied to the nature of the interpersonal patterns of instruction” (p. 646). Students’ interests and motivation to read the provided material increased as they had time to communicate with the teacher on an individual level.

Around the same time, Doris Spencer (Spencer, 1966) compared the effectiveness of two reading methods at the first-grade level: individualized reading and a basal reading program. The basal reading program was an organized text-based program in which the teacher and students shared a common text found within a prescribed textbook. Associated key vocabulary, comprehension questions, and extension activities were all offered as a part of the teacher’s edition of the basal reader. The study included all students in 22 first grade classrooms in the same town. The teachers selected were considered above average by their principals. Each of the teachers taught using their preferred method of reading instruction. The researchers determined achievement levels instruction by using the Stanford Achievement Test, the Gilmore Oral Reading, and the Gates Word recognition assessments. After 140 days of instruction, the tests were administered and based upon the results, it was determined that instruction was more effective when instruction was concentrated on individual needs, and this “adjustment to levels and progress rate in learning is essential for effective teaching of reading” (p. 599). Spencer’s (1966) study also determined that the reading program which teaches to points of need of the individual students rather than relying upon group analysis techniques was

more effective for adjusting to individual progress and the promotion of future learning. She labeled this type of program “individualized reading” and asserted that it was more effective than the basal method, allowing students to progress at their own rate.

The keen interest on the topic of individualized instruction during the 1950s and 60s is evidenced by the increase in research on the topic. The research discussed above is representative of the focus on individualized instruction as an integral element of reading instruction. This focus on meeting the needs of students while building off of their experiences and interests continues into the present day.

1970s to Present. During the past 3 decades, the whole language movement emerged, placing the teacher into the role of facilitator of students’ discovery of reading insights (Pearson, 1983). Comprehension strategies became a hot topic of research, and high stakes testing became a strong force in educational reform. During these decades, reader response (Rosenblatt, 2004) was introduced with the focus on the transaction between the reader and text. Additionally, student book selection and interest as related to students’ interest in reading was highlighted (p. 442). More recently, with the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), standardization and accountability have begun to influence how reading instruction is enacted in schools. Identifying the needs of students in this atmosphere of accountability is key to the success of students in their reading and on state assessments. Often, classroom instruction is planned around the confines of the test expectations and so opportunities for one-on-one time with the teacher may not be present. In many classrooms, reading workshop is a method that honors student interest and experience while providing opportunities for teachers to identify and teach to the

needs of the students. In this way, the teacher is able to assist in the reading success of students in both their in-class practice and on state and national assessments.

Individualized Instruction

Within this history of reading instruction is embedded the evolution of the term, “individualized instruction.” The development of this term is described below to situate the current day usage within its historical context and provide an entry point into the discussion of reading instruction and individual conferencing in the research of the present.

As early as the 16th century, Reading instruction was structured as an individualized occurrence. Children were taught in a one-on-one setting by a scribe, priest, or tutor. These lessons were geared toward the needs of the student and were paced according to the child’s ability. Later, as schools were created, children began receiving reading instruction in larger groupings where less individualization occurred. Although individualized instruction in reading can be seen as early as the 16th century with the use of scribes, priests, or private tutors by the upper class (Smith, 2002), the notion of individualization in reading was not evident as schools were created. As referenced in Table 1 above, the content of reading instruction was influenced by issues of the church and state and was not yet attentive to individual needs of students. It was with the evolution of standardized testing between 1910 and 1920 that the wide differences in reading ability among students in the classrooms were revealed. During this same time, the tenet “Individual progression in reading” (Smith, 2002, p.350) began to have characteristics similar to the present day notion of individualized instruction.

Breaking up traditional class organization and employing strategic grouping were the first steps to approaching the differences in reading ability and addressing this individual progression. Furthermore, students were assessed to determine their reading level, and books and assessments were provided that allowed students to work their way through reading leveled tests.

Proponents of Individual Instruction argue that through individualization students' interests are addressed and their developmental needs met. In this way, all children have the opportunity to learn and achieve school success. Specific to reading instruction, "they [the Progressive Movement leaders] have emphasized the importance of interest and motivation and have criticized reliance on drill . . ." (Harris, 1964, p. 128). As supported by the sociocultural theory of learning, when a child is interested in what is being learned and when it is directly connected to the life outside of school, the student is more successful in what is being learned. The Progressive Education Movement stressed this relationship between content and individual interest and promoted a focus on the child as learner in lieu of a focus on the content of the subject area. A prominent member of this movement, John (Dewey, 1938), exemplified this relationship in his theory of education.

John Dewey's (1938) educational theory is one based upon the experiences that are created and encountered in the classroom. He proposes a project-based curriculum in which, "... the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Based upon this overarching theory, Dewey specifies the roles of the teachers and students in classrooms that work to achieve

continuity of experience. Of utmost importance is the ability of the teacher to know the student. As Dewey stated, the educators have “that sympathetic understanding of students as individuals which gives them an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning” (p. 39). When the teacher is aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of the students, allows suggestions to be made, and uses these to develop a plan or project for the classroom, the result is a “co-operative enterprise” (p.71). Dewey’s theory moved the focus of the instructional engagement from the skill to be learned to the needs and experiences of the student participating in the instructional relationship. This emphasis on the experiences of the students can be seen in the instructional engagement of individual conferencing in reading classrooms today.

Looking at individualized instruction from a historical perspective and embedded within the research cited above, it is evident that an individualized approach to instruction made an impact in reading education during the last century. The research on individualized instruction demonstrated that its focus on the specific needs of the students seemed to promote a higher rate of progression in reading than instruction dependent on prescribed materials that did not take into account the lived experiences of the students in the class. Examples of individualized instruction can be found in *The Personalized Reading Program* (Barbe, 1961) and *Reading Workshop* (Calkins, 2001). Both programs draw upon the tenets of individualized instruction and directly apply them to instructional processes.

Personalized Reading Program. *The Personalized Reading Program* (Barbe, 1961) did not depend on the use of basal readers as the primary means of instruction;

rather, basals were merely used in a supplementary manner in order to present a particular skill. The key aspect of this approach was the emphasis on student choice. As Barbe (1961) explained, children do not naturally move from “reader to reader,” they learn to read from material personally selected with the teacher providing the individual and group skill instruction as needed for a progression into more difficult reading material to occur (p. 1). The *Personalized Reading Program* pinpointed elements of basal instruction that weakened the effectiveness of the series, but stressed that basal usage was not being criticized; the overuse of only one method in a classroom is what was in question. Barbe clarifies,

If we recognize that individual differences exist, both in innate ability to learn and in environmental factors which contribute to the desire to learn to read, then it is unlikely that any one type of approach or reading material will appeal to all children. Even though basal readers have attempted to incorporate many different methods of teaching, they nevertheless inherently require that each child read the same type of story. (p.3)

In order to offer a variety of reading materials that appealed to all of the students in the classroom, the *Personalized Reading Program* was based on the concepts of “seeking, self-selection and pacing” and on the premise that the child who is involved in the discovery of books and the selection of the book he will be reading, either silently or orally, will have more vested interest in the activity and place more effort in the task at hand (p. 3). Similarly, the child who reads books that are on his level will achieve success and thus become motivated to continue in his reading endeavors. In addition to this, Barbe attended to the teacher’s responsibilities and role. The program was dependent

upon a teacher who is perceptive and believes that children want to learn. The teacher works with the children and respects their ideas and behaviors in an effort to lead them to success (p. 18). Similar to this program of reading instruction and the participatory role of the teacher is the process of conferencing used in classrooms today.

Reading Workshop. A curricular approach that fosters student engagement, practice, and personalization is that of reading workshop (Calkins, 2001). Reading workshop is a common method of reading instruction in primary classrooms that creates a space for the “gradual release” of responsibility from the teacher to the student (Pearson, 1993). Although individual classrooms demonstrate variety in the application of the workshop approach, a classroom that ascribes to reading workshop contains 4 basic tenets in each lesson: (1) a mini lesson on some aspect of literature or a reading strategy, (2) independent reading time, (3) student conferences and/or (4) guided reading groups (Atwell, 1987); (Swift, 1993). The structure of reading workshop begins with the teacher providing modeling through thinking aloud as she interacts with a text. During this time, students are able to watch the teacher and listen to the questions she asks and strategies she employs as she works to make meaning. Often during the mini lesson, the teacher poses questions to engage the students in the interaction. By posing guiding questions and leading the students into a discussion about the text, students are able to engage in practice of comprehension strategies as they are introduced by the teacher. At the completion of the mini lesson, students are then provided with time for independent reading with a book that they have self selected. Students who need more guidance may be called with other students who share the same needs to a guided reading group for

more tailored instruction from the teacher. In addition to this need based support, the teacher also confers with all students, both those that struggle with and those who excel in the process of reading. It is during this stage of gradual release that students are working within their Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and optimal learning is taking place. A more detailed discussion of the element of reading conferences will be included later.

Reading Conferences

The discussions of conferencing in the fields of education and literacy studies have many of their roots in the “individualized reading” discussed by Veatch (1957) and the *Personalized Reading Program* as described by Barbe (1961). The three concepts of seeking, self-selection, and pacing central to the *Personalized Reading Program* are also integral elements of the conferencing approach to reading instruction. During conferencing, the child is able to discuss things he has learned or made connections with during his reading. This is similar to the concept of seeking where “the healthy child is naturally active and he is engaged almost continuously while awake in an active exploration of his environment. He seeks from the environment those experiences that are consistent with his maturity and his needs” (Barbe, 1961, p.3). With the element of self-selection during the choosing of his/her independent reading text, the student can have a conversation with the teacher based upon topics he is interested in, based upon the book he has chosen to read, and relating to his need to understand/receive more information. As Durrell (1937) explains, the individual conferences with students may be helpful in the mastery of specific skills or in providing strategies that may be useful to their reading

experiences in the future (p. 344). By focusing the conferencing topics on the students' individual needs, the pacing of the reading instruction is at the appropriate learning level for the student.

Currently, there is limited research studying reading conferencing in classrooms. Below is a discussion of the current practitioner-oriented materials that discuss reading conferences as a tenet of a workshop approach to reading instruction. Following the summary is an overview of the current scholarly research in the field (Allington & Cunningham, 2002; Bomer, 1999; Gill, 2000).

Features of Reading Conferencing. Reading conferences are structured as a one-on-one meeting between teacher and student, and are based upon the needs of the student at the time of the meeting. Common elements of teacher questioning, modeling, strategy instruction, student read-alouds and goal setting underlie the conversations between the teacher and student. Often during time spent with individual students on reading, the teacher has the child focus on reading aloud in order to assess skill strengths and weaknesses. Though many authors include time for reading aloud in a conference, they too refer to this as brief and based upon individual need (Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Gill, 2000; Hornsby *et al.*, 1988; Taberski, 2000; Veatch, 1967). In his educator's guide to personalized reading instruction, Barbe (1961) stresses that this time not become simply an oral reading session. Concentrating on oral reading takes away from other aspects of the individual time period. Barbe (1961) highlights how the necessary skills assessment can be attained without hindering the other concepts of one-on-one time when he states

As the teacher discusses the material with the child, gets to know him and his reading habits and interests better, she records pertinent information on the child's record. In addition to checking his comprehension and the level of difficulty of the material he is reading, she will probably also check his ability with particular words in the story that are difficult . . . the conference must not become a testing period for which the child feels he must prepare. It is instead a relaxed discussion period during which time the child and the teacher share together experiences. (p. 46-7)

In line with Barbe's assertion, Veatch (1957) recognized the need for a conversational tone during the conferencing time and believed that the type of questioning the teacher pursues in the individual conference should be open-ended and thought-provoking (p.14). Though organization and preparedness is stressed, the aim of the teacher is to maintain a relaxed and informal feel to the conference to promote relationship building and student comfort. This underlying tenet of a conference as a time of conversation is a principal component of more present-day, practitioner oriented discussions of reading conferences. In her book Taberski (2000) emphasized the importance of talking to students in her statement, "I can't imagine teaching children to read without meeting with them one-on-one to assess their reading. It's my chance to direct readers to more effective practices, gather information to help me plan further instruction, and match children with appropriate books" (p.6). Similarly, in her anecdotal summary of her classroom, Molly Williams (2001) explained how she sets up conferences in her classroom with a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere that is non-

threatening to the students (p.596). By way of this casual atmosphere, Williams (2001) is able to ask questions for knowledge, to determine the strategies in use by her students, and allow the students to read aloud the favorite part of their self-selected book. As she explains, “Through this process, I learn a great deal about the student’s use of strategies and comprehension. . . . I also teach students about strategies (p. 596). Williams also emphasized that this time allows a “window of teaching opportunity” where she can provide students with the help they need right away (p. 596). The goals of the meeting times described here meet the students’ needs in the reading classroom.

Calkins (2001) developed this idea in her text geared to educators when she explains, “conferring with young readers first involves research in order to learn where the child is as a reader and understand the child’s intention, then deciding what we should teach, and then teaching in a way that can influence what that child does on another day with another book” (p.102). Her dependence on research of or knowing the student is the key to a successful personalized approach to reading instruction. Calkins (2001) also chooses terminology that implies her promotion of skills based learning during conferencing when she describes the role of the teacher as a conferrer and “coach” with individuals, partners, or small groups (p.43). Her use of the term “coach” as well as her emphasis on teacher preparedness shows the active approach the teacher must take in order to ensure the students attain the knowledge they need to be successful in reading.

Types of Reading Conferences. The types of conferences that happen during the literacy block vary based upon student need and teacher formal and informal assessments of the students. Taberski (2000) explains how sometimes conferences arise

“spontaneously” in response to comments children make during mini lessons and at other times, the discussion is “planned,” preceding or following a running record or a retelling (p.72). She also extends this to differentiate between “Teacher-initiated” and “student-initiated” conferences. Teacher-initiated conferences are planned and occur regularly with focused group and individual meetings while planning is not possible with child-initiated conferences. Often, these discussions arise when the student is ready for a set of new books to read and so asks to meet with the teacher to talk about the books that have been recently completed and discuss book selection. Students also may ask for a conference to talk about connections they are having while they read or to read aloud to the teacher something of interest to them, though the conferences are not limited to this content. Hornsby (1988) breaks up conferences into four categories: “timetable, needs-based group, individual, and “teacher-required,” Similar to Taberski’s description of “teacher-initiated conferences,” Hornsby’s educator reference book for literature-based instruction in classrooms designates “time-table” conferring as recurring meeting between the teacher and students, either individually or in small groups, with the goal of maintaining regular contact with each student. “Needs-based group” and “individual” conferences both give children the opportunity for close attention and instruction from the teacher, while “teacher-required conferences” are more targeted to students who are having trouble with their book selection or who are continuously reading the same author or genre of books. In using this type of conferring, the teacher encourages the student to join in with other conferring groups in order to expose him/her to other, more varied, conversations about the books being read in the classroom in an effort to spark interest.

Evident in each of these discussions is what is of utmost importance, the teacher's ability to decide, based upon her knowledge of the student, when conferencing needs to occur (if it is planned) and what needs to be addressed during this time (planned or spontaneous). As Williams (Williams, 2001) concurs, "I am able to teach on the spot and use ongoing assessment. This personalized approach to teaching and assessment is invaluable. I consider the conference one of the most important components of the program" (p. 597).

Benefits of Reading Conferencing. In addition to the method for conducting a conference and setting goals for its implementation, there are clear benefits to the use of reading conferences in classrooms. Choice is an important and beneficial feature in the process of conferencing. In his study, Akmal (2002) pointed out that having choice and the chance for one-on-one time with the teacher appealed to students' personal interest and helped in the development of a student-adult relationship (p. 157). Through this relationship, students became more comfortable with the teacher and were better able to express their needs to them. Another benefit of the conferencing approach is the skill mastery and comprehension strength that it affords students for future reading experiences (Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Hornsby et al., 1988; Miller, 2002). As Williams (2001) checks the progress of her students daily, she is able to help them learn, practice, and internalize reading behaviors and strategies (p. 601). Hornsby (1988) notes that conferences allow teachers to "harness" the verbal responses of students. During the one-on-one conversation, a teacher can use the language of the student to identify needs and determine a relevant starting point for instruction. This is particularly

relevant for young students or students with limited written language experiences. They are able to articulate to their teacher what they know and what needs still remain in the conversation about the book they are reading.

Conferencing also afforded positives that reached beyond the academic to the personal. This is explained well in Akmal's (2002) statement, "Conferences help develop the academic and non-academic self-concept of students. . . . Conferences serve as an excellent vehicle for monitoring the students' academic, social, and personal growth" (Akmal, 2002). Through this personal contact the teacher is able to determine the interests and personalities of each child. As the teacher and student spend more one-on-one time together, the teacher is better able to talk with the student about any problem, academic or non academic, that the student may want to share with her. It is evident through these discussions of the benefits of talking to students that the label of the approach does not matter. What is of most importance is that teachers take the time to individualize and personalize their approach to reading instruction.

Allington and Cunningham (1995) conducted a study that focused on an elementary school in the southeastern United States that "didn't work very well for children" (p. 18). Prior to the year that a new instructional program was enacted by the teachers, most of the classrooms focused on a skills-driven basal reader with students assigned to one of three achievement groups leaving 40 percent of the first-grade students struggling at the pre-primer level and one in five students in the second grade as "unable to read anything but the simplest of texts" (p. 18-19). The school implemented an instructional program which focused on writing, self-selected reading, guided reading,

and working with words. During the self-selected reading time, children were given the opportunity to read from materials that they chose and that were on their level. While the children read, the teacher would spend time conferencing with individual students, meeting with up to one fifth of the class each day. During these conferences, the teacher would work to encourage individual reading interests, build motivation for reading, and provide support to students in their selection of text by way of discussing the book, responding to journal entries, or offering strategies that seem appropriate to a problem the student may have encountered while reading (p. 99). Using informal reading inventories, data showed that at the end of the first year more than half of the first and second graders were reading at or above grade level and by the end of the second year 82 percent of the first-grade students were reading on or above grade level (p. 23). Although the instructional program used focused on four elements of reading instruction, the daily period of self-selection allowed students the time for independent reading and the teacher the opportunity to conference with all of the students in order to provide the necessary support for their reading success.

Randy Bomer (1999) focused his research on conferencing during upper grade reading workshops and how they provide support for struggling readers. He points out that supporting struggling readers required reflection, inquiry, and understanding on the part of the teacher and conferencing allowed a space for these in the classroom (p. 22). During the workshop period, students had the opportunity to select their own texts and read them while the teacher conferred with individuals in an effort to assess their needs, assign strategies that met these needs and provide support (p. 23). The students had time

each day to talk with one another and with the teacher about their reading processes and to offer ideas and share books they had read (p. 23). During the conferences, the researchers “tried to be representatives of meaning in the story, reminding the reader that what they said should make sense in the whole of the text” with the goal of the conference being “to help the reader construct durable understanding about a bit of the reading process, not merely get her through this text today” (p. 29). Bomer pointed out that this is a similar role to that of teacher during the conferencing time. Students are guided and supported through the conferencing process in order to encourage independence with their individual reading experiences. Bomer’s study found that the practices of teacher as facilitator and co-meaning maker, though labor intensive, are helpful for classroom teachers and their work with students who need additional one-on-one attention and encourages teachers to respond to these students’ needs with their best intelligence, efforts, and craft.

Focused on the elementary level, Sharon Ruth Gill (2000) researched the teaching and learning that takes place by way of reading conferences. Unique to the previous studies above, Gill (2000) included in her study the role of the teacher in these conferences. Through analysis of the conference notes, she pinpointed three key teacher roles: collaborator, demonstrator, and observer/assessor and stated that in these roles, teachers support students’ literacy development by making assessments, demonstrating strategies at the point of need, and providing successful reading experiences (p. 506-508). In her study she focused on the processes and skills the student learns as he/she becomes literate. In this qualitative case study, Gill focused her attention on a second grade student

in her classroom. Data was collected through anecdotal notes taken during their reading conferences over a four month time period. These notes specifically included the ways in which Gill assisted Amy in these conversations. The data was coded and three categories – Amy’s choice of texts, her use of reading strategies, and the roles of the teacher — became evident. From the data of the conference sessions, Gill noted that patterns emerged in the student’s book selection as the teacher provided more support to this method. At the start, she only selected familiar books, but as Gill modeled the reading of other, similar texts that were appropriate to her current reading skill expertise, the student followed suite and began to branch out. In these book selections, the student was knowledgeable of how to choose the right book and was successful with selecting only books that she was able to read and comprehend with success. Similarly, patterns emerged in the area of strategy use with the student gradually becoming independent of the teacher by adopting the strategies modeled during the conferencing period. By the end of the four month study, the student was monitoring her own meaning making and independently making use of visualization strategies. Through conferencing, the teacher had the opportunity to model strategies for book selection and reading that Amy was able to internalize, thus becoming more independent and successful in her reading.

Conclusion

Individualization (Barbe, 1961; Veatch, 1957) is one way to provide effective reading instruction in classrooms. From the research cited above, we know that an individualized approach to instruction with one-on-one time with the teacher leads to higher achievement and more positive attitudes towards reading than does the solitary use

of basal readers. Often in reading this one-on-one time comes in the form of conferencing. While there are practitioner oriented materials exploring the process and benefits of including conferencing in classroom instruction, there remains a lack of scholarly research in this area as well as in what ways this instructional engagement leads the students to apply strategies and come to make meaning from what they are reading. In order to delve more deeply into processes, benefits, and individual applications of conferencing, what is needed is a study that describes the nature of reading conferencing and identifies in what ways, if any, participation in reading conferences influences students during the independent reading period. My study aimed to fill this gap in current research and focused on the students during and after the reading conference. Chapter 3 will outline the methods used for data collection and analysis in the study. Chapters 4 and 5 will delve into the data and provide analysis and developed hypotheses. In addition to the analysis, implications on the fields of reading and education research will be identified and discussed in detail.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The methodology discussion details the design of the study and is divided into several sections. I first discuss site selection and field entry. Second, I provide a description of Ms. Sloan¹, the classroom structure and students, and details of the literacy block. Then, rationale for the selection of the three focus students is provided. Next, the phases of the study are outlined and include a description of data collection, documentation, and record-keeping within each phase. Finally, I discuss sampling decisions and outline data analysis methods and discuss quality criteria of qualitative research.

Site Selection and Field Entry

The study was conducted at an international school in Surrey, England. It included 15 of the 17 students and teacher, Ms. Sloan, in one third-grade classroom. The school is located in a village which is 23 miles southwest of London. It is a kindergarten through twelfth-grade tuition-based school divided into the early childhood, lower, middle, and high school buildings. Students come from 51 nations around the world with an approximated 50% of the students from the United States.

Ms. Sloan and I knew each other for one year previous to the research year. We met when I came to the school, as both a substitute teacher for the lower school and a researcher in a neighboring teacher's classroom in September of 2006. My pilot study focused on reading conferencing, and knowing that Ms. Sloan used a conferencing

¹ Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

approach to reading and writing instruction in her classroom, I approached her about continuing the study in her classroom for the 2007-2008 school year after I discovered that my pilot teacher would be returning to the United States. During the 2007-2008 school year, I worked on the third-grade team as one of five full-time teachers that resulted in Ms. Sloan and me spending many hours a week of professional time together. Based upon our schedules for the year, my students attended “specials” (Music, Art, P.E. ,etc.) two days per week at the time when Ms. Sloan conducted reading conferencing with her students, which allowed me time to collect data in her room.

During those weeks when I felt it was necessary to spend a third observation day in her classroom, my EAL support teacher, Mrs. Weir, taught the reading mini lesson in my classroom and met with her case load of students for reading groups. The other students read independently during reader’s workshop just as they would have if I were in the room conducting reading conferences and guided reading groups. In order to ensure that instruction stayed consistent even when I was out of the room collecting data, Mrs. Weir and I began a modified co-teaching model in the beginning of the year in both math and language arts two days per week. Having Mrs. Weir as an integral part of the instructional structure of the class created a more consistent environment of which the students were familiar and allowed me to leave the classroom to collect data as needed without a disruption to the learning of my own students.

I selected Ms. Sloan’s classroom as the research site based upon recommendations from the lower school principal and the teacher with whom I worked for my pilot study. In addition, I spoke with Ms. Sloan about her reading instruction

during my pilot study year, and her conferencing approach fell in line with the focus of this study. She organized her literacy block and executed small group meetings and individual conferencing in a similar way to what I observed and analyzed for the pilot study. Furthermore, I had a rapport with Ms. Sloan from my time working as a substitute teacher with the third-grade. Our relationship was comfortable both professionally and personally, and recognizing the large amount of time I would be in her classroom and the time she and I would spend in conversations and formal interviews, this relationship was of utmost importance. The relationship proved fruitful during the data collection and pre-analysis periods as Ms. Sloan and I conversed frequently about what I was observing in her classroom and she was able to clarify areas of confusion as they arose.

In order to begin my research, I met with the principal of the lower school during the fall of 2006 to discuss the logistics of and ask formal permission for the pilot study. At that time, I provided the principal with a formal research proposal as well as copies of the consent forms that were to be sent out to parents, and the principal provided me with a letter of permission. In May of 2007, I met with Ms. Sloan to discuss the details of the study, provided her with copies of the research proposal and permission letters to be sent out, and obtained her formal permission to conduct the study in her classroom. Due to the fact that I would be conducting research in a different classroom than that of the pilot study, and, since I would now be a member of the faculty, I also met with the principal again. During this meeting, I shared the plan for conducting the dissertation study in Ms. Sloan's classroom while fulfilling my duties as classroom teacher. I received verbal permission for this study at this meeting.

All of the students in Ms. Sloan's class were asked to participate in the study. I met with the students in mid September to introduce myself as researcher, as they all knew me as a classroom teacher prior to this point. I explained what I would be doing as a participant observer in the classroom. During this same week, I mailed a letter to each of the families with the same information about myself and the project. In addition to these introductory letters, I attached consent forms asking parental permission for students to participate in the study as well as the student assent form. Parents were supplied with a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to return the consent forms. These permissions included the audio taping of the informal interviews and conversations I planned to conduct, videotaping in the course of the normal activities of the classroom (specifically reading conferences), and the copying of any artifacts of importance to the study produced during the literacy block. There were three letters that were not returned, and so I followed up with a phone call to the parents to insure that they received the mailing and offered to answer any questions they had. Two parents opted out of participation. One provided no rationale, and the other explained that her son had learning and behavioral difficulties that required the full day assistance of an aide. The mother did not want to add to his already full schedule or risk taking away from his scheduled time with on campus specialists. The two children who did not return the signed consent forms were not used as part of the data analysis, and no videotaped segments including the children were or will be shown publicly.

In the explanation of the project with the students as well as in the parental letters mailed home, it was made apparent that: (1) participation is strictly voluntary; (2)

participants may withdraw without penalty at any time; (3) interviews, discussions, video and audiotapes will be kept confidential, and (4) pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants.

Ms. Sloan

As mentioned above, I knew Ms. Sloan professionally for one academic year prior to beginning my research in her classroom. During this time, I was able to informally observe Ms. Sloan with her students and the other third graders outside of the classroom. She had a calm demeanor and maintained a pleasant tone with the students. Based upon their willingness to come to her to share stories and give hugs, it was apparent that Ms. Sloan was well liked by the students. Additionally, when I spoke with team members about my study, they confirmed my decision to work in her classroom by their praise of both her instructional methods and personal relationships with her students.

Guiding Principles

During the year in which I worked alongside Ms. Sloan, the characterization above was affirmed through my interactions with her. As a researcher in her classroom, I was able to see first-hand her philosophy of education in action. During my initial conversation with Ms. Sloan about the reading block in her classroom, she explained that making time to sit and talk with each student was a high priority for her. During these times, she was “able to really get to know the student. I enjoy learning about their reading likes and struggles in order to better aid in their reading development” (TI, 10/2007). This desire to know her students was evident in her interactions with them during class time. Ms. Sloan often inquired about students’ family members of whom she’d heard the child

speak. In addition, Ms. Sloan made it a point to find connections to make the content being presented relevant and meaningful to the lives of her students. Just as important as relationship building in Ms. Sloan's classroom was her attention to creating interest in and differentiating the material presented in class so that all students would want to and had the opportunity to access the content. She often shared stories about her personal travels and experiences that sparked an interest across the group and encouraged the students to pose questions and share their own connections. Similarly, she modified assessments and individual assignments in the content areas in order to insure that each student was able to demonstrate his or her knowledge. Her constant attention to the needs of her students was reflected in her planning.

Preparation and Planning

As a faculty member at the school research site and the third grade team, I worked closely with Ms. Sloan during summer in-service planning and throughout the school year. We worked with the grade level team to map out the academic calendar, outline major projects, and determine key strategies and skills to be taught to the third grade students. Each week the third grade team met to discuss students of concern, review content that seemed difficult to master for the majority of students, and plan lessons across each of the content areas. During these meetings, Ms. Sloan often made contributions that prompted the team to view the content in relation to the needs of all students. She took the lead in planning the reading lessons for the grade level and would guide us in the selection of interesting and relevant texts and activities to use in our

classrooms. Ms. Sloan consistently encouraged us to modify her ideas and suggestions to fit the students in our own classrooms and our personal teaching styles.

The Classroom

Class schedule

The third grade students were taught Reading, Writing, Math, and Social Studies in their classrooms and by their homeroom teacher. “Specials,” or ancillary courses, were taught in other locations and by other faculty. Science was a unique content area due to the fact that the school had a lab at the top floor of the building and a Science teacher for the elementary grade levels. Although the students left the room for Science, Ms. Sloan accompanied them to the lab and participated in the lesson as a teacher of support for students struggling with the concepts introduced. In addition, she would follow up the concepts discovered during the time in the laboratory with additional readings and or assignments. Table 2 is an overview of a week in Ms. Sloan’s classroom.

Table 2					
<u>Weekly Schedule in Ms. Sloan's Third-Grade Classroom.</u>					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-8:45	Morning Registration				
8:50-9:30	Library	People Skills	Music	Science Lab	PE
9:35-10:30	Math	Math	Math	French	
10:35-11:45	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:45-12:25	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
12:20-1:35	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
1:40-2:20	French	PE	Art	Computer	Music
2:25-3:10	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing

During “Morning Registration” students would put their book bags into their lockers, turn in homework from the night before, hand notes for Ms. Sloan and the office to Ms. Sloan, check off their lunch preference (from home or cafeteria), and then sit to do a Math warm up that would later be the connection to the day’s math lesson. If students completed the warm up, they would then take out one of their independent reading books and read until given the direction to line up for their Specials course. While the students embarked upon their daily morning routine, Ms. Sloan would utilize the time to take attendance, complete the lunch count form for the office, and sort out any notes she received from the students.

This routine allowed students and teacher to settle into their day before the start of instruction. On some occasions, Ms. Sloan would switch the reading and writing times. She only did this on days when I was not coming in to conduct research and on days when she wanted the students to spend a significant uninterrupted time on their writing as the afternoon was occasionally broken up by all school activities, announcements, or students' early dismissal.

Reading Instructional Time

The reading instruction in Ms. Sloan's classroom happened each day during a mid-morning time slot. The routine surrounding this block of time remained consistent throughout the school year. As students returned from their *Specials* course (see non content courses in Table 2 above), they entered the classroom and proceeded to "the carpet" as instructed by Ms. Sloan. This was the daily read aloud and whole class strategy instruction area of the classroom bordered on one side by bookcases and on another by a tall wooden easel supporting a flip chart (See Appendix A). The bookcases were filled with books shelved with teacher-leveled books noted by a color coded sticker and grade level number on the spine. Additionally, these books were grouped on the shelf by the marked level. In addition to this selection of books, there were books categorized by genre in baskets. The flip chart was often written on in brightly colored marker and filled with *Post-it* notes, making it the focal point of the space. On this chart paper could be found the focal comprehension strategy for the week. As the year continued, the focus strategies previously taught hung around the room with student examples noted on them by *Post-it* notes.

On the day of my initial observation in Ms. Sloan's room, like the following days of observation, Ms. Sloan awaited the children's attention as they arrived into the classroom, first standing and then sitting next to the easel. This was where the mini lesson of the reading period was to take place. Written on the chart paper were the words "Text-to-Self" with a definition of this strategy. In addition to this, students' names and yellow *Post-it* notes, in the shape of thought bubbles, surrounded the strategy label. These *Post-its* were filled with the students' connections made during independent reading between the text and their life experiences. Ms. Sloan spotlighted these examples throughout the week during the whole class mini lesson as a way to encourage student participation as well as demonstrate the application of the strategy in a variety of ways.

Assessments

Mrs. Slaven utilized both formal and informal assessments to determine the reading needs of the students in her class. Informally, she kept anecdotal notes during individual conferences that are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Formally, she used The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA is a common reading assessment used in primary classrooms to assess the current reading levels of the students in the class. The DRA is a set of individually administered criterion-referenced assessments for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. It is administered, scored, and interpreted by the classroom teacher, and it identifies students' independent reading levels. Table 3 below provides an overview of DRA scores' correlation to grade level.

Table 3	
<u>DRA score correlation to grade level.</u>	
DRA	Grade
A, 1, 2	Kindergarten
2, 3, 4, 6-8, 10, 12, 14, 16	1 st
18, 20, 24, 28	2 nd
30, 34, 38	3 rd
40	4 th
44	5 th

Mrs. Sloan administered the DRA to her students in October and in May. The information gathered from the October assessment was used to determine which texts in the classroom library would be good choices for the students. Mrs. Sloan wanted to ensure that students' experiences with reading during the independent reading time were not hampered by frustration. As discussed in chapter 4, she taught students how to select "Just Right" books, and her knowledge of their independent and instructional reading levels (both provided to her through the results of the DRA assessment) aided her in guiding their selections. As mentioned in chapter 3's overview of focus students, the students in Mrs. Sloan's class performed well on their fall DRA. As shown in table 4, most students' scores indicated that their independent reading level was at the third grade level. The selection of Renee and Liam as a focal students allowed me to pinpoint the ways in which individual conferencing influenced the reading of even grade level readers. It was apparent from the data that these two focal students developed in their ability to articulate their thinking about their reading and apply various comprehension strategies.

Table 4 shows the fall and spring scores for Mrs. Sloan’s third-grade classroom. It is important to note that the school policy was not to test students in third grade beyond level 40 on the DRA. Students who scored a 40 at the beginning of the school year, indicating that they were able to read independently texts geared toward fourth-graders, were tested at the same independent level in the spring. The DRA measure of the reading growth of these students over the course of the school year is unknown, and any improvement made by students was not indicated by the DRA. Additionally, scores at the school were taken in October and March, and reading instruction continued until the end of the school year in late May. There is the possibility that additional growth occurred in some of the students.

Table 4		
<u>DRA Scores for Mrs. Sloan’s Third Grade</u>		
Student	October 2007	March 2008
Carlos	14	18
Liam	40	40
Renee	38	40
#4	40	40
#5	38	40
#6	30	38
#7	40	40
#8	38	40

Table 4 continued

#9	30	34
#10	40	40
#11	40	40
#12	28	34
#13	40	40
#14	30	38
#15	40	40
#16	Arrived in March	38
#17	20	28

Focus Student Selection

Focus students were selected during Phase 2 of the research (phases discussed in following section). These students were selected based upon scheduling logistics, DRA score analysis, and the review of field notes from classroom observations and initial informal student interviews. Although the majority of Ms. Sloan’s 17 person class was on or above grade level based upon the DRA reading assessment given in October, there were a few students in the classroom who had learning and/or developmental difficulties and were pulled out of class for services (occupational therapy, emotional counseling, etc.). These students were not a logistical fit as focus students due to the fact that their pull out times conflicted with the independent reading portion of the reading block. Looking more closely at the DRA data, I noted 7 students who scored a 40 on the fall

assessment. Since such a high percentage scored in this range, I thought it was important to select a student from this group, so I selected Liam. The second focus student was selected due to the transferability opportunities to other primary grade reading classrooms for the reader. Many classroom teachers face diverse learners and must work to meet their developmental needs (Harris, 1964; Dewey, 1938), and so selecting Carlos, a focus student not proficient in the English language, would provide insight into his thinking about reading. Finally, I selected a third focus student, Renee, whom I learned through the initial informal interview and observations liked to read, but did not have much experience talking about books in a meaningful way. Again, this was common in Ms. Sloan's class and so Renee proved a strong representative case.

Carlos

Carlos is a non native English speaker. He had attended schools where English was taught, but the year in which I conducted my study was his first year immersed in an English only environment (English as the language the subjects are taught). He communicated clearly in spoken English with his classmates and Ms. Sloan. Where he struggled was in the area of vocabulary. This transferred into his reading experiences as Carlos had difficulty with his comprehension due to limited word knowledge. On the October DRA, Carlos scored a 14 and increased to a level 18 on the February assessment. During the course of the year, Carlos was pulled out of writing and social studies for English Language Learner (ELL) support. He was out of the class for 45 minutes weekly. During his time with his ELL teacher, the focus was on vocabulary building based upon the content words in his current SS and Science units. He and the teacher would preview

the texts to be read in class and ensure that he had a strong understanding of the words and concepts that the content units were based upon. Not much additional time was spent on general reading comprehension; instead, the language arts specific support was centered upon spelling. Ms. Sloan worked 2-3 times a week with Carlos during reading conferences. He was often her first conference of the independent reading period as he needed the guidance from her with unknown vocabulary and pronunciations of words to continue reading the texts selected. Ms. Sloan spent most of her conferences with Carlos spotlighting unknown words in the text. Often, she would provide definitions of the word both in the context of the story as well as other possible meanings of the word as heard in everyday English conversation.

Renee

Renee is a native English speaker. She and her family moved overseas when she was in the first grade, and she has attended the American School for the past 2 years. Renee is a successful student who works hard at each task with which she is presented. She scored a 38 on the October DRA and increased to a 40 in February. When selecting focus students, Renee stood out due to her methodical response to text. It was obvious that she had been previously engaged with books through reader response questions and other teacher directed activities. This was representative of quite a few of Ms. Sloan's students. The process of individual conferences was new to them and so the act of talking about their thinking as they read was also new to them. Renee provided insight into the transformation from a teacher directed reader to a reader who was cognitively aware of her reading decisions and actions. Ms. Sloan's focus for Renee's conferences was based

primarily on the mini lesson strategy at the start of the year and then transitioned into a more student-led focus. As Renee was more confidently able to talk about her reading and her thinking about her reading, Ms. Sloan could tailor the conversation to her needs.

Liam

Liam is a native English speaker who has been at the school for 2 academic years. As mentioned previously, 40% of the students in Ms. Sloan's classroom scored a 40 on the DRA. This made it important to focus on a student in this range in order to fully represent the composition of the class in reference to standardized reading ability. In looking at the subcategories from the assessment, I selected Liam due to the fact that he had room to advance numerically in both his oral reading fluency and comprehension; both of these were a part of the content of the individual conferencing time. In addition, in speaking informally with Liam about his reading experiences, it was clear that he enjoyed reading but was unable to articulate strategies that he used to navigate through books. Additionally, in his early conferences with Ms. Sloan, it was evident that he relished the individual time with her and became eager to return to his seat to read when he left a conference. The struggle to articulate how they strategize while reading and a strong enthusiasm for reading were common among the students in Ms. Sloan's classroom.

Phases of Inquiry

Data collection was concentrated over three time periods in order to have samples across an academic year in the hope of capturing any changes that might occur during the school year. The phases are adapted from those of (Kong & Pearson, 2003). The following sections contain Table 3 and discussion of the timeline followed for the four

phases of inquiry the study required (a) field entry, (b) hypothesis development, (c) hypothesis refinement, and (d) field exit. An overview of the phases is outlined in the Table 3.

Phase One: Field Entry

Data Collection

During this first five weeks in the classroom as researcher, I made efforts to acquaint myself with the structure of the classroom, the students, and the relationships between the teacher and these students. Data collection during this introductory phase consisted of field notes, teacher interviews (see Appendix B), audio and video taping and included the weekly expansion of field notes and review of the audio and video tapes. Each of these is detailed below.

Phase and Anticipated Duration	Focus	Frequency of Observations	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Phase One 5 weeks (End of September - mid December)	*Field entry *Familiarize self with setting *Negotiate role as participant observer	*2 Reading periods/week	*Participant/observation *Field notes *Video/Audio tape *Formal and informal teacher interview *Artifact collection	*Weekly review/expansion of FN, MN, and PN *Microanalysis and Labels *Peer debriefing *Weekly review of Video/Audio tapes

Table 5 continued.

<p>Interim</p> <p>6 weeks</p> <p>(End of December - January)</p>	<p>*Analysis and development of categories</p> <p>*Developing Hypotheses</p>	<p>*1 Reading period every other week</p>	<p>*Field notes</p> <p>*Video/Audio tape</p> <p>*Artifact Collection</p> <p>*Informal teacher interviews</p>	<p>*Constant Comparative Method: Open Coding (memos, concepts, and categories)</p> <p>*Intensive Review of FN at end of Phase 1</p>
<p>Phase Two</p> <p>6 weeks</p> <p>(Early February-mid March)</p>	<p>*Theoretical sampling to further develop hypotheses and refine categories.</p>	<p>*2-3 Reading periods/week</p>	<p>*Participant/observation</p> <p>*Field notes</p> <p>*Video/Audio tape</p> <p>*Formal and informal teacher interview</p> <p>*Artifact collection</p> <p>*Informal Interviews with students</p>	<p>*Weekly review/expansion of FN, MN, and PN</p> <p>*Peer debriefing</p> <p>*Weekly review of Video/Audio tapes</p> <p>*Triangulation</p>
<p>Interim</p> <p>4 weeks</p> <p>(End of March – end of April)</p>	<p>*Analysis</p> <p>*Category refinement</p>	<p>*1 Reading period every other week</p>	<p>*Field notes</p> <p>*Video/Audio tape</p> <p>*Artifact Collection</p>	<p>*Constant Comparative Method: Axial Coding</p> <p>*Intensive Review of FN at end of Phase 2</p> <p>*Member Check</p> <p>*Peer Debriefing</p>
<p>Phase Three</p> <p>4 weeks</p> <p>(end of April to Mid May)</p>	<p>*Refine Hypotheses</p>	<p>*1-2 Reading periods/week</p>	<p>*Field Notes</p>	<p>*Review of taped data</p> <p>*Review of Field notes</p> <p>*Constant Comparative Method</p> <p>*Member Check</p>

Table 5 continued.

<p>Phase Four</p> <p>3 weeks (Mid May to Early June)</p>	<p>Field exit</p>		<p>*Formal Interview with teacher *Formal/informal interview with students</p>	<p>*Peer Debriefing *Member Check</p>
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Participant Observation. Framed within the interpretivist paradigm, the study incorporated qualitative methods “involving a level of interaction between the researcher and the researched” (Schwandt, 1994). It was designed to delve into how students create meaning and deepen understanding of text through talking about and interacting with it. The purpose of this initial five week phase was to familiarize myself with the routines and climate of the classroom and the teacher. In addition, I situated myself as researcher and participant observer during the literacy block. Due to the fact that the students knew me first as a teacher on their grade level, I wanted to distinguish my role during this observation period. Instead of being someone they looked to for direction, occasional academic support, and as needed behavior manager, I made an effort to blend into the background of the physical classroom. I placed myself outside of the instructional spaces and made every effort to enter and leave the classroom without disrupting the normal routine. Ms. Sloan and I spoke about my goal, and so she made every effort to keep colleague talk out of the observation periods. In this way, students were able to find comfort with my presence as participant observer. They did not question the audio and videotaping of their lessons and seemed to be at ease with my questions and conversations with them about what they were reading, thinking, etc. I attribute much of this comfort to the environment of Ms. Sloan’s classroom. By implementing the

workshop approach to reading and writing, from day one, students were talking with adults (teacher, aide, administrative observers, and parent volunteers) about what they were reading and how they were thinking about that reading.

As a result of my role as a teacher during the time of data collection, I was unable to spend full days within Ms. Sloan's classroom. In order to address the limitation of not being able to observe an entire day, I adjusted my teaching schedule, spent additional time with Ms. Sloan before and after the students arrived, and coordinated with the EAL support teacher to increase my availability to observe during the reading lessons. My students followed the same basic schedule, with a slight variation in the timing of their "Specials" courses. In order to be as acquainted as possible with the classroom culture, I spent one to two mornings a week with Ms. Sloan as she set up for her day. I also spent one to two afternoons in her room as she tidied up and began to grade assignments. During these times, I spoke informally to Ms. Sloan about her planning, thoughts about her students, and her vision for her classroom. These interviews provided the opportunity for me to better understand her guiding principles and rationale for some instructional decisions. I also spent significant time in Ms. Sloan's room during this phase. I observed "reader's workshop" (Calkins, 2001; Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, 2006; Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2000) two days per week for approximately one hour per day. During the first observation, I gathered data to provide a general sense of the context of the classroom. I focused on established classroom procedures, teacher and student roles, and reader's workshop routines.

Field Notes, Methodological Notes, and Theoretical Notes. During each of the phases of research, I recorded four kinds of notes: field notes (FN), theoretical notes (TN), and personal notes (PN). Table 6 (adapted from (Corsaro, 1985) provides definitions of those notes.

Type	Definition
Field	Described events that were experienced directly by watching and listening. They contained as little interpretation as possible and were recorded both during and shortly after the period of observation. Included both observations and informal teacher and student interviews.
Theoretical	Included attempts to develop theoretical significance of field notes from an observation. These notes included thoughts and evaluations on the effectiveness of instructional methods.
Personal	Involved attempts to capture the observer's personal thoughts and reactions to the events observed. These notes included reactions to the behaviors and talk of both the teacher and students as well as general events in the classroom
Methodological	Involved evaluations of, and instructions for improving, methods of observational data. Methodological notes were expanded to include specific evaluations of and strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. They included peer and expert debriefing notes.

Field notes were notes written at the close of each research day and allowed me to reflect immediately on what I observed and note questions or places where I needed to focus future observations. During my observation time in the classroom, I recorded notes that overviewed the events in the classroom and captured some talk of the teacher and students, but due to the limitation of being able to capture all that was occurring in writing, I needed to expand my notes to increase the detail of the observation. In order to expand my notes from the observation, I listened to the audio tape and watched the video tape from the day. During this expansion. I added in theoretical notes describing my

thinking/interpretation about what was happening in the captured moments. Additionally, I added methodological notes about specific data collection procedures and personal notes inclusive of my questions and reactions to the data (see Appendix C for copies of expanded field notes).

Formal and informal interviews with teacher. During Phase 1, I talked both formally and informally with Ms. Sloan about various aspects of classroom life. As I spent time working within her classroom and during team meetings, we would informally chat about the day's events. These conversations allowed me to gather information about the students in the classroom as well as the thinking behind instructional decisions Ms. Sloan was making. The content of these informal interviews was not preplanned; rather, it evolved as a result of normal interactions. Following these informal interviews, notes were made and expanded further at home.

Along with these informal interviews, I also interviewed Ms. Sloan formally at the end of Phase 1. During this interview, we spoke about her guiding philosophy in her classroom, how she came to make instructional decisions, and her vision of what she wanted reader's workshop in her classroom to look like. In addition, Ms. Sloan spoke about the conferencing time and framed its purpose and her goals for it within the reader's workshop. This interview was audio taped and later transcribed.

Audio and video recording. Audio and video recording began during the second week of Phase 1. I audio taped both the whole class mini lesson and one-on-one conferences between students and teacher. My purpose in audio recording was to insure that I captured the complete dialogue between the teacher and the student since the

microphone of the video camera was not always close enough to capture talk. I introduced both the audio and video recorder to the class prior to my first visit as researcher to the classroom. At this time, I demonstrated how both worked and showed students video of themselves and let them hear the audio recordings of their voices. This allowed for a quick adjustment to the presence of these recording devices in the classroom. Videotaping was used because it provided a visual record of the interactions. More specifically, I was able to review the facial expressions and gestures of the teacher and students during the conference conversations. During the first few weeks, I asked Ms. Sloan to record conferences when I was not in the room so that the camera would become part of the routine. This consistent exposure was successful. Only on one occasion did a student appear distracted by the camera during a conference. The video data collected during this period was used with caution during analysis because of possible obtrusiveness issues.

Artifact Collection. The final data source during this phase was the collection of teacher and classroom artifacts. Photographs of chart paper displaying the focus strategy and student contributions were taken. In addition, anecdotal and diagnostic records were obtained from Ms. Sloan. These documents were photocopied and returned immediately. No collected artifacts were produced for the purpose of the study; all collected artifacts were generated in the process of everyday classroom events.

Data Analysis

Data analysis during Phase 1 primarily consisted of (a) bi-weekly reviews of field notes, (b) estimating obtrusiveness, and (c) peer debriefing.

Bi-weekly reviews of field notes. During Phase 1, bi-weekly reviews were conducted. During these reviews, notes were made in the margins as possible categories in the data emerged. Additionally, questions about teacher decision making and structure of the conference were recorded. The focus of these notes was to better understand the conferencing period and the teacher's instructional foci during this time. These notes, patterns, and questions which emerged from them were informally shared and discussed with the teacher for the purpose of triangulation and member checking.

Obtrusiveness. Another purpose for the bi-weekly reviews of field notes was to determine the obtrusiveness of data collection techniques (note-taking, audio and video taping) within the classroom. During this first phase of data collection, I utilized both audio and video taping. I was not a participant in the class activities and set up my note-taking space at the back of the room near the table where the one-on-one conferencing occurred. My space was not physically obtrusive to the students' work space. Only occasionally did students stop to look at the note pad on which I was taking notes. There was not much interest in my presence in the classroom. I attribute this primarily to the students familiarity to me as a member of their grade level teaching team. I placed the audio recorder near my chair and used a microphone that extended from the audio recorder onto the conferencing table. This elicited some curiosity at first, but the students' attention waned within the first two weeks as I demonstrated to them how it worked and let them speak into it. Similarly, the video recorder set up on the back bookshelf near the conferencing table received minor attention at the start of data collection. Most students were curious about the miniature tripod on which it was

located. They wondered how it balanced and why I did not have a regular sized tripod. Once I allowed them to touch the camera to see how it was set up, their attention was no longer focused on the recording device.

Peer debriefing. According to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer debriefers are to be “noninvolved professional peers” who are prepared to have an honest conversation about the data (p. 283). Debriefing with a colleague at the university allowed outside perspective on the data collected. My peer debriefer met the above criteria. She was a fellow graduate student who has a depth of experience teaching using the reader’s workshop and conferencing approach as well as a well versed understanding of the current research in reading instruction. Due to the fact that I was collecting data in a school out of the country, my peer debriefer and I met in person only once during the data collection period. We relied upon email and phone conversations for our communication. Prior to our conversations, my debriefer was given access to my FN, MN and TN. During these debriefing sessions, I would share my observations and transcripts and the patterns that I saw emerging from this data set. Her comments assisted me in taking a different perspective when looking at the raw data and gave me guidance in my methodological decisions.

Interim

This phase lasted approximately 6 weeks. During this time when data collection was not scheduled regularly, the class was observed 3 times. I conducted informal interviews with both the teacher and the students as well as conducted an intense review of the field notes and other data (video tapes, artifacts, interviews). The constant

comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to analyze the data. I reviewed field notes, conference transcripts, and audio and video tapes. I highlighted themes that began to emerge and noted possible categories in which to sort the data. In addition, I made notes about students in an effort to begin to hone in on the focus students. At the end of the 6 weeks, I created a theoretical summary of working hypotheses. This summary guided the methodological decisions for phase 2 in terms of data collection and sampling issues and was used to identify possible students on whom to focus. It was during this time that I selected Carlos as a focus student for the next phase of research.

Phase Two: Focused Observations & Hypothesis Development

Data Collection

The second phase of the study was comprised of more focused observations; specifically the conferences occurring in the reading period that consisted of teacher pre-determined and planned conferences. I had originally planned to collect data on spontaneous student and teacher initiated situations, but the context of this classroom did not allow for many of those to occur during my observation sessions. In speaking with Ms. Sloan, it became clear that she prefers to have conferences in a more structured way, although on a few occasions, I observed her responding to immediate reading needs and questions of students not on her list of conferences to hold for the period. This is addressed in more detail in Chapter 4. Phase 2 of data collection lasted approximately 6 weeks and included two observations per week. Conferencing between teacher and students was observed and field notes were taken on each of these. I also began collecting

information from the students during their independent reading time by way of informal interviews.

Participant Observation. It is during Phase 2 that I moved from being a sole observer to a partial participant during the independent reading period. When the teacher was conferring with one of the non-participants or when the students began the read aloud portion of the conference when minimal instruction or modeling was to occur, I moved among the students as they read independently, prepared for their conferences by noting thoughts and observation on *Post-It* notes, and made book selections. In this way, I was able to informally interview students about what I observed them talk about in their conferences as well as their thoughts behind their book selection and independent reading and responding.

Audio and Video recordings. I continued to both audio and videotape during my observation time in the classroom. Video data was planned to be collected at the start of the whole class mini lesson, but this did not always work out logistically. Due to the fact that I was teaching and was only able to enter Ms. Sloan's room once my own students were settled in their reading groups and independent reading locations, I often recorded data beginning at the transition from the whole class mini lesson into independent silent reading and conferencing. It is during this transition that Ms. Sloan often gave the independent reading task for the day and so I was able to keep track of the student's purpose for each observation day. Additionally, my focus was on the conferencing and independent reading portions of the reading workshop in Ms. Sloan's room, and I determined that the most time spent during these two events was more important than

capturing the entire reading block. Although the read aloud portion of the mini lesson was not captured, I was aware of the focus text and strategy definition and applications modeled since Ms. Sloan and I often shared our mini lesson ideas and lesson plans with each other. In order to ensure that all of the conferences were captured, I continued with the set up of the video recorder at the back book shelf near the conferencing table. In this way, I was free to move about the room with the audio recorder to capture informal interviews with students about their reading.

Interviews with Ms. Sloan. During Phase 2, I formally interviewed Ms. Sloan one time. This interview focused on Ms. Sloan's instructional decisions during the conference time. We discussed the structure of the conference, how she determined the content, and how she utilized record keeping through the process. In addition to this formal interview, I continued to spend time with Ms. Sloan as a team member and we spoke often about the strategies being taught in her classroom and how her intentions and plans for conferences developed as she got to know her students. As one of the foci of this study is on the teacher's role and how decisions are being made about the structure and content of the reading conferences, these interviews were of utmost importance. We continued to interact throughout the day and these moments gave way to her ability to answer questions that emerged from that day's observation.

Artifacts. The collection of artifacts began during Phase 2. It is during this second phase that students began to routinely use *Post-it* notes in their independent reading selections. Artifacts collected included photos of students' *Post-it* notes and the teacher's anecdotal record sheets.

Interviews with students. As mentioned above, I began to informally and formally interview students during their independent reading time throughout Phase 2. Students were selected for interview based upon the conference session with the teacher. As a result of this sampling technique, all students were not being interviewed. More specifically, if the teacher focused on a specific strategy, I made an effort to interview that student to determine what impact, if any, this individual instruction made to his/her independent reading. These conversations occurred when students were working independently on their reading or book selection. The specific content of these interviews developed from the working hypotheses, and in general, focused on the student's attitude toward reading, the rationale for book choice, and their application of reading strategies. These interviews were generally brief and did not keep the students from their independent reading time. No interviews occurred during times when the teacher was providing students with instruction.

Data Analysis

Data analysis during this phase consisted of (a) systematic reviews of field notes and (b) member checking with the teacher.

Systematic reviews of field notes. The reviews of field notes during this phase consisted of bi-weekly and weekly reviews. These reviews served two main purposes: (a) identifying patterns in the data to generate working hypotheses about the nature of reading conferencing and (b) guiding sampling decisions.

In Phase 2, I began to review the field notes to determine patterns in the data related to the nature of reading conferencing in a third grade classroom. Utilizing the

constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I continued to review the data and record notes in the margin. My focus in the review during Phase 2 concerned possible categories and items that related to these categories across the data set.

In a grounded theory study, data collection is guided by theoretical sampling in which the data is collected, coded, and analyzed in order to develop the theory as it emerges (Merriam, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first period of the study, all of the reading lesson activities and students were observed equally and their relevant comments and actions recorded. During Phase 2, as hypotheses emerged and were refined, select literacy events (individual conferring and independent reading) were of primary interest. As this period of data collection continued, sampling became more theoretical based upon emerging hypotheses. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of reading conferencing and how it influenced students' independent reading experiences, I selected both Renee and Liam as focal students. These focus students were selected based upon both their conferences with Ms. Sloan as well as the informal interviews I conducted with them.

Member Checking. Periodically, I checked my field notes, tentative hypotheses, and selected data (transcripts, expanded field notes, and artifacts) with the teacher for purposes of member checking. I provided Ms. Sloan with my field notes and selected transcripts to read and then we met to discuss her thoughts on the accuracy of the notes. There were no differences in interpretation from the data during these member checking meetings. Additionally, I was able to delve into the teacher's perspective and learn about

her decision-making process before and during conferences as we discussed the data being collected.

Interim

As with the first “interim period,” the class was observed at least one day every other week over the 5 week period. Transcriptions were not completed for all data collected; instead, extensive field notes were taken and portions of conversations were transcribed as needed. I conducted informal interviews with both the teacher and the students as well as intensely reviewed my field notes and data (video tapes, artifacts, interviews). Additionally, the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and triangulation (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Mertens, 1998; Yin, 2003) were used with the data. I applied the strategy of “open coding” to develop concepts and classify the data into categories. These categories related to both the structure and content of reading conferences. Within each conference, a particular structure was followed. Additionally, clear trends in the content of the conferences emerged from the data. As the data (field notes, interviews, audio and video tapes) was reviewed and categorized, this analysis yielded a range of themes. These themes were inclusive of elements that appeared to illustrate the nature of the reading conferences. At the end of phase 2, subsequent analysis of the themes helped me narrow these down to three key hypotheses: (1) reading conferences in a third grade classroom provide a space for joint meaning making to occur through teacher modeling and student talk, (2) the structure of conferences [provided the teacher with the opportunity to gather information about the text the student was reading and gauge the student’s instructional needs, and (3) through

focused, teacher facilitated conversations, students were able to appropriate reading strategies and later apply them to their independent reading experiences/tasks. I then created a theoretical summary of working hypotheses generated during the first four4 months of data collection.

Phase Three: Hypothesis Refinement

Data Collection

I entered Phase 3 of the research with working hypotheses in mind. Lasting for 5 weeks and spending 2 reading periods per week in the classroom, this period was similar to Phase 2 in data collection methods used. Sampling became more theoretical and observations were narrowed to the 3 focus students described in detail above. Audio and videotaping continued, but the focus was on the conferences and independent reading activities of only these students. At the end of this period, member checks of findings were conducted with Ms. Sloan. She was asked to look at my interpretations, and she was in agreement with my refined hypothesis and supporting student data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved (a) weekly reviews of field notes and other data to further develop and refine hypotheses, and (b) the continued use of the constant-comparative method. In addition to these techniques, the data analysis procedures of peer debriefing and triangulation mentioned previously were continued. The categories and hypotheses developed are described in chapters IV and V.

Phase 4: Exit from the Field

Data Collection

During Phase 4, research efforts turned from data collection to data analysis. Although it was my original plan to conduct data collection one to two days per week for another 6 weeks, due to the logistics of the school calendar, it became impossible to spend one to two days per week in Ms. Sloan's classroom. I did, however, continue to collect data until the end of May. At that time, I began conducting final student interviews. During the first weeks of June, Ms. Sloan and I reviewed my hypotheses developed during Phase 2 in an effort to member check one last time before the end of the school year and my departure back to the United States.

Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on refinement of hypotheses and consisted of (a) extensive review of field notes, videotapes, interviews, and artifacts to compare categories and refine hypotheses and (b) member checking.

Refining Hypothesis. I continued to utilize the constant comparative method of analysis advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I reread my field notes, transcripts, and previous notes made about possible categories and emerging hypotheses. I continued to add to these notes as connections were made. During this time, I coded the conferencing transcripts to visually categorize the data and ensure that there were enough examples to support the category in the findings. As I coded the transcripts, I identified new categories and discovered episodes that fit into more than one category. Analysis

continued until hypotheses had been refined and confirmed and no new hypotheses emerged.

Quality of Study

Mertens (1998) proposes the following criteria for judging quality in qualitative research based on those outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1989): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these terms is discussed below, and I describe how they enhanced the proposed study.

Credibility

Credibility insures a correspondence between the way the respondents perceive the constructs of the study and the way that the researcher portrays their views. There are a number of strategies that can be used to enhance the credibility of a study. In this study, I observed over a nine month period in order to insure that I had adequate time to identify salient issues in the study. In addition to the time spent at the site, I used the research strategies of triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing as described in Mertens (1998).

Triangulation. Involves checking the data that has been collected by using different sources or methods for “consistency of evidence across the sources” (Mertens, 1998, p. 183; (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). In this study, I used a variety of data collection techniques (video and audio taping, interviews, observations, field notes, and artifact collection) to insure that the collected data was consistent.

Member checks. Member checks allow for the researcher to “verify with the respondent groups the constructions that are developing as a result of data collected and

analyzed” (Mertens, 1998, p. 182; (Yin, 2003). I used member checks following phases two and three of data collection and analysis. Ms. Sloan was provided with expanded field notes and theoretical summaries as well as transcriptions of the formal interviews conducted with her. In providing her with this information, she was able to add information, clarify her statements, and express concerns about the emerging hypotheses.

Peer Debriefing. According to Mertens (1998), the researcher engages in peer debriefing by asking a peer or colleague to comment on data, findings, analysis, and hypotheses. After all periods of data collection, I submitted my theoretical summaries along with raw data samples to a fellow graduate student and discussed with her my findings, analyses, and interpretations.

Transferability

Transferability is the researcher’s responsibility to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to determine the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to their context (Mertens, 1998; (Merriam, 1998, 2002). In this study, I used “rich” or “thick” description of the “time, place, culture, and context,” of the data collected to provide this necessary detail so that readers are able to generalize the findings and apply them to their own relevant situations (Merriam, 1998, 2002).

Dependability

Termed “reliability” by Merriam (1998, 2002), and (Yin, 2003), dependability refers to the extent in which the study could be repeated with the discovery of the same findings or conclusions. More importantly, dependability “lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense” (Merriam, 2002, p, 27). One way to

allow repetition of the study or to demonstrate consistent and dependable results from the data collected is intense documentation of the procedures followed. In this study, I used an “audit trail” so that independent readers could “authenticate” the findings (Merriam, 1998, 2002). The audit trail, described in this chapter, describes in detail how data was collected, how I derived categories, and how methodological decisions were made. The use of expanded field notes (including personal, theoretical, and methodological notes) and theoretical summaries during each period of data collection insured that the emerging categories hypotheses could be clearly linked to the collected data.

Confirmability

Confirmability is based upon the assumption that data, interpretations, and outcomes are “rooted in contexts and persons apart from the researcher and are not figments of the imagination” (Mertens, 1998). Data collected can be tracked back to its source and the logic used to make interpretations is made explicit in the narrative. Using member checks and triangulation during the data collection process insured that analysis and the working hypotheses could be easily traced back to its roots in the data collected.

Ethical Issues

The data gathered from this research study was shared with Ms. Sloan for member checking and triangulation of the data. It was also shared with the members of my doctoral committee and my peer debriefer. It is likely that it will be later shared in professional meetings and in publications. The data may be submitted to further analysis by me in the future. To safeguard for confidentiality, all written reports have and will use pseudonyms. All videotapes and audiotapes were and will be kept locked in my home

office. They will be coded to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Videotapes have not been destroyed at the completion of this study. The videotapes may be used in the future for additional analyses and/or possible presentation in classes or national presentations. This was explained in the consent forms.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had several strengths and limitations. The length of time as a participant observer in the classroom allowed for an emergence of themes and data that established redundancy concerning the structure and content of the reading conferences. This prolonged engagement enhanced the credibility of the study and was an asset to this research.

Another strength of this study was my relationship with Ms. Sloan, the classroom teacher. Previous to the study, Ms. Sloan and I had established a relationship as colleagues. During the course of the data collection, I worked closely with Ms. Sloan as a grade level team member and co-planner. This relationship solidified our mutual respect as colleagues and developed into a personal friendship. Due to the nature of our relationship, Ms. Sloan and I spent much time talking about the conferencing occurring in her classrooms. Additionally, she was willing to review raw data and emerging hypotheses throughout the study and clearly communicated her agreement or disagreement with my thinking and preliminary findings. This allowed for triangulation and enhanced the credibility and confirmability of the study.

One limitation of this research was my novice approach as a researcher. Although I had conducted a pilot study the year before entering into this data collection period, I

was still not skilled in the craft of continual data analysis and the identification of emerging theory. In order to compensate for my inexperience as a researcher, I consulted often with my committee chair during analysis.

The hypotheses and implications of this research have to be contextualized. Specifically, because this study was conducted in one classroom, these findings may not generalize to other settings. Efforts have been made to increase the transferability of the findings by way of a detailed description of the classroom and specifically, the one-on-one conferencing sessions. Through this detail, the reader can make decisions about the comparability of this setting to other settings.

Another limitation of the research was the lack of opportunity to collect data during the entire reading period within the three research phases. While the schedule of data collection was sufficient to develop, refine, and support working hypotheses about reading conferencing, additional data during the whole class mini lesson the transition into the writing period would have provided the opportunity to identify more instances of the appropriation and application of reading strategies.

An additional limitation was my role as full time teacher during the collection phases. Due to my responsibilities in this role, my ability to change my observation schedule if Ms. Sloan's schedule was altered was limited. On these occasions, I relied on video and audio tapes to collect the conversations happening during the mini lesson and conferencing period. Furthermore, I would follow up with Ms. Sloan after viewing the videotapes in order to triangulate my field notes.

A final limitation was the schedule of the international school. Due to the nature of the students who attended the international school, many vacation days were a part of the year long calendar for the school. Additionally, the school encouraged constant recognition of the cultures represented by the student body, and so there were often interrupted classroom schedules due to these assemblies. On these days, I was often left with no free planning period to conduct observations in Ms. Sloan's room. The assembly schedule also shortened the teaching time in Ms. Sloan's classroom, and in order to fulfill her lesson plans in each of the content areas, she often shortened the reading period resulting in little or no conferencing time on those days. To compensate for these days, I would often collect data for an additional day during the next week and added observation days during the two interim phases.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Ms. Sloan employed an individualized approach to reading instruction within the confines of an already full classroom schedule. The reading block was organized in such a way that students participated in whole class instruction, personalized instruction, and independent reading. Students experienced instruction tailored more specifically to their needs by way of the individual conference time that they received through whole class mini lessons led by the teacher during the week. The nature of the reading conferences in Ms. Sloan's classroom was such that students and teacher were able to build relationships. During this one-on-one time, Ms. Sloan tailored instruction pertaining to the reading strategies presented to the whole class. This individualized instruction proved meaningful and applicable to each student, and an opportunity to construct knowledge was provided through this interaction.

As analysis took place, theoretical principles emerged about the relationship between the reading events in the classroom. In Figure 1, the relationship between the elements of the reading workshop is highlighted. Each of the elements of reading workshop overviewed here is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The whole class mini lesson began the reading workshop each day. During this time, there was direct teaching and modeling of a reading strategy or skill. Additionally, this was the first instance in which students were able to practice the strategy or skill with the common text used in the mini lesson. Only a few students during each lesson were active during this practice; the rest were observers. During independent reading, students were sent

with the task of applying the focus strategy or skill in their own reading. This was promoted through the use of *Post-it* notes, provided by the teacher, to document thinking. The teacher used the one-on-one conferencing time to determine if the student understood and was able to apply the strategy in his/her self selected text. During this conferencing time, the teacher had the opportunity to re-teach using relevant examples from the student's text. After the conferencing period, the student returned to his/her desk to continue independent reading with a meaningful example of its application in his/her text to better guide his/her reading.

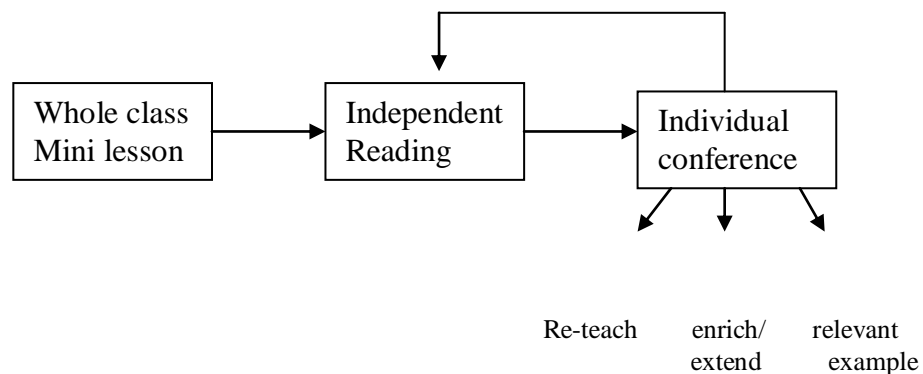


Figure 1. Individual conferences are a key component in the reading workshop and provide opportunities for a variety of instructional interactions to occur.

It became evident through analysis of the conferences that most students had difficulty to independently applying the reading strategy after the mini lesson. It was also during this conference time, this one-on-one social space, when the teacher could take the strategy that was taught to the whole class and show the student what the application of that strategy looked like in relation to the text he/she was reading independently. The space provided by the one-on-one conference between teacher and student seemed to be

integral in the student’s appropriation of reading strategies into their everyday reading experiences. In this chapter, the findings overviewed here will be presented with supporting evidence.

This chapter has two purposes. First, it provides a thick description of the classroom context during the reading block in order to contextualize the conferencing period in this third grade classroom. This description will provide context for the findings that address the first research question: What is the nature of reading conferencing in a third grade classroom? Second, this chapter presents findings and analysis related to the study’s second question: In what ways, if any, does participation in reading conferences influence subsequent book selection and reading?

Transcript excerpts will be utilized throughout this chapter to support findings. In Table 7 below, the transcript conventions used are highlighted and explained.

Table 7

Transcript Conventions

Behavior/Speech Act	Description
Interruptions	Where one person interrupts another, the speech ends with two slashes with the first speaker and begins with two slashes with the second speaker (i.e., “that’s like// //that’s like adoption”)
Omitted conversation	When transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of dots (i.e.,)
Inaudible speech	When words or phrases are completely inaudible, they are indicated by a series of asterisks enclosed in parentheses (i.e., (****)).
Emphasis	When a word or syllable is spoken with extra emphasis, it is italicized (i.e., “ <i>There is no love.</i> ”)

As described in Chapter 3, Ms. Sloan's daily schedule consisted of morning registration, math, reading, social studies, science, and a "Specials" course that varied by the day of the week. Most days, students were seated and working silently on independent math practice when the transition to reading occurred. Ms. Sloan would call the students to the carpet. This physical relocation out of individual desks and to a different area of the room where all students sat together signaled a change from independent work time to a more collaborative tone. During the reading period, Ms. Sloan utilized a Reader's Workshop (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991) approach to reading instruction. Reader's Workshop occurred each day in the morning and lasted for approximately an hour. As displayed in Table 6 that follows, the workshop consisted of a daily whole class mini lesson, one-on-one conferencing time with the teacher, and independent reading time.

Table 8

Components of Reading Workshop in Ms. Sloan's Third-Grade Classroom

Component	Description	Duration
Whole class mini lesson	During the whole class mini lesson, students gather on the carpet to listen to the teacher read aloud from a piece of text. The teacher often introduces a new reading strategy during this time or builds upon a strategy previously taught through modeling the application of that strategy as she reads aloud. Additionally, students are able to ask questions freely and they are encouraged to offer responses to the teacher's queries.	15-20 minutes
Independent reading	Students are dismissed back to their desks after the whole class mini lesson. At dismissal, they are charged with active thinking while they are reading. More specifically, the teacher provides them with <i>Post-it</i> notes and reminds them of a particular reading strategy to implement while they read. During the remainder of the class period, they are immersed in their independent reading selections.	45-55 minutes
Reading Conferences	Occurring simultaneously with independent reading time, students meet with the teacher individually. During the teacher-initiated conference, students are asked to summarize what they have read, read aloud, and talk about their application of the focus strategy while reading. In addition, the teacher uses this time to model and guide students in other reading tasks that are challenging to them.	
Whole Group Share	On some occasions the students return to the carpet at the end of the reading period to share applications of the reading strategy that they have made in their reading so far. During this time, the students share the ways that they have applied the focus strategy in their independent reading. They take their <i>Post-it</i> note and place it on the class focus strategy chart.	5 minutes

Reading Workshop: Thick Description

Whole Class Mini Lesson

The use of mini lessons in Ms. Sloan's classroom exhibited both similarities and differences to the notion of a mini lesson as part of Reader's Workshop (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991). Similar to the common descriptions of a mini lesson, Ms. Sloan's lasted less than twenty minutes, focused on a particular reading skill or strategy and ended with a verbal encouragement and time allotted for students to apply the discussed strategy to their independent reading selection. Like the "mini lesson" described in current research, Ms. Sloan's whole class mini lessons occurred for about 20 minutes at the beginning of each lesson. Over the course of the year, mini lessons centered on class material usage, book selection, book and author exposure, various reading content topics, and comprehension strategies. Early in the year, Ms. Sloan used this time to help students think about book selection and how to understand and navigate the classroom library organization. As the mini lessons moved to focusing on comprehension strategies, Ms. Sloan would still take the time, when needed, to refer to earlier lessons on book selection. The most typical start to the reading period, as the year progressed, however, was a mini lesson centered on a comprehension strategy.

Based on descriptions of reading workshop, mini lessons are routinely created daily to address the immediate needs of a classroom of students. Ms. Sloan's planning of the mini lessons during her reading period differed from this typical method. At the start of the school year, a rough sketch of what was to be taught in each content area during each grading period was created by the grade level team. Each week, the grade level team

would meet to co-plan specific lessons based upon the outline of topics for the upcoming weeks. The planning of the reading mini lessons was based on the comprehension focus strategy for the week. Although a list of strategies and a tentative time line was outlined at the start of the year, the team would take time to discuss the relevance of the comprehension strategy at each team meeting. In an effort to provide multiple opportunities for students to apply the learned reading strategies, the team made efforts to align the focus strategy with the current social studies and science units. By teaching the focus strategy at the same time that it was most applicable in the content areas, students had multiple opportunities and a variety of texts on which to practice the strategy and hone their skills. Although the mini lessons in Ms. Sloan's reading period were selected based upon team decisions, it was up to the discretion of each teacher how and for what duration to present the material to the students. As will be illustrated below, Ms. Sloan used the knowledge gained from working with her students during individual conferencing sessions to both determine what the needs of her students were in order to adjust the upcoming mini lessons as well as individualize reading instruction.

She routinely referenced the chart paper at her side and posed a question about the comprehension strategy of focus for the week. Comprehension strategies included, but were not limited to, making connections, inferring, summarizing, visualizing, making predictions, decoding, and questioning. The excerpt that follows is representative of a typical mini lesson in her classroom.

T: What kind of connections were we looking at last week?"

S: schema (In unison, most of the class reply)

T: We use the symbol, T→S (points to the class focus strategy chart which displays this symbol) to note a particular kind of connection. What kind of connection does this stand for?

(Various students contribute to the response that the “T” stands for “text” and the “S”, “self”.)

T: Just as we make connections to books when we read, we can also make connections *between* books. We use the symbol, T→T, which means we have made a “Text-to-Text” connection

(Ms. Sloan holds up three books - Alexander and the Horrible No Good Very Bad Day and two others by the same author with Alexander as the character - of which the class has read two together.

T: We have all read Alexander and the Horrible No Good Very Bad Day. As I read these other 2 books, I want you to wave your hand in the air as you make connections between the text being read and this one (holds up book)

Ms. Sloan begins reading. Many students wave throughout the reading of the story. Ms. Sloan references pictures while reading, modeling a variety of comprehension strategies using a “think aloud” approach. At the end of the read-aloud, students are given time to share their connections between the three Alexander books, and then they are dismissed to do their independent reading with a Post-it note and instructions to note any T→ T connections as they read (FN, 10/31/2007).

This lesson exemplifies how Ms. Sloan used the mini lesson time to make connections across mini lessons and focus strategies. Depending upon the difficulty of the comprehension strategy and the students’ success with applying it, a strategy would remain a focus strategy for one to two weeks. On the first day, the strategy was introduced, and on subsequent days, elements of the strategy were added as appropriate. This was demonstrated in the example above where connections to text began with text-to-self and was extended with the inclusion of text-to-text, or practiced with a variety of text examples as a whole class to ensure students were exposed to the strategy in a variety of ways.

Ms. Sloan also utilized the mini lesson portion of the reading block to model comprehension strategies both noted on chart paper in the room from past lessons and some that had not yet been introduced to the students. The transcript excerpt below is from a mini lesson that focuses on characterization. During that particular week, Ms. Sloan had introduced the notion of characterization and how a reader uses the actions of a character to learn about them and their life situation. Before this lesson, Ms. Sloan had directly taught, modeled, and conferred with most students about text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connection. During subsequent conferences, it became apparent to Ms. Sloan that students seemed to struggle with the concept of making a text-to-world connection during independent and whole class reading (FN, 11/5/2009). Thus in the midst of talking about characterization, we see her embed modeling of inferring and making connections.

T reads Tea with Milk to class. Pauses during reading to pose questions.

T: She went in. What do you think she's going to do (poses this to the class)? (Only 1 student raises his hand)

T: I'm going to look at the illustration. It is a picture of the inside of the department store. I wonder what she is doing in the department store. If I think about what happened earlier in the story, I can figure out why she is in the store now.

Alex: She could get a room in the department store

Liam: You don't get a room in a department store.

T: Alex has the right idea that she is in the store for something, but it isn't a room. What could she be in the department store to get? Remember, she put on her brightest clothes.

T: Let's think back to what we've read. In order to figure out why she is in the department store, I have to ask myself, "What does she want?"

Lilly: She needs money, so maybe she could get a job there to get money.

T: That prediction makes sense based upon what we know about the character and where she is at the moment in the story.

T: I'm looking at the next illustration, and I can make a connection here. I can make a text-to-world connection as well as a text-to-self. In Japan, when you go into a department store or a hotel, every elevator, every lift, has somebody in charge of it. And when you get into it, they bow and you go in. I'm interested to continue reading tomorrow to see if the people by the elevators in the story do the same thing as they did when I lived in Japan. I also look forward to finding out if the character is in the store to get a job.
(FN, 11/5/2007)

In the lesson referenced above, when Ms. Sloan said, "If I think about what happened earlier in the story, I can figure out why she is in the store now," she modeled the strategy of making an inference, something that the students had not yet been explicitly taught, but something that she exposed them to here. Additionally, when referencing her personal experience in Japan, Ms. Sloan modeled, through thinking out loud, the strategy of making a text-to-world connection during reading. As this was a more difficult strategy for students to apply, since it was not as concrete as a text-to-self or text-to-text connection, this modeling provided a concrete example of how to think beyond the text to experiences and knowledge of the rest of the world and how those things may connect to the text.

Although most reading periods followed the typical routine, on occasion the instruction began with an introduction of new books to be added to the classroom library. This type of lesson occurred when Ms. Sloan purchased or received donated books for the classroom library (FN, 11/2007). Although the introduction of new books was not a regular part of the literacy block, analysis suggested that the process by which Ms. Sloan exposed the students to the new books was an important instructional method in the development of the students as independent readers. Students self selected texts for their

book boxes. Knowledge of the books in the classroom library was connected to this process in that their awareness of the titles and genres represented in the library aided their selection of a book that would be of interest to them. In my field notes I documented Ms. Sloan referencing the most recent introduction of books twice as students attempted to locate a book that would suit their interests (FN, 11/2008). As she described each book's content to the class, she posed the questions that encouraged students' active thinking and participation. For example, she would have students try to determine the genre of the book and placement of the book in the classroom library, which was based upon genre, author, and being a part of a series. She would also have them make predictions based upon that information that she shared about the book so far. In addition, Ms. Sloan would sometimes describe the main character and then pose the question, "Do you think this character is someone you would want to be friends with?" Often, a small group of students raised their hands and one was selected who responded to the query and then was prompted by Ms. Sloan to give a reason for his choice. At the beginning of the year, this exchange led into a brief teacher-directed discussion of genres and students participated in determining where in the classroom library the new books should go (FN, 10 & 12/2007). Later in the school year, the discussions about where to catalogue the new books became less teacher-directed and more conversational in its tone. For example, in February of 2008, I noted in my field notes that students began to suggest book placement without teacher prompting and were guided by Ms. Sloan to give their rationale for the genre selection as they discussed among each other the optimal book placement (FN, 2/2008).

Ms. Sloan provided *Post-it* notes at the completion of each mini lesson to ensure that students went into the independent reading session knowing that they must actively read and provide evidence for this thinking. In addition, these *Post-it* notes were sometimes requested by Ms. Sloan during the individual conferencing session as a starting point for the conversation.

Independent Reading Time

Armed with their *Post-its* and task for the reading time, students went to their desks and selected a book from their book box and began reading silently. Book boxes were filled by the students as they completed the books in the box. This usually occurred every other week for most students. At the beginning of the year, Ms. Sloan spent two weeks instructing the students on book selection strategies “so that they would be better equipped to select a book that they would both like and be able to comprehend. The students knew that the goal was to complete as many books as possible that go into the book box, so book selection is a very important process” (TI, 10/2007). Students kept at least 3 books in their box at a time, but could have as many as five books in the box. The only requirement was that there be at least two genres represented in their selections and that they utilized a book selection strategy to ensure that their selection was a “Just Right” book (Irene C. Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Book boxes were composed of a variety of both picture books and chapter books. During the first few months of the school year, phase 1 of the research, the students’ book boxes often housed 2-3 picture books and 1-2 chapter books. When I began interviewing students during the second phase of research, I noticed that the composition of many book boxes was changing to favor chapter books.

Table 9 identifies the range of titles across the desks of the students during one week in the fall and then one week during the spring semester in order to illustrate both the variety of texts being read as well as the change in book box composition.

Table 9

Book box Composition

Fall 2007	Spring 2008
<i>Sadako and the Paper Cranes</i> (Eleanor Coerr)	<i>Too Loud Lilly</i> (Sofie Laguna)
<i>Commander Toad</i> (Jane Yolen)	<i>Disgusting Digestion</i> (Nick Arnold)
<i>Magic Treehouse</i> series (x3) (Mary Pope Osborne)	<i>Utterly me, Clarice Bean</i> (Lauren Child)
<i>Best Enemies</i> (Kathleen Leverich)	<i>Ming Lo Moves the Mountain</i> (Arnold Lobel)
<i>The Hatching Horror</i> (Steve Cole)	<i>Charlie Small</i> (David Fickling)
<i>Horrible Harry</i> Series (x2)	<i>The Wise Doll</i> (Ruth Brown)
<i>Pinky Pye</i> (Eleanor Estes Suzy Kline)	<i>The Spiderwick Chronicles</i> (Tony DiTerlizzi)

After students completed a book and conference with Ms. Sloan with that book on hand, they spent some time during independent reading selecting another book. Although Ms. Sloan did not actively assist each student in the selection process, the conferencing table was set up to the right of the book cases and Ms. Sloan could easily be accessed if students needed assistance. In addition, Ms. Sloan often kept an eye on students as they made their selections, and if she recognized that a student was struggling or taking too

much time, she turned to that area and either posed questions to get the student thinking on the right track or determined exactly what kind of book the student was looking for. I noted Ms. Sloan helping students 7 times in my field notes across the data collection phases. These instances most often occurred between conferences with students. She would turn to the student and pose one of 2 questions: (1) Are you looking for a particular book or author? or (2) What kind of book are you looking for? These questions always elicited a response from the student, and on 4 of the occasions, the student was looking for a specific title or author. Ms. Sloan was then able to direct them to the space on the shelf where the book was located; or, on one occasion, the book was not a part of the classroom library, so she led the student to a book by the same author. During the other 3 instances, the student was looking for a general type of book. In these cases, Ms. Sloan would pose questions such as, “What is another book that you have read that is in the same genre?” and “What kind of story are you looking for? What kind of character do you want to read about?” These conversations opened up a space for Ms. Sloan to reference books she had discussed with the student in conferences to spark a memory in the student. Additionally, the student was able to more quickly select a book and return to independent reading. As students read, they were to apply the focus strategy and note evidence of that application in the text and their thinking with the *Post-it* note.

Individual Conferences

Individual conferences, the focus of this study, occurred during the independent reading time. A more in-depth description and analysis of the conferencing process will be discussed in the findings later in this chapter.

Conclusion of Reading Period

The closing of the independent reading session, identified by the ringing of a bell (sometimes by a student and sometimes by Ms. Sloan), varied in one of two ways. Sometimes, the students returned to the carpet to share applications of the reading strategy that they had made in their reading so far. On other days, the students moved directly into the next content area with brief instructions from Ms. Sloan to place all *Post-its* in to their books. Ms. Sloan determined the closing of the reading time by time constraints as well as the strategy of focus for the week. If it was a strategy that she determines “students are struggling with during individual conferences,” she reserved 3-5 minutes at the close of the period to “allow time for the students to share how they have applied the strategy so that I can provide a bit more guidance to the class and clarify any initial misunderstandings” (TI, 10/2007) .

It was during the independent conferencing and independent reading time where my research was focused. Through analysis of field notes and transcript analysis, I focused on the nature of reading conferencing in the classroom as well as the ways in which participation in reading conferences influenced subsequent independent reading. In the remainder of the chapter, I will describe the organization of the conferencing process in Ms. Sloan’s room and themes concerning the nature of this process. In addition, I will demonstrate how the reading strategies addressed in the individual conference period were appropriated by the students and utilized independently in their reading. In order to do this, my analysis narrows to the conference transcripts, interviews, and field notes of the three focus students.

The Nature of Reading Conferences

In this section, I will first describe in detail the process of reading conferences as they happened within the reading block in Ms. Sloan's classroom. Next, conference structure and conference content will be described in detail. Once the reader is provided with this context from which to view the data, I will introduce three prominent themes relating to the nature of reading conferences. First, I will focus on conferences as a means to relationship building between the teacher and student. Next, I will examine conferences as an individualized approach to enhancing strategy instruction previously introduced in a whole class setting. Finally, I will depict conferences as social spaces where students and teacher engage in joint meaning-making about strategies.

Process

During the independent reading time, Ms. Sloan took the opportunity to speak with students individually about their reading. These conferences lasted from five to ten minutes each. Each student was spoken with weekly, and some students conferenced with Ms. Sloan multiple times during the week. Conferences occurred at a table set up in the rear of the classroom near the carpet and classroom library. In this position, Ms. Sloan could monitor students as they made book selections; assisting them if necessary. Ms. Sloan utilized a class grid (see Figure 2) to keep anecdotal notes pertaining to the conference. She selected students each day in an effort to meet with each student at least two times during the week. Additionally, Ms. Sloan increased the conference time and frequency when a student demonstrated the need for more one on one time with her. She made this determination utilizing both her anecdotal notes and the whole class mini

lesson discussions. For example, Ms. Sloan opted to meet with Carlos (a focus student to be discussed in more detail later) multiple times during the week for shorter lengths of time due to his developing decoding skills and the need for more consistent assistance in word identification (TI, 10/2007). Ms. Sloan also selected students who have read far enough into their text to have content from which to draw for the conference. She determined this by a glance around the room as well as by asking students how far along they are in the text. When students were called to the table, they brought with them their current independent reading selection. Ms. Sloan awaited them at the table with *Post-it* notes, a pen, and an anecdotal note taking grid.

Questions (Thick/Thin)

Anecdotal Records for: 3C 07/08

<p>Roque 2/5</p> <p>Artic Adventure</p> <p>How can you grow tulips in Greenland shouldn't because it's freezing (I asked him this.)</p> <p>Reading aloud with expression + accuracy</p>	<p>Will 19/5</p> <p>Star Wars (DK)</p> <p>Re-reading for sense. challenging vocab. Not getting all monotone. <u>described</u></p>	<p>Norah 16/5</p> <p>Nancy Drew (3)</p> <p>found 'inferred' in text. Discussed enigma. Explained <u>background</u> for her Q. <u>heavily</u> found <u>answers</u> for</p>	<p>Braden 23/5</p> <p>Spiderwick (3)</p> <p>shared his Q. why the BLACK OF THE NIGHT is awake in the daytime) Reread for sense. Expressive <u>reading</u></p>
<p>Laura 21/5</p> <p>The Horse and His Boy p.128</p> <p>Good comprehensive retell to date. explained her Q. (Needs to write in more detail.) Reading v accurate <u>read for accuracy/expression</u></p>	<p>Reece 23/5</p> <p>The cat that got carried away</p> <p>had 2 thin questions / discussed that the Q. at the start of a story would be thin <u>THICK</u></p>	<p>Markus 20/5</p> <p>Despereaux p.90</p> <p>Had a Right There Q. Didn't understand hypothesis by the rocket. Reading with expression + understanding of</p>	<p>Kate 16/5</p> <p>Spiderwick (1)</p> <p>Good retell of complex event. Has seen movie so hard for her to have. <u>question</u></p>
<p>Brennan 2/5</p> <p>Joyage of Dawn reader</p>	<p>Alex 29/5</p> <p>Whispering Wood (low level series)</p> <p>Absolutely fought me every inch of the way. Enunciated each word separately. <u>No</u> <u>fluently</u>.</p>	<p>Lily 20/5</p> <p>Jake Cake</p> <p>Talked about FANTASY genre. Agatha - needs to look carefully at chunks.</p>	<p>Julia 2/5</p> <p>Fudge-a-Mania</p> <p>Q. about <u>setting</u> in Spiderwick. Shared Q about Fudgea - too. look for THICK</p>
<p>Ch-Non (1)</p> <p>BIGHAMNAST</p> <p>Connecting it to Show Day. No Q. The Missing Piece</p>	<p>Brittany 23/5</p> <p>Charliet G. Glass</p> <p>told me Elevator it continues the story of C + the Chocolate Factory</p> <p>p.13 - Read quite expressively. building dict vocab</p>	<p>Troy 16/5</p> <p>Spiderwick (2)</p> <p>Not really any Q. didn't know what one character was - found <u>elf</u> so had <u>one</u>.</p>	<p>Tyler 19/5</p> <p>SNAKES+Rept</p> <p>Had forgotten to write Q. Had been thinking about photograph of new born sn</p>
<p>Nicole 19/5</p> <p>the Newt is <u>impossible</u> <u>terrible</u></p> <p>Explained background for her Q. well. (good retell.) Looking for clues as to</p>	<p>Oriana 16/5</p> <p>Spiderwick (1)</p> <p>Retell of main events clear enough.</p>	<p>Ch-Non 29/5</p> <p>Charlie Small (1)</p> <p>Talked about the genre - fantasy! some v. challenging vocab - <u>hauled</u> <u>prevented</u> - Needs to chunk words</p>	

Figure 2. Anecdotal notes were taken daily during reading conferences in Ms. Sloan's classroom.

While Ms. Sloan worked with individual students, the rest of the class was engaged in independent reading and interruptions to the conferencing period were few and brief. The classroom was mostly silent, with the occasional conversation at a table between two students. Students had the freedom to move about the room to get water, a

Kleenex, or exchange a book in their book box. These movements around the room did not appear to disrupt the conferencing session as rarely was more than one student up and moving at a time. While reading, students were also pausing to make notes on the *Post-its* given to them at the end of the mini lesson. For example, as noted in my field notes on 12/8/2009,

Most students are seated and reading. Independent reading time began 5 minutes ago, and at this point, no students have utilized the *Post-it* notes on their desk . . . 12 minutes into the independent reading time, 5 students have written on a post it and placed it in their text. From what I am able to see, it appears as if Brennan has written a question and Laura a word that she is trying to determine the meaning for.

Although students generally worked independently and did not seek out Ms. Sloan during her conferences, there were occasionally minor interruptions to the conversations as Ms. Sloan redirected off task behavior or attended to visitors entering the room (FN, 12/10/2007, 12/13/2007). Students seldom came to the back table to pose a question to Ms. Sloan. When they did, it is often a request to leave the room to use the restroom and not related to instruction. On rare occasions, Ms. Sloan interrupted a conference to provide assistance to a student in the classroom library, although more often she would wait until the transition between conferences to attend to students at the classroom library. The majority of the individual conference time is uninterrupted conversation between the teacher and the student.

Structure

Ms. Sloan informally checked in with the student at the start of each conference. This included time spent when the teacher worked to determine what the student was struggling with. Although she was well versed in the titles and genres represented in the classroom library, Ms. Sloan did not read all of the books found on the bookcases in her classroom. As a result, it was necessary for her to spend some time getting information about the text from the student in order to better identify the needs of the student. This was done through either an informal check in or the student's oral reading of portions of the text. The informal check in was usually in the form of a question. Some examples from my field notes were, "How are you getting on with this book," "What is the title of your book? Is it interesting to you? Why?" and "Why did you select this book." After the informal check in, instruction was approached in one of two ways. Either Ms. Sloan began asking the student to summarize what has been read up to this point in the independent reading selection or, if the student had a specific need that Ms. Sloan was aware of, she began to address that concern at the start. For example, in a conference with Julia, Ms. Sloan moved directly into a discussion about the focus strategy from early in the week before, inferring about character. In her conference on the day the strategy was introduced, Julia was unable to connect any of the characters in her story to a personality trait. Instead, she focused predominantly on their physical features (FN, 11/26/2007). Knowing that Julia had not yet demonstrated proficiency with the independent application of the strategy, Ms. Sloan began the conference by asking Julia to come and sit with her, and then posed the question, "What sort of characters are you reading about

in this story?” (FN, 12/3/2007). The consistency in the structure of the conference facilitated a purposeful discussion in that students knew what to expect during the one-on-one conference time and came prepared to the conversation.

Regardless of the conference content or focus, the individual conferences tended to follow the same pattern. After the informal opening of a summary or the addressing of a particular concern noted above, the topic of the conference was often directly linked to the whole class strategy that was introduced during the mini lesson that day or during that week. In the excerpt below, for example, Ms. Sloan builds from the focus strategy, making inferences, as she confers with a student.

T: Does the mom in this story want a monster as a pet?

C: I don't know

T: There's a clue there. If we're going to be inferring, we have to look for clues, don't we?

C: Yeah

T: There is a clue in this story that tells us that the boy's mom wouldn't want a monster. Can you re-read the introduction of the story to look for that clue?

C: (scanning the page) Not even a tadpole

T: What did you tell me earlier about tadpoles?

C: they're tiny, tiny, tiny!

T: Tiny. Right. The mother doesn't even want a tadpole as a pet. What can you infer from this information? How does the mom not even wanting a tadpole tell you that she wouldn't want a monster as a pet?

C: Well, she doesn't want a baby tadpole that's very small, so she won't want a monster that's bigger.

T: Excellent inference! (FN, 11/16/2007)

In this excerpt, she guided the student to re-read the text in an effort to find text evidence that provided clues about the desires of the character of the mother. Ms. Sloan uses the conference time to solidify the students' understanding of making an inference as well as

provided him with a strategy for re-reading to find clues. In this way, the teacher is scaffolding the students thinking to make inferences.

Later in the year, this strategy connection did not always directly follow the focus strategy in the whole class mini lesson. If the student demonstrated proficiency in the strategy the class was focusing on, or if a student was struggling with the text and unable to grasp the focus strategy, Ms. Sloan would focus in on a comprehension strategy that the student needed to hone. The space provided during the one-on-one conferencing time allowed for Ms. Sloan to approach each conference flexibly with the focus directed towards the needs of the students.

T: Now this is really hard, since it is a *Fantasy* book, to find connections. Were you able to make any connections between this and other books you've read?

Tr: No

T: have you read any books like this before?

Tr: no

(T has student read aloud – “if any connections pop into your mind . . .”

Tr finds where he was begins to read aloud with excitement.

T asks questions about main character- “Is the crazy wild boy that they're talking about John?)

Tr: I think a couple of people think he is, but I am not sure

T: But when they say the crazy wild boy, they are talking about John?

Tr: I think.

T: Next time you come read to me – is he doing lots of strange things that would seem strange to him? Is he doing things that would be strange in our world?

Tr: Um . . . well . . . Not much

T: So next time you come, see if you can make any connections, but really (gets up to get *Post-it* note), I'd like you to think about this now, so when you come back next time, even more than connections, if you think – I want you to think about (writes on *Post-it*) “Does John, act the same way in this strange world he's fallen into as he did in the normal world?” See if he's noticing strange things

Tr: I don't think he did it in his normal world. Well, maybe he did

T: What is he noticing? Is he scared? How does he feel?

In the excerpt above, Ms. Sloan began posing questions about the focus strategy, making connections. She then had the student read a portion of the text out loud to get an idea of what the story was about and Troy's understanding of it (TI, 10/2007). In addition, by having the student read out loud, Ms. Sloan had the opportunity to scaffold the student's understanding of the main character. She did this by providing questions for Troy to think about as he continues to read that pushes him to focus on the character's experiences and feelings to determine if there was a change in the character over the course of the story (FN, 11/6/2009). It was evident during this conversation that Troy did not have a firm grasp on who this character was or what was going on between the two worlds in the text. Recognizing this, Ms. Sloan begins to direct the conversation to an analysis of the main character rather than continuing to push him to make a connection with what he was reading. This transcript excerpt is representative of the ways Ms. Sloan attempted to be flexible in her approach with students as she made decisions about instruction for the conferences.

Every conference was teacher initiated. They did not happen spontaneously as the classroom routines were not conducive to student-initiated conferences. Ms. Sloan's position at the back of the classroom allowed her to monitor the students as they read independently and observe them as they utilized their *Post-it* notes to denote strategy application. Her stationary seat, however, did not allow her the opportunity to see students reading in the moment and confer with them accordingly.

At the end of the conference, Ms. Sloan would set a task for students to complete as they left the conference to begin their individual reading time. In the example below,

the teacher encouraged the use of text evidence to make assertions about character and to utilize this evidence to formulate inferences. As mentioned in the overview of the connections between the elements of the reading workshop, Ms. Sloan included *Post-it* notes as a routine aspect of the independent reading time. She would often assign a reading task for the day and the students were instructed to note their thinking and mark the place where they applied strategies using the *Post-it* notes. In this example, Ms. Sloan utilized the *Post-it* question to build upon the previous focus strategy of identifying character traits. She closed the conference with a task related to further developing the student's skill in the application of this strategy.

T: What do we know about the girl?

J: She's nice.

T: When you identify a character's personality, you need to figure out how you can describe her beyond using the word "nice". Let's look back into the text to see what clues the author has given you to tell you about the character.

(J reads the page, and the teacher writes, "Why is she not showing her teeth" on a *Post-it* note.)

T: I want you to tell me why she is not showing her teeth? What does this character action tell us about the character's personality? (see Figure 3)

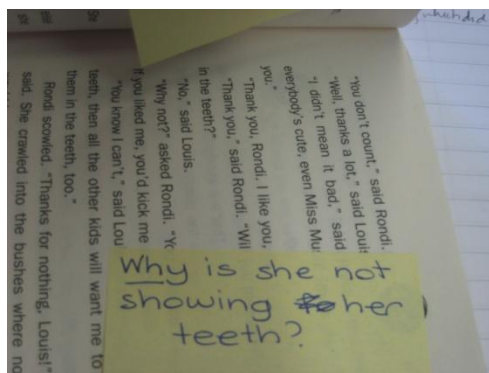


Figure 3. Ms. Sloan utilized *Post-it* notes in order to provide reminders and prompts to students for use during their independent reading.

J: Well, in this part she is only kind of smiling.

T: Why is she kind of smiling? What does this tell us about her?

J: That she's serious. She doesn't like to smile big.

T: Serious is a good word to describe a person's personality.

T: As you continue to read, I want you to carry on the quest of finding words in the text that show you what kind of person your character is. How is the author giving you clues about this person? What is she saying and doing that tells you about her personality?

(FN, 12/3/2007)

This example is representative of most conference closures. By closing the conference with a specific task, students were left thinking about a particular reading strategy and the need to actively read in order to apply it to their text.

Content

Although the organization of the conference was similar for each student, Ms. Sloan individualized the time with each student by varying the content of the conference based upon the needs of the student. Ms. Sloan used the whole class mini lesson focus strategy as the springboard for the conference conversation and as other needs were identified, they were addressed so that the conference was most relevant for each particular student. The following transcript is a representative example of Ms. Sloan's use of questioning to determine the need of the student while orienting herself to the content of the text. In the excerpt below, Ms. Sloan is guiding the student to build off of the many strategies already learned during the year to discuss her book. Although the mini lesson focus strategy was on using mental images to both make predictions and draw conclusions, the conference focused on enriching Nora's understanding of context clues to determine word meaning and use of text evidence through relevant application (TN,

2/22/2008). As will be seen in the transcript, Ms. Sloan moves towards a focus on context clues in response to Nora's questions about the book.

T: Can you tell me what mental images you have used that have helped you as you read the story?

N: Actually, I can't figure out what lumpies are.

T: Can you tell me if they are things or people?

N: I'm not sure

T: How has the author described them? Where are they first mentioned? What was going on in the story when lumpies were introduced?

(Nora and Ms. Sloan look in the text to find where lumpies are talked about).

N: (reading) They are purple and soft . . . look like rocks.

T: Nice detective work! Now that we know that they are not human, let's figure out what they are. What else can a lumpie do?

N: They are really alive

T: How do you know?

(N reads from the text about how they speak. She stops at the word "snarled")

N: I'm not sure what snarled means

T: What should you do if you are not sure about the meaning of a word?

N: Look at the words to see if I can figure it out?

T: And what is that called?

N: Inferring

T: Yes, you look around a new word at the context to infer its meaning.

Although Ms. Sloan began the conference with the intention to work on the focus strategy (making mental images), she redirected the conversation to assist the student in determining the meaning of the word "lumpie" in the book she was reading. They successfully determined what a lumpie is, and then Ms. Sloan talks about the strategy of using context clues in a more abstract way. When she poses the question, "What should you do if you are not sure about the meaning of the word?," Ms. Sloan broadens the conversation to a more general strategy that the student can use in her independent reading. In addition, by having the student label the strategy "inferring," Ms. Sloan links the process just taught to shared language about that comprehension strategy. Often, Ms.

Sloan changed the focus of the conference from the focus of the mini lesson to another strategy or skill if it was apparent that the student would benefit from a more in depth application of other strategies or guidance to work through another more relevant strategy for enhanced comprehension of the text. In this way, the conference conversations led to identifying specific needs/struggles of the student with whom she conferenced. The conference transcripts illustrate the trends in topics of focus for individual conferences.

Strategy instruction. All conferences included some aspect of strategy instruction, and this strategy-focused instruction was the only content that appeared to be planned. It was based on the whole class strategy focus for the week. The excerpt below is from a conference centered on the focus strategy of utilizing text evidence to support inferences.

T: Flat Stanley. My favorite edition! So Laura, what have you learned about Flat Stanley from what you have read so far?

S: That he is an ordinary boy until he gets flattened

...

S: He's nice in the story

T: You think he acts nicely.

S: nods

...

T asks **S** to read aloud

T: We can see if we have clues as to the kind of person he is.

T: If you stop there, I think there's a clue as to what kind of a person Stanley is. What kind of a person is he?

T: What does he do?

S: he lets Arthur fly him like a kite

T: But, read this bit here. Did Arthur ask him if he would be the kite?

S: no

T: So what happened? What kind of person is he?

S: A person that likes to um likes to make his friends happy.

T: Yeah. So he's *kind* isn't he? That's a character trait. Do you remember what happened at the end of this part – the part where's he's flying?

S: Yeah, uh, he gets stuck in a tree and Arthur doesn't really care he goes without him.

T: So what does that say about Arthur

S: Arthur just goes with somebody and kind of ignores him.

T: Yes, he wasn't very thoughtful was he?

S: No, um he was selfish to just leave him

T: Exactly. And selfish is a character trait too. The author has given you clues about the characters by the ways that they act in the story. Their actions are text evidence that tell you what kind of person the character is.

Ms. Sloan utilizes the text that Laura is reading independently to practice using evidence from the text to make inferences. Due to the fact that Laura had just begun the book, the focus is on the main character, Stanley. By having her read from the text, Ms. Sloan is creating opportunities for Laura to demonstrate her thinking while reading. Through this individual conference time students are able to practice the whole class focus strategy and Ms. Sloan is able to scaffold their understanding. When speaking to Ms. Sloan about this, she stated,

I try to link each conference to the whole class mini lesson or focus strategy of the week. If there is a student who I know has skills-based needs that limit his or her understanding and/or application of the comprehension strategy that we are working on, I will use the conference time to tackle the skills that he or she requires to be able to then apply the comprehension strategies discussed in class” (TI, 10/2007).

This link to whole class instruction allowed for a consistency among student learning in both Ms. Sloan's class of students and across the grade level. Ms. Sloan was able to identify needs in literacy learning in her classroom through her discussions with each student about each comprehension strategy directly taught and modeled to the whole class. In addition, the fact that all students in third grade were taught the same comprehension strategies (although not always at the same time or in the same way), allowed the team the data to be able to determine which of these strategies posed the most difficulty for students as a whole. In this way, the team was able to plan more effective

content lessons in Social Studies and Science that also addressed the literacy needs identified. The flexibility that Ms. Sloan demonstrated during the conference to allow the student's individual need to become the focus of the instruction proved beneficial to students as they were able to hone the strategies with which they struggled most at the same time that they were exposed to other important comprehension strategies. Examples of how students honed strategies and independently applied these strategies to their reading are discussed in more detail through the case study student analysis later in Chapter 4.

The transcript excerpts that follow identify trends in other topics that conferences address.

Decoding. Although none of the whole class mini lessons focused on decoding, it was apparent through the transcription data that the skill of decoding was necessary to address on many occasions with her students. The inclusion of decoding support and was very common during the individual conference time. Although the books they selected were within their independent reading range, students often came upon unknown words. Ms. Sloan was able to identify this decoding struggle since the structure of the conference included the students' reading aloud from their independent reading book. It was during these moments, when the need arose, that she modeled decoding strategies for the students based upon the current need and for later use in their reading encounters. Prior to the excerpt below, Ms. Sloan began the conversation with a reference to summarization, the strategy focus from the mini lesson of the day. During the student's summary of the story, Ms. Sloan identified some misconceptions: a misunderstanding about the main

conflict in the story. In order to determine where the break down occurred, she had the student read a portion of the text aloud to her. The excerpt that follows is a conversation between the teacher and the student during this read aloud.

T: Can you choose a part to read aloud to me?

S reads aloud; struggles with “malevolent” –

T: if you split it into syllables, how many do you think it has?

S: maybe 4 or 5

T: writes out word and they sound it out together as she writes it. “Mal” is French for sickness or evil. So it means like the evil eye.

(S re-reads sentence with the word and explains, “so Cow is not nice to Jamie. He’s evil to him!”)

T: Yep. You used the context – what you know and what you’ve read in the book – to figure out the meaning of malevolent. It is important to take the time to sound out words that you don’t know, especially words that describe a character in the story, so that you can understand what their personalities are like (FN, 11/9/2007)

As exemplified in the transcript excerpt, the read aloud shows a potential cause of the student’s misunderstanding – not knowing the meaning of, or pronunciation of, a word describing the character. During this time with the student, Ms. Sloan was able to guide him through the pronunciation and comprehension of an important word in the text with strategies that he could later apply to his independent reading. Also in this transcript, we see Ms. Sloan tying in context clues and meaning. She often introduced word meaning and linked the use of context clues to the skill of decoding. Many students required support as they worked to determine the meaning of the newly decoded words in their texts. The excerpt below is representative of the scaffolding provided to students during the conference period.

T: I see that you are getting through Harry Potter. How is it going?

L: Good

T: And what are you thinking of it.

L: Well, it’s good.

T: So you're enjoying it? (*Laura nods*) Are you coming across any words?
L: Well there was matron (*pronounced with a short a*)
T: Oh, let's see
(Laura moves book toward teacher and shows her the post it note she had written during independent reading.)
T: Oh, good, "Matron." And did you, from the context, work out what matron might be?
L: No
T: So, if you read me that sentence. Let's do a bit of detective work
(L reads, "Madam p****, the matron, was kept busy by a sudden spate of colds among the staff and students.")
T: What do you think might be important words that can help us?
...
T: And what was keeping her busy?
L: Um, the colds.
T: The colds. So can you maybe think about what kind of a person a matron is?
...
L: a doctor!
T: think about a school.
L: A nurse!
T: Exactly. In our school we just have a nurse, but in boarding schools, this person is sometimes called a matron
T: Well done! I'm impressed. Can you do the same thing again when you carry on reading? (*Laura nods*) That was such a great example. (FN, 12/13/2007)

Ms. Sloan used the one-on-one time to draw from both her and Laura's personal experience as they co-constructed the meaning of the word matron. By way of personal connections and textual clues, Laura was able to determine the meaning of the word and better comprehend the story (TN, 12/13/2007).

Interest/book selection. The selection of a book for independent reading with teacher support was not a routine within the structure of the reading period. Students were given mini lessons as a class on strategies to use when determining if a book was a "just right" reading level for them, and Ms. Sloan would give book talks when new books were introduced into the classroom library. In these ways, Ms. Sloan addressed the general skill of book selection. It was only during conferencing time that student interest was

discussed in relation to how they elected the book that they were discussing during the conference. Most often, Ms. Sloan focused on what interested them in the book rather than the method they utilized for selection (5 finger, Just Right Book, etc.). On the day of the following conference, the mini lesson focused on two strategies. Ms. Sloan modeled the use of text evidence to support her assertion of the moral of a fable and she also pinpointed elements of the fable's characters as an extension of the focus strategy of characterization. Students were instructed to select a book that had a character in it from their book box and read with the purpose of identifying characters and their traits and using text evidence to support this trait. In the excerpt below, Ms. Sloan begins the conference with a focus on book selection. After pinpointing the student's interest in the text, she moved into a discussion about Harry as the main character.

T: Are you happier with this than Harry and the Horrible Centipede? Do you feel like giving up on that story?

S: Yeah. I don't really like it

T: Why don't you like it?

S: It doesn't make sense. Even though it is by one of my favorite authors, it's not that great.

T: Oh, you're reading it because it's by Suzie Kline? But it's a very different kind of book than you're used to. Is it written for the same kind of audience as the Indian in the Cupboard books?

S: I'm not sure. I just like them for the adventure.

T: Do you think that Horrible Harry may have been written for younger children?

S: Yeah, more for first graders. There isn't as much action or adventure (FN, 11/26/2009)

During this portion of the conference, Ms. Sloan focused on relationship building with the student around the topic of books and what he liked to read. Conversations about book interest, like the excerpt demonstrates above, were often informal and a way that Ms. Sloan was able to determine if the student was interested in the book enough to

remain committed to it and make connections and have authentic reactions (TI, 12/10/2007).

Fluency. Within each conference, Ms. Sloan asked students to read aloud a portion of their book to her. They started with where they left off in their silent reading and read for a non-predetermined period of time. While reading, Ms. Sloan actively listened and followed along with them in their book. When students struggled with pronunciation, punctuation, or other issues relating to fluency in their reading, Ms. Sloan stopped them and provided them with direct instruction and teacher modeling.

N: Um . . . Ginger pie hasn't come into the story yet . . .

T: Okay, so you're telling me that Ginger Pie is a dog and he hasn't come into the story yet.

Nora: He introduced . . . he said, kind of in the beginning he wanted one (flipping through pages to get to the point she is trying to explain). It just said he wanted a dog.

T: Show me that. Can you read that bit that tells us that?

N: Ummm . . . (reads)

T: So, do they already have a dog?

N: No they have a cat.

T: I was just looking at this. Where it says, *reads from text* "if the Pies get another pet. . ." Can you see that? That's called a hyphen, *continues reading* "-a dog". I think when you read it, I thought they already had a dog, because when you read it, you said, "Would Graci the cat be jealous if the Pies got another pet dog?" So what that is, is to do with how to read the sentence. You know? Because all commas, periods, question marks are all letting us know what the author means through symbols and signs. That is a pause. So, try reading it again and pause. Stop for a minute before reading on. Remember what's coming up? What kind of a sentence is it?

N: A question

T: So read it again and remember a question is coming at the end.

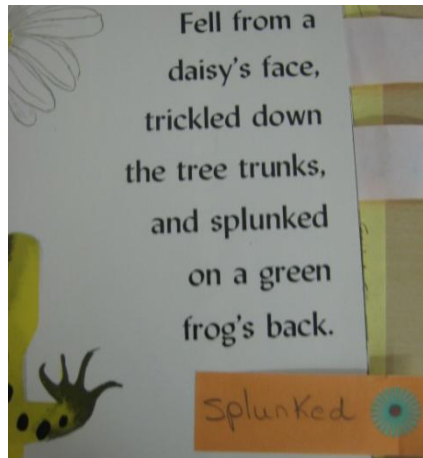
(N reads again with appropriate punctuation/notation/intonation) (FN,

12/7/2007)

In the excerpt above, Ms. Sloan was able to identify an area of confusion, related to fluency, that affected the student's comprehension of the text. She was able to shift gears

in the moment and address the student-demonstrated need for assistance with punctuation in text. Ms. Sloan also made a more general statement about the importance of punctuation to reading comprehension. She guided the student through the remainder of the read aloud portion to ensure that she took her time and followed the punctuation cues provided by the author.

Post-It Notes. While this was not the focus of an entire conference, the use of *Post-it* notes happened consistently across all conferences. This use of notation on the part of the teacher and student was an important part of the content of the workshops. Ms. Sloan often wrote on a *Post- it* note for them to take back to their desk so that they could be reminded of the skill that they worked on together during the conference. This was an important element in the students' application of the strategy discussed during the conference as it acted as a reminder of the strategy they discussed during the conference as they continued to read. When a student was unable to pronounce a word, Ms. Sloan often wrote the word down as she guided him/her to sound it out (see Figure 4) She left the word in the text to remind the student of the steps that they took to determine the pronunciation (TI, 12/2007).



“splunked” written in the teacher’s handwriting.

Figure 4. Ms. Sloan writes the word down as she guides the student how to sound it out. This is intended as a visual reminder of the process of decoding.

She also used *Post-it* notes to demonstrate how to chunk words (see Figure 5). If a student did not know the meaning of a word, she often wrote the definition for them to refer back to as they read. The *Post-it* note with Ms. Sloan’s evidence of chunking was also a reminder to students of a decoding strategy they could use if they come upon an unknown word during their independent reading (TI, 12/2008).

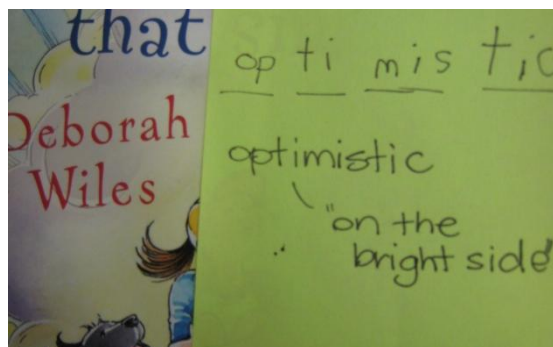


Figure 5. *Post-it* note with a word that the teacher and student worked together to pronounce during a reading conference.

Similarly, Ms. Sloan also left general reminder notes about the strategy of focus for the students. The catchy reminder to “look more carefully” above was placed in this student’s book as he struggled to make predictions due to a lack of focusing in on the evidence presented in the text (FN, 12/3/2007).



Figure 6. *Post-it* notes were utilized to leave general reminders about the reading strategies practiced during the conference for the reader to note during independent reading time.

Themes

In the previous section, I laid out conference transcriptions and their contextual accounts in order to provide the reader with a clear idea of what a conference structure looked like and the content of conferences in Ms. Sloan’s classroom. In the section that follows, I intend to showcase the three themes that emerged from this data. In addition to the relevant instances to be presented below, the reader is encouraged to refer back to the

data presented in this section. Through both of these data sets, the prominent themes are illustrated.

Relationship Building. When reviewing conference videos, transcripts, and teacher interviews, it became clear to me that the conference period is not only a time for instruction, but it is a moment where the teacher has an opportunity to build a relationship with her students. This relationship building was most often evident through Ms. Sloan's tone during conversations about students' reading interest.

T: There are other books in this series. What other books have you read?

N: I've read Pinky Pie

T: That's wonderful! Did you read that since it came into the classroom, or did you read it some other time?

N: I read it at my house.

T: So, it's your own copy. That's brilliant! I managed to get some books you already know about! So what do you think about Ginger Pye so far?

The brief excerpt above is an example of how Ms. Sloan created a conversational and inviting feel to the discussion by her receptivity to the student's contributions. When asked about this conversation, Ms. Sloan stated

Since I only have a short time to meet with each student, it is very important early on in the year to get to know their interests, both in their reading and in general. By keeping the conference as a conversation, the students learn that there is no right or wrong answer; rather, they offer their ideas, I offer mine, and together we understand and enjoy the stories they are reading (TI, 11/15/2007).

It was apparent during my observations of student conferences that students were comfortable with Ms. Sloan. From their willingness to pose questions to their enthusiasm to share personal information with her, the conference sessions felt like a comfortable conversation about books (FN, 12/15/2007). In addition to her tone and focus on student interest, Ms. Sloan maintained a flexible atmosphere within the one-on-one conferencing

time. Although there was the underlying goal of strategy instruction and practice, Ms. Sloan solidified relationships with the students by providing time within the conference for students to share personal memories and stories that were sparked through their reading of the text. In the excerpt below, Ms. Sloan began the conversation with questions about the student's interest in the text. The student explained to Ms. Sloan that he preferred Magic Tree House books and continued to expand on his rationale for that choice.

T: So now we're back to the Magic Tree House. Is this a new one? Have you read it before?

S: no. Guess what?

T: What?

S: From numbers 13-15 are certain kinds of books. Every 4 books are a certain series. And I already read the first one which is the volcano and now I am starting to read this one.

T: So you probably already know a lot about the characters in the story already, don't you?

S: Yeah

T: Who's your favorite character?

S: My favorite character is Jack. He's 8 years old.

T: And why is he your favorite?

S: Because he's worried like me. Sometimes he gets worried. And my sister, she likes to be excited just like Annie

T: That's amazing! So you can see similarities and make connections between//

S: //Except that me and boogie don't really like each other that much and Annie and Jack do.

T: That's probably just because of the differences in your ages

S: Yeah... Annie's 7

T: She's probably a little more grown up. A little more mature than your sister.

S: Yeah, My sister's only 6.

T: That can make a lot of difference. What makes Jack worry?

(Student gives summary of parts that make him worry)

T: Would that worry you if you were in that situation

S: Yeah. I have bad dreams about it. I sometimes do.

T: Because of the novels? Because it makes you think of situations that may be difficult?

S: yeah

T: I think you're right. The whole situation is a worrying situation. It makes for a good adventure, but at the same time, they have to find their way home at the end. (S reads aloud)

T: I can see something else about Jack's character from that. What kind of a person is he? There was a clue in this sentence. (teacher reads) "still looking around . . ."

S: Careful. He was careful.

T: Yeah. He was a careful guy. Do you remember the word we had from the story we read?

S: Cautious

T: Do you think it's wise of him to be cautious?

S: cautious. Cautious. Wet floor sign (t laughs) You've got to be careful.

T: so, he's worried about things, he's cautious. There are some character traits for him. You can maybe add some more while you are reading. Thank you Will that was lovely. (FN, 11/26/2007)

In this exchange, Ms. Sloan showed authentic excitement over the connections Will was making between his life and the characters. Through her upbeat tone, positive facial expressions, and her closing of the conversation with the compliment of his contributions being "lovely," Will was reassured that he was contributing appropriately to the conversation. Additionally, even though the conference centered mostly around Will's talk about his and his sister's personalities, Ms. Sloan honed Will's application of both the making connections and characterization strategies in a meaningful and memorable way to him (TN, 11/26/2007). Through conversations like the excerpt above, Ms. Sloan began to build relationships with her students. Like in the excerpt above, Ms. Sloan took the information students shared with her through their stories and utilized them to scaffold the student's use of reading strategies. Although many of these conversations that led to the building of relationships occurred at the beginning of the year Ms. Sloan maintained a conversational tone and fostered students' excitement to talk about their personal lives during conferences throughout the course of the school year.

Enhancing Strategy Instruction

I also examined conferences as an individualized approach to enhancing strategy instruction previously introduced in a whole class setting. Reading conferences offered the opportunity for students to receive instruction tailored to their individual needs. They provided the chance for Ms. Sloan to address misconceptions immediately as well as model reading skills and strategies in a relevant and meaningful way to the child participating in the conference.

T: How are you getting on? Can you give me a summary of what you have read today?

S: Well I started off by reading a comic part of the story like this one (points to a page in the book).

T: Why did you say that it was a “comic part”?

S: Because well . . . maybe . . . see that kid here, she’s actually the one who created the TV show about it.

T reads about “crazy cow” on the page and asks who Crazy cow is?

S: cartoonist

T: A cartoon character? And a child has created him and how is he created – in a notebook at school?

S: Well he draws cows all over his school books

T: Oh, so he really likes cows. So the cows that he draws, are just pictures of cows or is something happening? Are they stories about cows?

S: um . . . (looking through book) . . . this is actually kind of like a 2 in one story. Maybe 4 in one because actually, it is 2 in one because the comic parts

T: Oh, so now I understand. Part is the story (pointing to regular text on the page) about the boy and then when you say comic part, that’s one of the comics that Jamie writes and draws.

S: Yes (FN, 11/9/2007)

In the excerpt above, Ms. Sloan begins the conference referencing the whole class mini lesson strategy that was introduced to the class – summarization. By asking the student to summarize what he was reading, Ms. Sloan was able to identify his confusion with the structure of his text. As Roque attempted to summarize his book, it was evident that he did not understand the format that the author used, and as a result was unable to provide a

concise and comprehensive summary of the text. Although he was able to identify some of the characters and seemed to enjoy what he was reading, he did not truly understand how the book encompassed two stories in one that merged to create one comprehensive story. The one-on-one time with Ms. Sloan, allowed her to identify Roque's confusion and talk through the format of the text with him so that he was able to understand it and then continue his reading in a more purposeful way. The opportunity for Ms. Sloan to address student misconceptions and work with the student to create an understanding is discussed in more detail in the next section, conferences as a space for joint meaning-making.

Joint Meaning-Making

The final theme that emerged relating to the nature of reading conferences during my analysis of the data set is that conferences are social spaces where students and teacher co-construct knowledge about strategies. Reading conferences in a third grade classroom provide the space for joint meaning making to occur through teacher modeling and student talk. This theme was evident in the transcripts of the student conferencing sessions. In particular, meaning making occurred in moments when Ms. Sloan identified a misconception or skill/strategy need of the student and worked with the student to come to a common understanding of what this strategy meant or how it was applied within the text that the student was reading independently.

In the transcript example described in the previous section, Ms. Sloan worked one-on-one with Raul to clarify his misconception about the format of his book. In this conversation, Ms. Sloan provided the direction and talked Raul through his approach to

the structure of the book. In the excerpts below, another form of guidance that occurred frequently during the conference is exemplified – Ms. Sloan, not as the director of the conversation; rather, she acts as a co-constructor with the student. In the excerpt below, both the teacher and the student pose questions and make statements as they work together to clarify misconceptions and solidify knowledge about comprehension strategies as applied in the student’s independent reading.

S: The character was calm. He got a little bit crazy at the third page because the third page said (inaudible)

T: So is that why you chose this story, because you were looking for a character that you liked?

S: Yeah.

T: Can you read me some of the evidence?

...

S: Calm

...

T: is that a character trait you have you think?

S: No. I’m energetic.

T: You’re more energetic than calm. Is it a character trait you’d like to have?

S: Yes. Because I always worry like Jack. Remember Jack?

T: From the Magic treehouse?

S: yeah. I worry a lot. My sister says I worry too much. My sister she sometimes tells me, “Don’t worry!” I get worried when she doesn’t have her seat belt on, but she tells me we’re just in the driveway so not to worry.

T: So you think it is important to worry about something like seatbelts when you are in the driveway?

S: I like to be safe.

T: What I’m thinking from this conversation we’ve had is that you really like this character trait of calm

S: Yeah I really do

T: And when you are around people who are calm, do you notice anything about yourself? How do you act around calm people? Does it change how you act?

S: Yeah, I get energetic

T: So when you’re energetic, are you worrying?

S: Not really

T: So, people’s character has an effect on other people around them.

S: Like this character in the book. He’s calm, but then he gets crazy sometimes. He changes from happy to sad. It depends upon what he is doing and who he is with.

T: that's a really deep thought actually. Could you really say that you are only 1 thing? Could you say that you are only a worrier?

S: Uh. . .

T: Would that tell us all we need to know about you?

S: Well, I'm humble too. And some days I'm good at some things and some days I'm not. Like in second grade, I wasn't that good at reading, but you improve and become something else.

T: Exactly! So, you're telling me that there is more than 1 character trait to Alexander T Wolf. There is one more aspect to his personality. People are complicated and have more than one characteristic.

W: Yes.

(T wraps up conversation and sets Will on the task to find evidence of Alexander's calmness in the story and any other traits he may have with evidence.) (FN, 12/7/2008)

In the excerpt above, the student applied a variety of reading strategies. He made a direct connection to another text and the characters in that text. In addition, he made a personal connection to the character in the book as he identified a trait accurately and using text evidence. Ms. Sloan built upon the student's knowledge as they determined together the notion of a complex character – a character who is multidimensional and holds a variety of traits. Although the conversation was primarily teacher directed, the student had the opportunity to make many contributions to this conversation by the nature of the teacher's direction - questioning. Ms. Sloan gave a comment from which the student was able to continue his train of thought until they both ended up with the understanding that just like people, characters are complex and the events in the book impact their personality and actions. The conference period allowed for this joint meaning making.

Summary

The process of reading conferences provided a unique space in the reading classroom where the teacher worked one-on-one with a student in an effort to both

discover the student's reading interests as well as identify their reading needs. Although the conferences were all structured in a similar way, they accomplished multiple functions. Through reading conferences, the teacher and student were able to build relationships around their discussion about books being read during independent reading time. During these discussions, students were able to share their life experiences as they made connections with the characters and events in the stories. By way of these conversations the teacher was able to learn about the student's interests and thoughts. In addition, the one-on-one conversations that occurred during reading conferences allowed the teacher to identify the individual reading needs of the student. The teacher was able to hone in on the need and provided strategies that the student were able to use to assist him/her in his/her reading. Finally, reading conferences were a place where joint meaning-making took place within the classroom. During the mini lesson, the teacher was directly instructing the whole class about a particular reading strategy. This structure did not allow for the teacher to begin instruction with the experiences and needs of the individual; rather, it only allowed an introduction to a strategy and a place to model the application of that strategy to a common reading. Conferences gave the teacher a chance to pose guiding questions and take what the student knows from prior reading experiences to develop a better understanding of the purpose of and method to using the focus strategies in their independent reading. In the next section, evidence will be presented that demonstrates the guidance provided to students in the use of reading strategies often is applied independently by the students during their reading time.

Student Appropriation

Equipped with an in-depth understanding of the nature of reading conferences in a third grade classroom, I turned to my second research question, “In what ways, if any, does participation in reading conferences influence subsequent book selection and reading?” Through analysis of conferences and student interviews and reflecting upon the work of (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), I hypothesized, based upon the data of the independent reading of the students after their conference with Ms. Sloan, through focused, teacher facilitated conversations, students were able to appropriate reading strategies and later apply them to their independent reading experiences/tasks. The focus of this hypothesis on the notion of “appropriation,” versus my original selection of “internalization” of reading strategies, was enhanced through my understanding of Bakhtin’s differentiation of these two terms. The use of appropriation denotes the distinction between a “passive transferal” of knowledge that is unilateral and an “active transformation” of knowledge that is reciprocal (Cazden, 2001). Appropriation connotes the learner’s active construction of knowledge, not always visible to the teacher or in the conscious awareness of the learner. In Ms. Sloan’s classroom, the reading conference offered a space in which the teacher used the reading experiences and talk of the student to provide the skills and strategies needed for reading success. Additionally, this conference between the teacher and student allowed the student to take the time to talk through, think about, and possibly apply in the moment the new knowledge received. In this way, the teacher and learner worked together to develop the student’s understanding of the reading strategies, thus equipping the student with the ability to apply this strategy

in different contexts, independent of direct teacher guidance. This in-depth analysis of the three focal students utilizing conference and interview transcripts as well as visual evidence of student appropriation and application of reading strategies follows below.

As described in Chapter 3, the focus students were selected based upon their representation of the larger group of students in Ms. Sloan's classroom as well as their reading experiences and struggles that are transferable to other primary grade reading classrooms. I focused my research on these 3 students at the close of Phase 2 by observing their conferences with Ms. Sloan and conducting student interviews with each of them during their independent reading time. In addition, I noted their thoughts while reading through occasional photographs of the *Post-it* notes that they placed in their texts.

In the following sections, I address the ways in which the conference provided individualized instruction and promoted the application of reading strategies during independent reading. I will speak to both data sources of student language and in-text evidence to show the ways in which conversations during reading conferences were illustrated in the students independent work.

Book Selection

My research question initiated a focus on data that included student book selection, but I was unable to link individual conference time with the teacher to students' subsequent book selection. During my time in Ms. Sloan's classroom, I observed students visiting the classroom library to select a new book or books for their book boxes. I also spoke with the focus students about their book selection process. Although there were examples of Ms. Sloan addressing book selection via conversations about student interest

and appropriateness of a text's reading level, these conversations did not directly translate into the decisions made by students about the book that they were going to read next. Instead, interview data supported the appropriation of the skill of selecting a "just right" book using the "5 finger rule"; a whole class mini lesson skill that Ms. Sloan referred back to over the course of the year. In the conference transcripts that I analyzed, instruction about book selection strategies was not a frequent focus, and so I detected very little influence of conferences on student book selection from my data sources. My observations outside of the conferences, during other parts of the reading workshop, did suggest a relationship of some kind between the teachers' suggestions and students' book selection. However, my data set did not yield enough evidence from reading conferences about book selection to say that there was a significant influence.

Individualized Instruction

The reading conference offered a space in which the teacher used the reading experiences and talk of the student to provide the skills and strategies needed for reading success. As noted in the discussion about the nature of reading conferences, the structure of the reading conference allowed for teacher flexibility so that Ms. Sloan could focus on skills and strategies that the student needed to hone in order to strengthen his/her reading. This space, or one-on-one time, was key in the focus student's appropriation of reading skills. The following is a representative example of this theme.

As noted in my field notes, Ms. Sloan's first conference with Liam after the introduction of the strategy of characterization resulted in Liam's assignment to continue to read to determine character traits (FN 12/8/2010). During this conference Liam had

read only 15 pages of his book and was unable to assign a character trait to the main character. When asked how he would describe the main character, Liam replied, “She seems nice at times, but then sometimes she causes problems because she does only what she wants to do.” Ms. Sloan reviewed the character trait word bank with him to expose him to words other than nice and set the task for him to find words that descriptive Lola. She also prompted Liam to think about why he would give her that trait by “taking a look at specific events in the story that the character participates in.” (FN, 12/8/2010). During the next conference with Liam, Ms. Sloan checks in with him about the characterizing he has done during independent reading time since their last conference.

(L brings *Post-it* to meeting)

T: I see you have some interesting comments written here. Which character did you choose to focus on?

L: Lola because she just came into the story

T: Is she the most interesting?

L: No. but she only came in on – *flips through book to find chapter 37*

T: What do you know about Lola’s character up to this point?

L: She is stubborn, obstinate, and headstrong

T: Wow! Those are some great words. How did you determine those described Lola?

L: Well, I thought that she was stubborn by the way she only does what she wants to do and never listens to anyone else. Then, I looked up stubborn in the thesaurus and found the other 2 words to describe her.

T: What affect do you think she’ll have on the events in the story?

(L summarizes the events of the book as he talks about Lola’s role on those past events.)

T: Now that you know what Lola has done so far in the book, I would like you to extend this thinking to making predictions about what may happen to the events that she is a part of. As you read, ask yourself, what might happen next if Lola continues to be stubborn? (FN, 12/10/2007)

During this conference, Liam demonstrated the ability to independently apply the focus strategy of inferring for character traits. He was able to identify the characters traits, synonyms of these, and confidently provided text evidence to support his assertions about

the character. Rather than check Liam off as mastering the strategy and sending him to continue reading independently, Ms. Sloan used the opportunity to individualize her approach and attempted to enrich his thinking about his reading (TN, 12/10/2007). She introduced the idea of using what you know about a character to make predictions about future events in the story. Liam was unable to demonstrate this skill, and so Ms. Sloan sent him into his independent reading time with a focus to apply what he knows about the character in his active thinking and prediction making while reading the story.

This individualization of instruction was apparent across the data of all three students. Carlos, for example, predominantly engaged in conversations with Ms. Sloan about the meanings of unknown words. Just as Liam, who easily mastered the focus strategies, received instruction tailored to enriching his reading experience through further application of the strategy of focus, Carlos's instruction was tailored to his need – (predominantly) limited English vocabulary from which to draw as he read. Ms. Sloan worked “to incorporate the other reading strategies of focus for the whole class” – inferring for meaning, characterization, questioning, etc.- “into the scaffolding” she provided to Carlos as they worked through decoding and using context clues as he read. In this way, Carlos was receiving the instruction that the rest of his classmates received, but it was individualized to connect to his own needs (TN, 3/10/2008). As Carlos explained, he was able to “understand the books he was reading much better” when he “learned how to figure out words that he didn’t know” (SI, 3/22/2008). The conferencing period provided the opportunity for Ms. Sloan to identify the particular reading needs of the student with whom she worked and then tailor her instruction accordingly.

Independent Strategy Application

The one-on-one conferencing time seemed to prepare the student to apply reading strategies during independent reading time without direct teacher guidance. During my early interviews with students, most were unable to articulate links between their conferences with Ms. Sloan and their independent reading experiences. I spent time with each student during the first data collection phase, at which time I asked them about the topics of their conferences with Ms. Sloan as well as what kinds of things they learned from these conferences. Students replied with statements such as “I’m not sure,” “She makes me use *Post-it* notes,” and “It helps me think while I read” (SI, 11/17/2007). I had a similar conversation with students during the final phase of research. The responses were representative of the students’ appreciation of and value for the one-on-one conferencing time with Ms. Sloan. One student replied, “Conferences make a difference because I will not have to stop and struggle with how to say a word because after talking with Ms. Sloan, I know a good strategy. I break the word into parts and sound out each small part starting with what I know. This way, I can just keep on reading (SI (SI (Nora), 5/20/2008). Many students referenced the ease of word decoding and defining in their reading now that they have had time to talk about and practice this strategy in their own reading with Ms. Sloan. Another student acknowledged, “She made me try to find thick questions and I’m looking very hard and that sort of makes it easier to find out more about the details of the story (SI (Reece), 05/23/2008). These responses exemplify the type of connections students began to make between conferences and independent reading.

In addition to these connections, students began to demonstrate application of the reading strategies and skills taught during the conference in their independent reading. Through the analysis of conference and student interview transcripts as well as field notes of their independent reading, evidence is provided that through these focused, teacher facilitated conversations, students were able to appropriate reading strategies and later apply them to their independent reading experiences. The discussion that follows utilizes data from the three focus students during phases two and three to illustrate the strategy and skill appropriation that arose from the individual conferencing sessions with Ms. Sloan. This discussion is divided into two themes, student language from interviews and in-text evidence.

Student Language. Just as student answers to my question posed about the impact of conferences developed into more articulate and descriptive responses, so too did their language about reading strategies as applied to their independent reading. It was this transformation in word choice and increased sophistication in the discussion of their thinking about reading that was the first indication to me that students were appropriating the information they gathered within the one-on-one conferences with Ms. Sloan. This language was evident both within the conferencing period and during my informal interviews with students about these conferences, the books they were reading, and strategies they were applying.

In the conferences between Ms. Sloan and the focus students during Phase one of the study, students were not equipped to utilize strategy labels when discussing their independent reading selections. Furthermore, Ms. Sloan directed the conference through

her strategic questions and statements. During these early conferences, Ms. Sloan's intention was to embed the language of reading strategies within the conversation so that students would be exposed to it "as it was connected to their thinking while reading." In this way, the experience of applying strategies would be an "authentic" one for them (TI, 10/2007). Table 10 below overviews the connection between teacher instruction and the increase in student language for Carlos and Renee, two of the focus students. Further discussion on representative conferences will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this section.

Table 10

Sample of Focus Student Conferences Over Time

Focus Student	Conference 1	Conference 2
Carlos	<p>The focus of this conference was on decoding and using context clues to determine a word’s meaning. Carlos explains, “I don’t know what this means.” Ms. Sloan models for him how to “use the words around the word you don’t know. Use the <u>context clues</u> that the author gives you. Like for the word, “Spending”. She proceeds to show him how the words around “spending” give “clues” to what spending means. (FN 12/3/2007)</p>	<p>In this conference, Carlos is reading <u>Ming Lo Moves the Mountain</u> and comes to the conference with a question about the word “wise”. Ms. Sloan asks him how he can figure out the meaning on his own. Carlos replied, “I can use the clues around the word.” Ms. Sloan comments, “Using <u>context</u> clues is a great strategy. Can you walk me through how you will figure it out based upon the clues?” Carlos proceeds to talk through his thinking. (1/10/2008)</p>
Renee	<p>During this conference, Renee is not yet able to utilize text evidence to support her statements about the book she is reading. Ms. Sloan poses the question, “Why is the title of this book <u>Best Enemies</u>?” Renee sates, “probably because the girls aren’t friends.” Ms. Sloan encourages her to look within the text for specific evidence, but Renee continues t make general statements without referencing the text. Mrs Slaven asks Renee to read aloud and stops her to show her concrete language within the text that could provide an explanation for the title. At the end of the conference, she asks Renee to read “to find textual evidence for her thinking about the book.” (FN, 11/16/2007)</p>	<p>In this later conference, Ms. Sloan asks Renee to describe the main character of the book she is reading. Renee opens her book and begins skimming the pages. She stops and says, “Well, I would say that she is confident because I just read that she wore what she wanted to school even though the other girls were teasing her.” Ms. Sloan compliments her use of the word confident and asks her if there is any other description she might give the character. Renee replies, “Um, I haven’t read enough of the book yet to find evidence for anything else.” (FN, 12/07/2008)</p>

The following conversation between Liam and Ms. Sloan is a representative example of this theme.

T asks about his interest in Dragon books and he comments it was his mascot at his old school and he's read lots of books about them.

T: So, you've connected with your life. You've made a text-to-self connection just in picking out this book. Have you made any connections while reading today?

L: No. Nothing that is happening is like my life.

T: Think about the other books about Dragons that you have read. How does this book compare?

L: This princess went to go find a knight to face a dragon that was . . . (summarizes)

T: Is this a lot similar to the other stories you read?

L: yeah

T: Were you able to make any specific connections between the stories? (Liam shrugs)

T: The stories you've been reading about dragons, what kinds of characters do they have in them?

(L lists them)

T: Are those the same kinds of characters in this story?

L: Yeah. They have a dragons, princesses and knights.

T: So that's a text-to-text connection isn't it?

(L nods and smiles)

Ms. Sloan uses this conversation about Liam's dragon book to both determine what his understanding is of the current focus strategy of making connections as well as to teach Liam the guiding questions to ask as he reads and the language to use when talking about the connections strategy (TN, 10/15/2007). It is evident that as he reads, Liam is making connections to his life and to other books that he has read in the past. What Liam is unable to do independently is identify that he is making these connections as well as label the type of connection being made using the academic language taught during the whole class mini lessons about this strategy. In addition, he does not know what questions to ask himself during reading to insure that he is taking the time to make meaningful text-to-self

and text-to-text connections. Ms. Sloan provides Liam with the specific label and scaffolds his thinking about his reading by posing a question about the characters in the books he has read. In this way, she is providing him with the tools that he needs to independently make comparisons between texts that he reads. In a later conference, Liam's use of academic language and tools for accessing texts while he reads are made evident. In the excerpt below, the focus of the conference is on the strategy of questioning. Ms. Sloan has taught the students about both "thick" and "thin" questions (FN, 05/28/2008).

T: What have you been thinking about as you read?

L: I've already made a couple of text-to-self and text-to-text connections. Both are mainly about the main character and his experiences.

T: Anything else besides connections?

L: I'm using – well, usually when I'm reading, I look through the pages to see if I have any questions. In this book, I've already had a few questions. Most of them have been thick.

T: What do you mean by thick?

L: Well, they aren't things I can just put my finger on to answer. I have to read to figure it out.

T: What is a question that you still have about this book?

L: I'm wondering why they're pretending to be the opposite of each other. The author hasn't given me any clues yet, but I know that there is a reason for it. Otherwise, no one would know why they did that. It would be pointless. (FN, 6/02/2010)

In the excerpt above, Liam correctly uses terminology to explain the strategies that he is applying as he reads. His authentic and appropriate use of the language of reading strategies indicates his appropriation of them into his daily classroom reading experiences.

This increase in the use of academic language to talk about reading experiences was apparent across the data of all three students. Carlos, for example, had a limited

English vocabulary that made it difficult for him to explain where his comprehension faltered. Ms. Sloan modeled for Carlos the language he needed to talk about his reading needs. She scaffolded his use of “context clues” as a strategy to “figure out the meaning of unknown words” and provided for him the tools he needed to utilize illustrations by way of a “picture walk” to help him figure out what was happening in the story (FN, 11/9/2008). He was later able to explain to Ms. Sloan how taking a picture walk had helped him to understand what was going on in the story in general, but that he didn’t think the book was a “just right” selection for him since he still “didn’t know enough of the words to figure out exactly was going on.” He was having trouble “using context clues since the words are too hard” (FN, 3/10/2008). The increase in the focus students’ use of appropriate academic language and their ability to describe their thinking while reading demonstrated the ways in which the students in Ms. Sloan’s class began to appropriate knowledge about reading through the one-on-one conferencing sessions.

In-text Evidence. In addition to the shift in the language used to describe their thinking about reading, students in Ms. Sloan’s classroom also began to note their thinking within the text via the *Post-it* notes provided to them at the start of the independent reading period. The use of *Post-it* notes made evident the students’ ability to apply a variety of reading strategies without the direct guidance of the teacher. During analysis of the focus students, it was evident that students’ strategy usage was directly linked to the instruction they received during their one-on-one conferences with Ms. Sloan. This conferencing time solidified their understanding of the strategy and often provided an opportunity to practice the application during the conference. Just as the use

of language became evident later in the data collection, evidence of the independent application of strategies emerged during the second interim and phase three of data collection.

The following transcript excerpt comes from a one-on-one conference between Ms. Sloan and Renee. Ms. Sloan instructed students to focus on both the focus strategy of images and any other appropriate reading strategy learned during the year.

R: There is part I didn't understand, so I am reading that part out loud again. (T writes "poising" as Renee struggles to pronounce it. She shows it to Renee.)

T: Look at this word and sound it out.

R: Poising.

T: It's easier sometimes if you write it down. You can see the word on its own that way and it is less overwhelming. Do you know what this word means?

(R shakes her head)

T: Let's take a look at the text to figure out what it means using the context clues provided by the author. (FN, 6/09/2008)

The conversation above shows that Renee has begun to independently apply reading strategies. She attempted to clarify her misunderstanding through rereading the portion that confused her. Through her reading of the text out loud, Ms. Sloan is able to identify that Renee is struggling with pronunciation of a word. Rather than correcting this for her and moving on, Ms. Sloan provides a strategy for Renee to apply when she comes upon an unknown word to both decode and correctly pronounce the word as well as determine its meaning within the story. Two days after this conference, I noted a *Post-it* note in Renee's book with the word "exquisitely" written on it directly under where the word was typed within the text (FN, 6/11/2010). I asked Renee why she had written the word on the *Post-it*, and she explained that Ms. Sloan showed her "how it helps to write the word down and underline the different sounds." She continued with an explanation of

why knowing the meaning of the words was important because if she “didn’t know what they meant, the story wouldn’t make any sense” (SI, 06/13/2008). Renee was introduced to the strategy in a whole class lesson, conferred with Ms. Sloan, and was able to see this strategy modeled with a word with which she struggled, and then she took this knowledge and applied it independently to her own reading. The one-on-one time with Ms. Sloan provided the opportunity for Renee to strengthen her knowledge of the strategy and appropriate this knowledge into her independent reading experience.

All three focus students exemplified this appropriation through independent application of strategies discussed in conferences with Ms. Sloan. For example, Carlos’s meetings with Ms. Sloan frequently were focused on the reading skill of decoding and the strategy of using context clues and illustrations to determine the meaning of unknown words. Due to the fact that Carlos was transitioning into an English only classroom and had not yet mastered the English language, he was unable to complete a book independent of Mrs. Slaven’s guidance at the beginning of the year. There were always unknown words that he could neither pronounce nor define that hindered his understanding of the story.

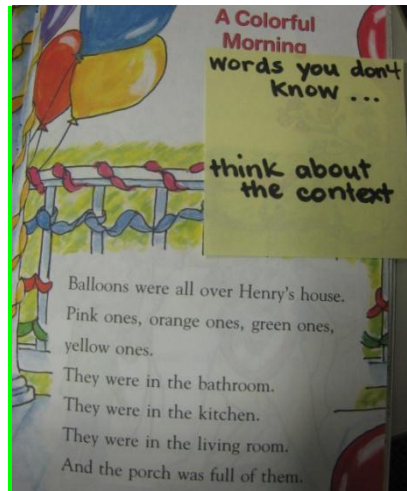


Figure 7. Notes left by Ms. Sloan in Carlos's text with the dual purpose of reminding him of the strategies and in an effort to make him more independent in his strategy application.

Ms. Sloan often left notes in Carlos's text (see Figure 7). When I asked her the purpose in this, she explained that her intention for making this reminder is to "create more independence in the students as readers." They are able to think about character in relation to actions, words, and associations when guided by her in a conference, but she wants them to begin working on their own to have that thinking. She believes that "if they are first reminded to practice, this will become a reading habit for them and begin to happen unintentionally as a way for them to clarify and make connections to the text" (TI, 12/2007).

Ms. Sloan met with Carlos often to insure that he was utilizing the decoding strategies she provided to him during conferences (TI, 03.2008). In addition, Ms. Sloan used the one-on-one time with Carlos to be sure that he was also beginning to apply comprehension strategies to his reading. The transcript below is a representative sample

of the many conferences between Ms. Sloan and Carlos in which Ms. Sloan attempted to guide Carlos through a variety of reading strategies applicable to his current comprehension needs.

T: Okay. So what book did you choose to read?

C: The Man Who Wore All His Clothes

T: That's a book I like so much, I bought two copies by mistake. Have you read much so far?

C: mmm . . . only this much

T: just a little bit. Who are the main characters in this story?

C: Mr. Gasket

T: Good Boy!

C: And Mrs. Gasket (C stumbles on a name, and T models for him how to decode the word by using the words that he knows in the name of the character "Gloria")

T: If Mr. Gasket is the father, what do you call Gloria?

C: His daughter.

T: Do they have any other children

C: no, but they have a kitty

T: Have you found anything about them yet?

C: She is a taxi. You see here (shows picture)

T: Oh, so she's a taxi driver

C: Yes, a driver

T: Just read me a little bit of wherever you are.

(Carlos reads & T models decoding/pronunciation when necessary. She walks him through the use of context clues to determine the meaning of "gruff")

T: I'm predicting something! You know the man with the gruff voice? Where did he go to?

C: the bank

T: he wants to go to the bank. I wonder what he's going to do?

C: steal the money?

T: I wonder if he is a bank robber

C: And uses his gruff voice!

T: It's just a prediction. Have you done a picture walk?

C: Yes.

T: and do you think he really is a bank robber?

C: Yes, because in this picture he has something in his hand after he left the bank.

T: You haven't read very much in this story, so I'm going to ask, when you've read, I want you to choose which character do you think will be most interesting?

C: the dad, because he wears all his clothes.

T: (writes it on a post it note)

T: I wonder, is he cold? Why does he wear all of those clothes? I want you to write down some thoughts about what kind of a person the dad is. Okay?

Remember to take into account what he says and does in the story to help you to do this,

C: Okay.

T: Well done, Ch Non. (3/18/2008)

In the excerpt above, although much time was spent working through unknown words, Ms. Sloan worked to include the strategy of making predictions based upon text evidence through her think aloud and characterization by initiating Carlos's interest in one of the characters and leaving him with the task of learning more about him. In my informal interview with Carlos the next day, he was able to recount his meeting with Ms. Sloan and explained to me that he was "trying to learn more about the dad's character by looking at the pictures and thinking about what he does in the story" and knew already that the dad didn't have to wear all of his clothes because he was cold, but he still "hadn't figured out if the other guy was a bank robber" (SI, 3/19.2008). When speaking with Carlos again during phase three about his reading, he explained that through the conferences with Ms. Sloan, he "learned how to figure out the words" that were unknown to him. Although Carlos did not utilize the *Post-it* notes to track this application, he often used scratch paper to make notes as he worked through pronunciations of words (FN, 3/22/2008). Additionally, he explained that, "I always look at pictures now when I read to help me figure out what words mean. The author gives me these pictures as a clue to what they mean" (SI, 3/22/2008).

Liam also demonstrated his application of strategies through both the inclusion of *Post-it* notes in his book as well as his explanation about the thinking he was doing about his reading. Below is an excerpt from a conference with Ms. Sloan.

T: It seems like you have a lot of questions about Spiderwick already

L: Yeah. There is a lot I am trying to figure out.

T: It is very important that you take the time to stop, reflect about your questions, and then use evidence in the text to determine the answer. As you continue your independent reading this week, I want you to stop, think about what you have just read, and then make sure you understand it all and are able to answer your questions before moving on.

L: Okay.(FN, 5/17.2008)

I skimmed through Liam's book after his conference with Ms. Sloan, and I noticed many blank *Post-it* notes on a variety of pages. When I asked Liam about these, he explained

Those are the places where I was stopping and reflecting. I read about this guy – Jared. He's the main guy and he and his sister's fencing journey. He thought he saw someone digging in Malory's stuff and he met another him – an evil version. I had to stop and think about before that. They were talking about a fairy as a shape shifter, so this must have tuned into Jared (FN, 5/19.2008).

Additionally, Liam was also able to articulate the impact that reading strategies have had on his independent reading.

I would like to talk about more strategies to help me understand my future books. I still need to think of my book more than I have. A lot of times, I read a chapter, then I think about what I just read and I can't remember. It helps you think more about what you learned before that. Like if you have a chapter that kind of comes back to it [a previous part of the story], you should use that strategy to think about what you read. Talking about the strategies helps me to remember about them when I read (FN, 5/19.2008).

Through this conversation with Liam, it is evident that he has appropriated the reading strategies worked on during his one-on-one conferences with Ms. Sloan to meet his individual reading needs. Table 11 provides additional examples of direct application of strategies by students after conferring with Ms. Sloan.

Table 11

Student Notations of Strategy Use During Independent Reading

Conference Summary or Excerpt

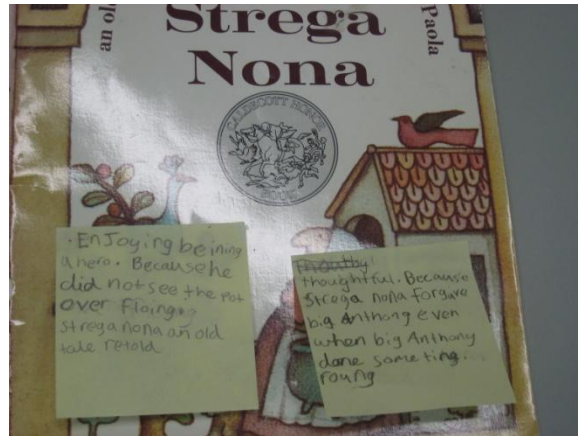
Independent Student Application

Mini Lesson Focus Strategy: Character Personality Traits

In her conference with Brittany, Ms. Sloan scaffolds Brittany's use of text evidence to support assertions about a character.

T: When you make a statement about a character, ask yourself, What clues in the story does the author give that make me think that? As you read, think about 1 or 2 of Strega Nora's character traits. Be sure to think about why you think these words describe her.

B: Okay, I will. (FN, 12/2/2007)



(FN, 12/2/2007)

Mini lesson Focus Strategy: Images

In her conference with Renee, the teacher asks her about any images that she has seen while reading.

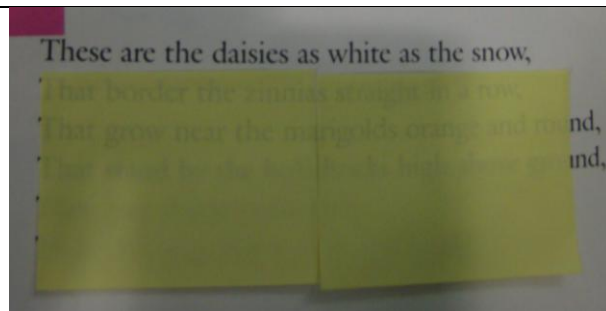
R: There are no pictures in my book

T: Images are not just given to the reader by the author in pictures. It is also important to read the words to find the hidden pictures that authors give.

Renee reads aloud and gets to the line, "ties itself up like a shoelace."

T: This is an example of author's language that provides an image for the reader.

(FN, 02/22/2008)



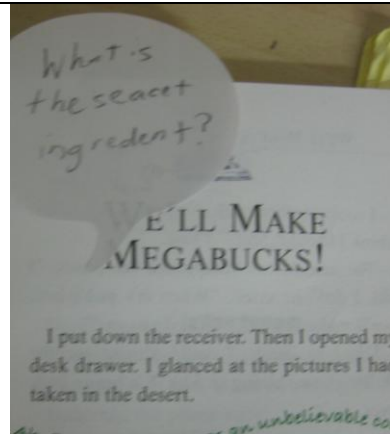
(FN, 03/03/2008)

Table 11 continued.

Mini Lesson Focus Strategy:
Questioning

T: As you read, stop and ask yourself, “What am I wondering? What am I curious about that would help me to understand the story a bit better.” Then, read to find the answer.

(FN, 3/15/2008)



(FN, 3/20/2008)

T: You said that you have made some connections to your life. Have you made any connections between other books you have read?

R: No.

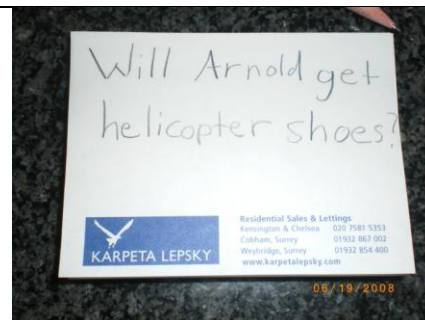
T: Remember, when you read a book, you can make connections about many things – the characters, the story parts, the setting – always keep in mind what the book reminds you of or what it is similar to. That way, you can make as many connections as possible!

R: Yeah, and then I could ask some questions about it too. Like in this story, I am already wondering . . . (FN, 5/15/2008)



(FN, 5/19/2008)

Although outside of school reading was not a focus of this study, I received evidence that demonstrated how the appropriation of reading strategy application during reading extended beyond the classroom walls. Excited about her final book report, Renee asked her mom to take a picture of the thinking she was doing while reading to show it to Ms. Sloan. This outside of the classroom data demonstrates the application of the appropriated reading strategies in students at home reading.



(TN, 6/19/2008)

Conclusion

During the course of the school year, the regularity of the conferencing between teacher and student seemed to set the students up for a meaningful conversation surrounding their independent reading selection. Conferences, in this classroom, had a recognizable structure in which the teacher honed in on students' individual needs, which may or may not directly relate to the focus strategy. Students came to read differently through these routine exchanges. They seemed to know that the expectation is to have utilized a particular strategy or strategies, and so they read in a way that will prepare them to make a contribution during the on-on-one meeting.

Through analysis of focus student data, it is evident that the students began to appropriate the reading strategies introduced to the whole class through the mini lesson and then supported through the one-on-one conference time with the teacher. Ms. Sloan's structure of providing *Post-it* notes to students and closing the conference with a goal for their independent reading set the stage for students to actively think during their independent reading time in the classroom. As demonstrated in the examples above, the focus students, like the other students in Ms. Sloan's class, each adapted the use of *Post-its* in a way that best fit their needs. Renee mirrored Ms. Sloan's use of *Post-its* in the conference, Liam used them occasionally to jot down words or phrases, and Carlos used Ms. Sloan's *Post-its* left in his texts as a guide but did not utilize them for note taking or strategy application as he read. Although the differences in application existed, the common theme among all of the focus students was their application of the reading strategies in their independent reading. All three students authentically applied the

reading strategies taught and reviewed within the one-on-one conferencing sessions. By way of this application, the goal of the reading strategies – improved comprehension of the text – was achieved.

The nature of reading conferences in this third grade classroom opened up a space within the reading block for relationship building between the teacher and student that allowed the teacher to better individualize instruction during the one-on-one meeting time. Through this individualization, the teacher was able to enhance the strategy instruction that was introduced in a whole class mini lesson. The conferencing time provided the opportunity for scaffolding, modeling, and the joint meaning-making around new knowledge about reading strategies that were relevant to the student and their current reading selections. In Chapter 5, implications of these findings in relation to research in the field of literacy and classrooms will be presented.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This study took place in a third grade classroom and addressed the following questions. First, what is the nature of reading conferences in a third grade classroom? Second, in what ways, if any, does participation in reading conferences influence subsequent book selection and reading? This chapter summarizes findings and interprets them with regard to the above questions, discusses theoretical and practical implications of those findings, and makes recommendations for further research.

This study is framed by the theories of Vygotsky (1986), Bruner (1990), Wells (1999), and other theorists associated with sociocultural theory. In brief, teaching and learning is considered a social, cultural and communicative process that is influenced by the context of the learning experience. Learning is not a solitary occurrence. It is based upon the interaction between the teacher and the student (Wertsch, 1990). Vygotsky spotlighted the interaction between the teacher and student in the act of constructing understandings. He emphasized the interaction of the more expert member of the learning community and the learner and regarded education as the “quintessential sociocultural activity” (Moll, 1991). He identified language and its use as a tool for students to gain access to learning through co-construction with peers and other adults. His work provides the theoretical basis for studies that center on collaboration through language in the processes of learning.

Accordingly, this study was framed by the perspective that participants in a learning encounter learn with and from each other by engagement in “dialogic inquiry” which

results in the learner becoming an autonomous participant in the activity (Wells, 1999, p. 262). Therefore, learning processes in which the teacher guides the student to independence through dialogue should be investigated. This study examined these processes as they are exhibited in reading conferences, a teacher/student interactional structure found within classrooms that is a part of a workshop approach to reading instruction.

Within reading workshop, teachers provide a space for one-on-one conversations with students via reading conferences. During these conferences, the teacher guides the student to a better understanding of reading strategies and skills based upon the needs of the student that emerge during the conference. In addition, the student draws from the text that he/she has selected to apply strategies and works with the teacher to make meaning from the text. Finally, the teacher provides an “externalized assignment” that encourages the student to keep working with an objective in mind as they leave the conference to continue their independent reading (Bomer, 2006).

Although there are many anecdotal texts that support reading conferences through a discussion of their structure and benefits, there is limited academic research on the subject. The research that is available identifies the positive impact of conferencing in reading classrooms. Randy Bomer (1999) and Sharon Ruth Gill (2000) conducted studies in which reading conference was a central feature. Bomer focuses on the role of teacher during the conference. He describes him/her as a facilitator and co-meaning maker who supports the students during the conference in an effort to encourage independence with their individual reading. He found that this role was most effective when working with

students who were in need of additional academic support and determined that the one-on-one time was integral in the process. It provided the teacher with the opportunity to determine the student's needs and provide tailored support in a way that promoted more student independence. Gill (2000) asserted through her findings that individual conferencing provided a space for teacher scaffolding that appeared to lead to more student independence in the application of reading strategies.

Both of these studies share the commonality of the time preceding and during the conference as their focus. What the research does not address is what happens between the students and their texts after this one-on-one time with the teacher. Although Gill's (2000) findings suggest that students are more independent readers as a result of conferencing, this independence is not studied during students' independent reading time; rather, the independent application of strategies that she highlights occurs during the conference. It is demonstrated during conferencing sessions where the teacher provides less guidance and allows the student to showcase the learning that has taken place through application to text being discussed in the conference. There is no published study that addresses the time after the conference as the student returns to his/her desk to read from his/her independent reading selection.

This study sought to build and expand upon the current research and examined the instructional implications of individual conferencing during the independent reading period on students' future reading experiences. This issue was best addressed through an interpretive case study. The research procedures were guided by the assumptions of interpretive/constructivist ethnography (Lincoln, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data

analyzed and reported in this volume were collected as part of a seventh month study of individual reading conferences between teacher and student in a third-grade classroom.

To investigate the guiding research questions, data were collected in the form of expanded field notes, video and audiotape, both teacher and student interviews. Additionally, photos of student and teacher note taking during reading were also collected. These data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ongoing analysis led to the themes and hypotheses that are discussed in this and previous chapters. Limitations to this study's findings are discussed in Chapter 3.

Summary of Findings

The remainder of this chapter summarizes the study's findings and suggests theoretical and practical implications. It is organized around the two research questions. First, what is the nature of reading conferences in a third grade classroom? Second, in what ways do reading conferences influence subsequent book selection and reading experiences? The summary of the findings is followed by a discussion of those findings and conclusions within the context of previous theory and research to be concluded with theoretical and curricular implications. Finally, recommendations for future research are considered.

The Nature of Reading Conferences in a Third Grade Classroom

As discussed in Chapter 4, reading conferences offered a unique space for building relationships between the teacher and students. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that interaction with others is crucial to intellectual development. Similarly, Barbara Rogoff (1990) writes, "understanding happens between people. . ." (p. 67). The conversational

tone and willingness of the teacher to listen to the connections, comments, and questions of the students led to conversations in which the teacher was able to come away with knowledge of the personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the student. In this way, the teacher was able to ensure that the instruction and learning during the conferencing was centered in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is allowed to take shape within a situation by way of the “affective qualities of the relationship between teacher and student” (Goldstein, 1999) p. 654). Providing instruction in the ZPD was fostered through the structure of the reading conferences. It afforded the opportunity for the teacher and learner to interact to find a common ground of knowledge and skill from which to build (B. Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). At the start of each conference, during the informal check in, Ms. Sloan was able to make a connection with the student on a more personal level and ascertain the learning need of the student with whom she met. As Ms. Sloan opened up the conversation to the thoughts of the student, relationship building was taking place (Goldstein, 1999). From this connection, the teacher and student were able to work together productively and successfully.

The conferencing period provided the opportunity to individualize instruction for each student during the reading period. Although all students were taught the focus strategy via the whole class mini lesson, the conference session afforded Ms. Sloan the chance to determine the student’s mastery of this strategy in his/her own reading. Conference content included instruction on decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies. Ms. Sloan came to the conference prepared to review the focus strategy for the week, but it was during the conference, as Ms. Sloan informally checked in with the

student, that the content of the conference was officially determined based upon the current needs of the student. In order for the one-on-one time to be tailored to the needs of each student with whom she met, Ms. Sloan exhibited flexibility in the content of each meeting. Each conference began similarly with an inquiry into student interest, a summary of the text read so far, and a discussion of the application of the current focus strategy. If the student demonstrated proficiency in the strategy the class was focusing on, or if a student struggled with the text and was unable to grasp the focus strategy, Ms. Sloan focused in on a comprehension strategy that the student needed to hone. It was during this conference opening that Ms. Sloan determined where to guide the conversation to best meet the needs of the student with whom she was working, with the overarching goal of solidifying understanding of reading strategies for increased comprehension.

The Influence of Reading Conferences on Independent Reading

As discussed in Chapter IV, individualization was a key component of the reading conferences. This individualization was necessary for the students' appropriation of reading strategies introduced during the whole class mini lessons. Although the mini lesson often included teacher modeling of the strategy and an opportunity for students to engage with sample text and practice the strategy, it became evident through conference transcripts that students were still not able to successfully apply the strategy within their personal reading experience without teacher guidance. During the conference, the teacher was able to hone in on the need of the student. By doing this, students were instructed on strategies that were relevant to their stage in their reading development.

They were able to participate in the whole class mini lesson and were exposed to a variety of reading strategies, but during the one-on-one time, the focus was based upon their need.

After the individualized sessions, students seemed better prepared to apply strategies during their independent reading. This application was noted through their use of *Post-it* notes to catalogue their thinking. In addition to this application via *Post-It* notes, the language of the students in the research class became more sophisticated as students began to mirror the academic talk used by Ms. Sloan during the conferences. They began to label what they were doing and thinking during independent reading time with the labels of the various reading strategies provided to them during conferences.

Summary

In review, the findings from this study suggest that: (a) the content of reading conferences impacts student's reading experiences; (b) reading conferences offer a space for teachers and students to build relationships and make meaning pertaining to reading strategies; (c) the strategy instruction that occurs during one-on-one time with the teacher is appropriated by students and utilized in their independent reading experiences at school. These findings are contextualized within existing theory and research in the following section.

Theoretical Interpretations and Implications of Findings

The findings of this study relate to current theory on teaching and learning. First, the teacher's actions during the reading conference are considered in relation to the theoretical constructs of scaffolding and individualized instruction. Second, the students'

application of learned reading strategies is interpreted through the theoretical lens of appropriation. As a conclusion to this section, theoretical and curricular implications of the findings are summarized.

Scaffolding

It is important to note that the students did not enter into these reading conferences as blank slates. Students may have been exposed to reading strategies in a previous grade level. However, students seemed to need guidance on how to apply these strategies effectively to their independent reading. Reading conferences seemed to be the means to which this scaffolding could occur regularly during the reading period. The designated one-on-one time provided the space and structure for teacher scaffolding to occur.

Ms. Sloan provided scaffolds for the students' appropriation of reading strategies in a number of ways. First, she gave them labels for their thinking about reading. During the mini lessons, Ms. Sloan taught the students the reading strategies, and during the one-on-one conferences, she reinforced those labels through her language. It was during the conferences that students were able to make a connection between the labels presented to the whole class and with their independent reading selections. Ms. Sloan had the opportunity to talk through what students were thinking and assign for them the label that fit their process while reading. In this way, she was able to show them that they were often already doing what the strategy defined.

Ms. Sloan utilized guiding questions to provide scaffolds for the students' appropriation. When a student came to a conference unable to tell her what they had been

reading about or unable to answer specific questions, Ms. Sloan posed questions to promote the student's active thinking about their reading. Finally, Ms. Sloan used written guidance to support students in their independent reading. When a student worked through a strategy with Ms. Sloan during the conference, she often made notes on a *Post-it* or use it to demonstrate the strategy. At the close of the conference, Ms. Sloan placed this note in the student's book and reminded the student to focus on that same strategy when he/she returned to their seats to continue independent reading. In this way, students left the conference with both a verbal and visual reminder of the strategy. At the same time, the *Post-it* provided a model from which they could work as they documented their application of the strategy in their independent reading.

The scaffolding provided during the conference seemed to strongly influence the students as they returned to their independent reading; more so than the mini lesson. Students appeared focused on a specific task – the documentation of their thinking- after they met with the teacher. This leads me to believe that they were more cognizant of their thinking while reading after the conference. Ms. Sloan played a key role in encouraging this active reading during the conferencing sessions. She provided the student with tools for thinking about their reading by way of her guiding questions, thinking aloud, and modeling of strategy application. Ms. Sloan's consistent focus on the strategies helped them acquire value within the classroom, and so students became more invested in both their application of and conversations about the strategies.

The one-on-one structure of the conference made it possible for Ms. Sloan to identify where the student appeared to need more support. Through her informal check

in, she was able to determine first if the student had been able to apply the focus strategy in his/her reading. For those students who were successful in this task, Ms. Sloan engaged them in an explanation of their thinking during the application. In this way, she was able to better grasp their level of understanding and determine if more practice was needed with her guidance or if instruction was better suited around a different, more challenging strategy for the student. Those students who struggled with the application of the strategy or who were unable to articulate their thinking surrounding their use of it in their reading were engaged in a teacher directed conversation in which Ms. Sloan prompted their thinking by questioning and providing academic labeling of their natural reading actions.

Wood *et al.* (1976) notes that in order ensure that learning takes place within the child's ZPD, it is the role of the teacher to provide "temporary, adjustable scaffolding" to enable the child to move towards independence (p. 98). This scaffolding begins with a focus on teacher modeling and moves into the students' interaction with the knowledge as they clarify their thinking and begin to practice what they have learned and seen from the teacher. A key component of scaffolding is teacher feedback. Students need continuous dialogue in order to determine in what ways they can improve in the learning task (Wood et al, 1976). As students become more confident in the application of the new knowledge, the teacher begins the "gradual release" of responsibility from the teacher to the student. As the student assumes more responsibility, the teacher's role is to offer support to the student as they become more sophisticated in their use of the knowledge (Pearson, 1983).

In this study, the one-on-one conferences provided routine interactions between the teacher and student in which scaffolding was able to occur frequently. This support was focused on the specific need of the student with whom the teacher conferred. The nature of the reading conference was such that the teacher was able to closely monitor the student as he/she was introduced to the strategy and attempted to apply this strategy within the independent reading selection. In this way, the teacher could immediately provide support and feedback to the student and ensure that the application was accurate. This contributes to our theorizing about scaffolding by highlighting the notion of consistent and individualized support as a means to student learning. By providing a structure that allowed for routine interaction between the teacher and the student, instruction was able to be individualized and feedback tailored to support the learner in the moment that meaning making occurred.

Routine interactional structures, such as reading conferences, may be ideal contexts for scaffolding. One important dimension of these structures in relation to scaffolding seemed to be the repeated and routine nature of these structures. Frequency of one-on-one interactions with the teacher allowed for norms of interaction to be established. Students knew that they were expected to come to the conference with evidence of their thinking about reading by way of applying strategies discussed in their conferences. In addition, if they were struggling during their independent reading, students knew that they would have the opportunity to pose questions and work through the application of reading strategies with the teacher. This norm, in particular, set up the conference as a space in which the teacher provided scaffolding to the student since the

students came prepared to discuss and work through the challenges they faced as they read. Another aspect is the ways in which this structure intersected with and sat along beside the whole group mini lesson. That is, strategies introduced in mini lessons were taught, experienced, and followed up on in reading conferences. During these conferences, the teacher was better able to guide the meaning making of the student by providing relevant supports as he/she attempted to apply strategies to and comprehend the text.

The dimensions of reading conference conducive to scaffolding that were identified here have implications for our theorizing about scaffolding in that they provide a better understanding about how scaffolding might work in primary classrooms.

Appropriation

Reading conferences provided the means for students to appropriate knowledge and apply reading strategies. Conferences, by their nature established learning in the student's ZPD. In this way, the student was in an optimal place for receiving the instruction of the teacher. As discussed above, the instruction during the conference time targeted individual needs. Through individualization of instruction, students not only learned in their optimal zone, they engaged in a meaningful interaction with the teacher. She provided guidance surrounding what they needed as readers in the moment that they needed it. As Ms. Sloan posed questions and modeled her thinking for the students, she provided them with the tools they needed to later apply these same strategies independently.

In thinking about why the one-one conferences aided in students' appropriation, I hypothesized that the relevance of the material was also at play. The nature of reading conferences is such that students are working with the text that they have selected to read during independent reading time. There is an inherent desire on their part to read and understand the book, and so there is more investment in the process of utilizing reading strategies to ensure meaning making is occurring. Ms. Sloan played to this relevance in the structure and content of the conferences. At the start of each conference, Ms. Sloan informally checked in. As noted above, this was an opportunity for her to determine the student's needs, but it also acted as a means to Ms. Sloan learning about the book the students were reading. With knowledge about the book's plot and characters, Ms. Sloan was better equipped to pose questions that would lead students to an understanding about the comprehension strategy in relation to their book.

According to Bakhtin (1981), appropriation is a reciprocal process between two parties during a dialogic encounter. This can occur in both educational and social settings, and it is not limited to an older teacher and younger learner; appropriation occurs when there is any interaction between two people in which new knowledge is developed. It emphasizes an active and constructive process that may or may not be recognized by the learner. Appropriation occurs often in the subconscious of the learner; however, significant mental work is required for the learner to appropriate new knowledge (Cazden, 2001). He/she must work to make meaning and construct new knowledge. Often in classrooms, this construction is supported by the teacher through scaffolding.

This interpretive case study suggests that students' opportunities to engage in one-on-one conference with the teacher furthered their appropriation of the reading skills presented during the whole class mini lesson and again within the one-on-one reading conference. Particularly, the teacher's use of modeling, guiding questions, and notes within the text that acted as prompts seemed to make it more likely that the students would attempt to and be successful in their application of the reading strategy of focus for that conference.

This contributes to our thinking about appropriation by presenting it in a real-life context. In this study, the teacher and student interact, and within this interaction is an exchange of new knowledge for the student. Although the students' real-time thinking during independent reading was unable to be documented, evidence of appropriation was identified through the ability of the students to articulate their use of reading strategies and the hard evidence of *Post it* notes used to record their thinking. Additionally, this study provides evidence of the benefit of one-on-one individualized instruction and authentic experiences in appropriation. Students who were unable to apply reading strategies after their introduction during mini lessons were able to again practice this application with the guidance of the teacher during conferences. During this interaction, students were once more exposed to these strategies and had the opportunity to pose questions and hear the teacher talk about the strategy as it related to their reading selection. When students returned to their desks to continue reading, they had an individualized and meaningful experience from which to draw as they attempted to apply the recently learned strategy independently. By providing a space for dialogue to occur

between the teacher and the student, the student is provided with an additional interaction with the strategy that seems to solidify understanding and promote independent application of that strategy.

Theoretical Model

The findings related to the nature of reading conferencing and its influence on subsequent student reading support a theory (see Figure 2) that is grounded in the relationship building between the teacher and student. As discussed in the data pertaining to the nature of reading conferences, the one-on-one interactions between the teacher and students provided a space for relationships to develop. Conferences also involved instances of teacher feedback as students attempted to apply reading strategies to their independent selection. The teacher offered feedback and goals to students by way of *Post-it* notes. The feedback provided on the *Post-it* notes also acted as a goal-setting mechanism for students' independent reading time. These notes were placed within the student's text at the close of the conference, and so the student was able to refer back to the notes made by the teacher as he/she read independently. In this way, the student was reminded of the strategy on which he/she was to focus during independent reading.

Theory of Reading Conferencing

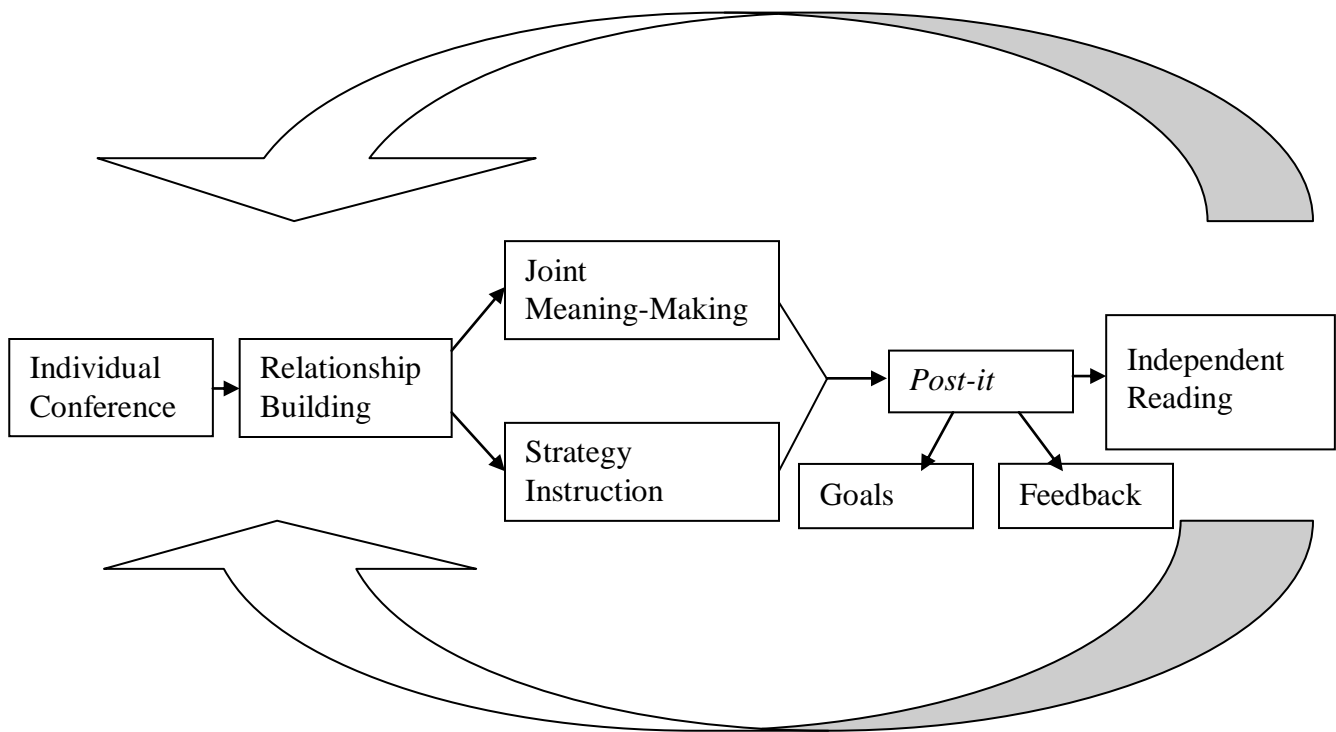


Figure 8. The foundation of an individual reading conference is the relationship building that occurs through the one-on-one interaction between the teacher and student.

Relationship Building. The relationship between the teacher and student during the conference is built from the caring nature of the teacher. As Noddings (1984) argues, the one caring must exhibit “engrossment and motivational displacement” to the person that is cared for (p. 69). Through the data referenced in chapter 4, it appears that the teacher exhibits this “engrossment” by her consistent focus on the student via guiding questions in order to gain a greater understanding of him or her. Additionally, the teacher’s caring behavior is determined by the needs of the student in the interaction. In response to the care of the teacher, the student becomes comfortable and begins to share

his or her thinking about the text; often relating it to personal experience. The caring of the teacher solidifies the relationship between her and the student.

The “relational zone” (Goldstein, 1999) is key to intellectual development. There is a “fundamental importance of one-on-one interpersonal relationship[s] to learning and development (p. 653). This can be seen through the interactions between the teacher and student during the reading conference. The teacher and student build a strong relationship, and through these relationships, the students worked with the teacher to make meaning from the texts they were reading and the teacher provided on the spot strategy instruction. In addition, the teacher was able to provide instruction focused on the reading strategy of focus and/or a reading strategy in which the student displayed a need to hone.

Focused Instruction and Feedback. The structure of the reading conference is one that allows for the student to receive tailored feedback specific to his/her application of the focus reading strategy. As shown in the excerpts in Chapter 4, the students had the opportunity during each conference to share their thinking about their independent reading selection. It was in these moments that the teacher was able to pinpoint the specific needs of the student and provide customized strategy instruction. During this instructional episode, the teacher would often make notes on a *Post it*. These notes were a method of providing the student with feedback about their use of the strategy. This feedback also acted as the driving force for the student’s independent reading. The *Post it* notes, left in the book by the student throughout the duration of the reading of the text, not only reminded the student of what the conference focus was, but they acted as a

reminder of the goal of their independent reading session. Students left the conference with both a verbal and written task that prompted them to apply the strategy of focus in their independent reading. Just as the *Post it* note as a feedback and goal setting device was an integral component of the structure of the conference, so too was the teacher's inquiry into the student's work during their independent reading. At the start of the conference, the teacher would ask the student what they had been thinking during their reading and, more specifically, what strategy they had applied. Most often this query was posed with the specific strategy of focus mentioned. The routine of the conferencing session paired with the *Post it* note reminder encouraged students to spend their independent reading time focused on their thinking about reading in order to be prepared for the next conference with the teacher.

Theory in Practice. The theory overviewed in the discussion above can be seen in practice by way of following, Liam, one of the focal students, through the model. Drawing upon the data presented in Chapter 4, the discussion below highlights the elements of the theory of conferencing found within the one-on-one conferences between Liam and Mrs. Sloan and Liam's independent reading experiences.

As described in Chapter 4, Mrs. Sloan began to build a relationship with Liam when she posed questions related to his interest in books. She learned what genre and topics he enjoyed reading about, and prompted him to share experiences that related to the texts he was reading. In this way, Liam was comfortable in his conversations with Mrs. Sloan and she was informed with enough detail to tailor his strategy instruction during the one-on-one conferencing period. During one of the conferences, it became

evident that Liam was unable to reach beyond the simplistic description of “nice” as a character trait Mrs. Sloan provided him with a list of words that they worked through together to determine what, more specific, trait they could assign to Lola, the main character. During this meeting, Mrs. Sloan also prompted Liam to think about why he would give a trait to that character in relation to evidence provided in the story At the close of the conference, Mrs. Sloan leaves Liam with a post it note that states “Descriptive words about Lola” (FN, 12/8/2010). During this conference, Mrs. Slaven was able to hone in on Liam’s individual need, provide instruction around the strategy of identifying character traits, and leave Liam with a goal to continue to think about descriptive words supported by text evidence in relation to the main character.

Liam use of the strategy is evidenced in his next conference with Mrs. Sloan. During this conference, Mrs. Sloan follows up with Liam’s task of a more detailed characterization of the main character with supporting evidence. Liam is able to pinpoint the trait of “stubborn” and provide evidence of this trait through the character’s actions (FN, 12/10.2010). Through this model of reading conferencing, Mrs. Sloan was able to target Liam’s needs, provide strategy instruction to support his meaning-making while reading, and offer feedback that structured his independent reading focus. Additionally, Mrs. Slaven was able to check in with Liam to determine if he was able to utilize the reading strategy on his own when they conferred a couple of days later. Through this process, Liam was held accountable for his application of the focus reading strategy and Mrs. Sloan was able to ensure his appropriation of that strategy before moving on in his instruction.

Practical Implications

As summarized in Chapter 2, there are many anecdotal texts that discuss and promote reading conferences as a part of reading workshop and the reading classroom. In addition, there are a few research studies that address the benefits of one-on-one conferencing time in reading. Both of these types of texts are similar in their overview of the content and structure of reading conferences. Moreover, both the anecdotal and research texts promote reading conferences as a way to ensure instruction is tailored to meet the individual needs present in reading classrooms.

Through studying reading conferences in a third grade classroom, it is evident that this instructional space influenced students' independent reading experiences. The practical implications of this study reach beyond the research classroom. One-on-one conferences provide opportunities to build relationships with students and create meaningful learning experiences from which students can build as they appropriate new knowledge. The reader can make judgments about the transferability of the structure, content, and approach to individualizing through reading conferences based on the thick description provided here. For those teachers who are limited by time and curricular confines, one-on-one conferences are an efficient and effective way to meet students' needs and that all students are able to experience success while learning strategies to improve their comprehension.

Reading teachers who rely on direct instruction and independent reading time alone may be missing out on an instructional method that directly influences student reading. One-on-one conferences, as evidenced in this study, may reinforce student

learning of new material and impact the authentic application of new knowledge. This study provides evidence that students leave their reading conference more prepared to approach their independent reading selection with strategies that promote their active thinking and comprehension of the text. For teachers who are unsure of how to provide individualized instruction, reading conferences offer a way to spend time with each student in order for the teacher to learn about their personal experiences as well as learning needs. The details provided here may be useful as teachers consider reading conferences within their own classrooms.

In a time when state and district standards and high stakes assessments guide classroom instruction (McNeil, 2000), the learning needs of the individual students can potentially be overshadowed by the focus on teaching the skills needed for all students to pass the standardized and high stakes tests. Often, the skills needed to pass state assessments are the same skills that students need to learn to progress in their reading development. In order to ensure that students are successfully appropriating the information as it is introduced so that it becomes a part of the students' practice and not just knowledge to reiterate on an assessment, teachers need a way to determine that the student is moving into independent application of their knowledge and not just mirroring instruction of the teacher. Reading conferences offer the space and time for the teacher to talk with students in an effort to determine that the student has done more than memorize the material; he/she has appropriated the strategy. Teachers can meet the requirements of a sometimes prescribed curriculum and at the same time ensure that all students are receiving relevant and individualized instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research arise from this study. First, researchers may want to investigate reading conferences across several teachers, with a focus on the teachers pre conference planning and post conference follow up. Although current research on conferencing provides a general overview of the structure of a conference within reader's workshop (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 2001) teacher preparation for and follow through after conferences vary. Findings from this type of investigation would help to develop a better understanding of the teacher determined elements of the reading conferencing that directly impact students' future reading experiences.

Second, researchers may want to explore student application of reading strategies in classrooms where whole class instruction is the sole method of instruction for reading strategies. The findings from this type of study could be compared to the findings in this study to determine in what specific ways one-on-one individualized instructional time influences student's independent application of reading strategies versus the influence of whole class instruction on student application of the same strategies. Findings from this study would provide a current example of individualized instruction and its benefits in the reading classroom.

Related to the study above, a final investigation utilizing quantitative methods would prove fruitful for the conversation in the field surrounding standards based assessment and curriculum that best prepares students for performance on these assessments. In an environment of standards based curriculums that allow for testable results in an effort to ensure quality education (McNeil, 2000, p. xv), a study utilizing the

scores of standardized achievement in a classroom employing reading conferences would be important to conduct. Standardization is critiqued due to its impact on the life of the classroom. The role of “students as contributors to classroom discourse, as thinkers, as people who brought their personal stories and life experiences into the classroom” is decreased in an effort to cover the material necessary for students to score well on the standards based assessment (McNeil, 2000, p.5). As the pressure to perform well on state administered assessments continues to increase, it is important to identify the ways in which reading conferencing influences student performance on these standards based assessments. Findings from this quantitative study could demonstrate the impact of individualized instruction on students’ reading performance; both within the classroom on diagnostics and on the state and/or nationally administered standards based assessments.

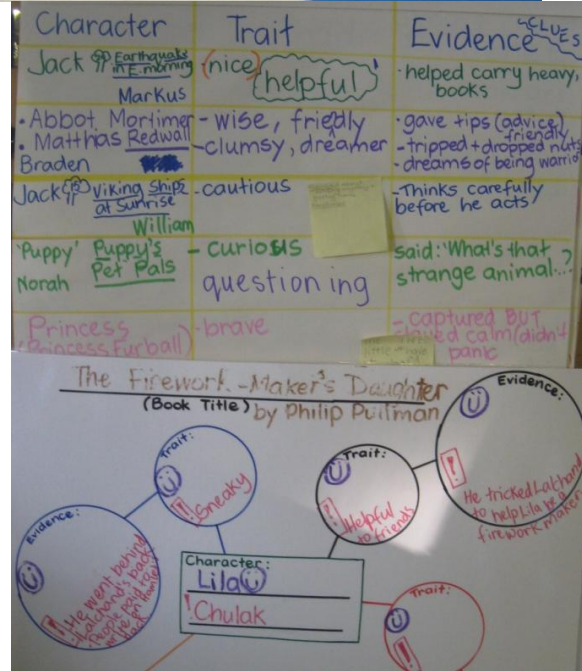
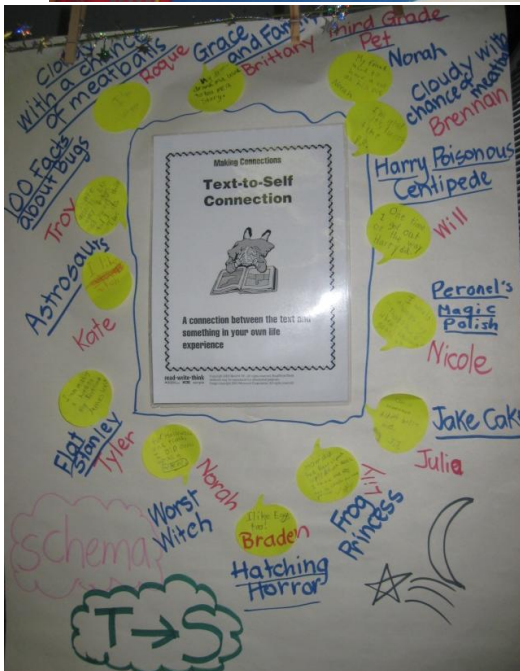
Conclusion

Reading conferences are an integral part of the Reader’s Workshop. In this dissertation I argue that the inclusion of conferences within the reading period is a way for teachers to provide more tailored instruction to the students in their classroom. Through conferences, teachers are able to scaffold student learning and individualize the support provided based upon the students’ needs and the text that they selected. However, it is important to recognize the lack of research focused on the aftermath of a conference. This next step in the appropriation of reading strategies is currently overlooked by researchers and practitioners. The research analyzed in this paper designates this post conference reading time as a strong indicator of a students’ learning in relation to reading

strategies and may require the teacher's attention and support as students begin to apply their learning independently and across a wide variety of texts.

APPENDIX A

PHOTO OF CLASSROOM LIBRARY/MINI LESSON AREA & STRATEGY POSTERS



APPENDIX B

TEACHER & STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher:

1. Talk to me about the organization of the reading workshop in the classroom.
2. How do you determine what the focus of the conference will be?
3. What are the different purposes/goals of the conferences?
4. Do you ever let the students guide the focus of the conference?
 - a. If so, in what way(s) do you facilitate this conversation?
 - b. If not, how to you ensure that they are engaged with you as the leader?
5. How do you keep records from the conferences?
6. In what ways do you find that the conferencing time impacts your instruction?
7. How do you select students to confer with each day?

Student:

1. What book are you reading? What are you thinking about right now?
2. Are you applying any reading strategies?
 - a. If yes, Which ones? How are you using it/them?
 - b. If no, Why aren't you using strategies right now?
3. Did you conference with Mrs. Sloan recently?
 - a. What did you talk about/work on together in that conference?
4. Did Mrs. Sloan give you an assignment to work on while you read today?
 - a. If yes, how's it coming along?
5. Do you have anything you are going to ask Mrs. Slaven about in your next conference?

*Note *Post-its* and inquire about those, if any.

APPENDIX C

EXPANDED FIELD NOTES

Field notes

Monday, November 5, 2007

9:45-10:20

Partial Mini Lesson & Individual Conferences

Observer: Frugé

9:45

I enter the classroom during the whole class mini lesson. Students are gathered on the carpet, and Mrs. Sloan is reading Tea with Milk to class. As she reads she asks, "What do you think she is going to do?" Only 2nhand is raised. T shows book to the class and says, "There's the illustration. This may also give us a clue to what she is going to do."

[PN: modeling questioning and scaffolding their thinking about the character - predictions].

Now, most of the students have their hands raised to share their thinking. Alex is very active in the back of the room. His hand is raised, and Mrs. Sloan calls on him. He suggests that the character might be going in to get a room. Brennan calls out that a department store is not that kind of store. Mrs. Sloan states, "Alex has the right idea, although she may not be getting a room. What might she be going in to get or too in this department store? Only 3 student shave hands raised.

9:47 – Trevor gets up and walks out of the classroom

[PN: I wonder if he is going to meet with a specialist during this time? Need to ask Mrs. Sloan about students who are not a part of the mini lesson – frequency of this/do they receive as much time with her during conferencing or maybe more to make up for time missed?]

Mrs. Slaven poses the question, "What could she get? Remember she put on her brightest clothes." Renee proposes that she could find a husband. Mrs. Slaven responds, looking to Renee and then to the whole class as if inviting all to think about what she was posing, "Was a husband *exactly* what she was looking for?" Students shake their heads and 8 hands are now in the air. Lilly is called on and says, "Get a job." Mrs. Slaven turns the page and shows the class the next illustration. "Based upon this picture, I think Lilly may be right!"

9:49

T points to the picture, “And I can make a connection here. A Text to *World* connection. She talked about when she lived in Japan and how when you go into a department store, every elevator has an attendant in it. She is pointing to the elevators in the illustration while she shares her connection. Students are attentive. She closes the book and tells that class that they will finish it tomorrow.

[PN: Modeling of the language and providing an example].

[TN: I wonder in what ways her modeling of the academic language of the strategies influence their discussions during conferences.]

9:51

Finishes book and puts up “Text-to-Text Connection” Chart paper on board. This has the definition of T-T as well as post-it notes with students’ connections made while reading with their name **[MN: Take picture of this]**. Adds “Text-to-World” symbol. The students are still attentive during this action. They are looking at the chart paper.

Mrs. Sloan Reminds students of the difference between a t-w and t-s (something that I know about); 3 stickies on each desk, expectations given to make at least 1 connection while reading independently. Students move to their desks. They are noisy, but move quickly to get their boxes and sit to read.

[MN: picture of the hand book mark; Buy lapel microphone for Anne]

9:52

Students are all seated at their desks. Most have their independent reading selections open and are reading them.

Teacher calls L to the back to talk about the book she is reading. Asks if those are the kinds of things you might predict – what’s been happening so far?

[PN: Does a summary start of most/all conferences? What is Anne looking for within this summary – why the way selected to begin conference?]

As L summarizes, T takes notes; interrupts to have her locate a part that she doesn’t remember “can you find that for me?”

[MN: The teacher appears to be scaffolding L’s summary by providing her guidance in referring back to the text. In what other ways does he conference lend itself to scaffolding?]

L finds the section and T has her read it aloud

T: So then what happened at the very end? What about the rest of the chapters? What's going on in the other parts of the story? I know the first chapter really well from doing book talks on it, but I want to know about the rest too.

[PN: t laughs and is light-hearted; feels like a discussion versus a question and answer session; makes it more personal as well by connecting what she knows about the book from her own reading]

L continues summary and states that the character thought they were monkeys

T: Did she really think they were monkeys (begins looking in the book)

L: Yeah

T: Really? What made her think they were monkeys? I'm looking at the illustrations **[PN: modeling use of picture evidence as context for inference]** and I can see them there, they look like monkey's, but -

L starts looking for the text and points to a page in advance

T: No, you don't have to read the whole thing

L points to a paragraph in the text

T: Oh. Read that section there (Laura reads) So do you think she really . . .?

L: Maybe

T: So why is she calling them monkeys?

L: Because they were really cute and she had never seen any children as cute as this

T: I'm connecting to this story because I don't particularly like monkeys. They sort of scare me, so I wouldn't necessarily call them cute, but I can see what the teacher is saying. **[PN: T models use of strategy with what she knows/feels to make a text-to-self connection. Example of a negative connection almost – finding something relatable about the text to make it more meaningful]** I know that it's hard because you've only just started reading, but have you been able to make any connections yet?

L: Not yet. I think I will though.

T: As you go off today, here is a whole stack of sticky so that you can be looking out for something as you read.

Laura goes back to her seat and Anne writes notes.

[MN: Need copies of these notes each week]

10:05

T calls Troy to the back for a conference. Begins conversation by asking if the student is still interested in his book since he's been reading the book for a while.

[PN: No summary to start; rather, interest – does the conference start vary based upon the student? What purpose does the opening play for the teacher?]

[TN: The structure of the conferences is an aspect of the nature of the reading conference.]

T: What is it that you're finding interesting? I'm very impressed that you've been reading it for so long.

Tr: Well, he actually learned English and he doesn't really think it's . . . he thinks it's like new, and he doesn't really . . . where he came from, there wasn't really anybody who stole anything.

T: What's the name of the main character?

Tr: Um. I'm not sure. (looks in the pages – TOC, and first page)

T: The blurb is often a good place (turns his book to point to the back of the book and the summary) **[PN: teacher uses terminology; use of text features]**

Tr: John

T: reads snippets from the blurb “ he doesn't know where he is. Only that he is in a strange land.” So the at the moment where you're reading, is he still in the strange land?

Tr: No. I'm only about a quarter way through the book.

T: okay. Has anything in particular happened?

Tr: No. Not really.

T: So what sorts of things is John doing?

[PN: modeling how to determine plot through actions of character. Character a solid and accessible place to start when talking about a book]

Tr: The other people are asking questions to him

T: Why is that

Tr: Because they want to know where he came from and stuff like that and he thinks spaceships are familiar **[PN: as he talks, Troy flips through the pages as if using the text to guide his thinking, but he doesn't even look at the words].**

T: So, they're all asking questions about John. So these people on this strange planet, do they think there is something strange about him?

Tr: Yeah

T: Why are they asking him so many questions

Tr: well, he doesn't really match

T: he doesn't fit in.

Tr: Yeah

T: Now this is really hard since it is a Fantasy (stresses word) book to find connections. **(15:22)** Were you able to make any connections between this and other books you've read?

Tr: No

T: have you read any books like this before?

Tr: no

T: What sort of genre books do you usually read?

[TN: categories appear to be emerging in what is going on in the conferences – the use of academic language/terminology by the teacher]

Tr: I usually read nonfiction books.

T continues to prompt to discover types of books he is interested **[MN: Interest a possible category]** in, but student doesn't provide much more than he likes “a lot of

types”. T asks if he remembered the plot during the break, and Tr focuses on how he put his bookmark in to remind him. He did not have to re-read.

T has student read aloud – “if anything pops into your mind . . .”

Tr finds where he was and interrupts as he begins to read aloud with excitement.

T asks questions about main character- “Is the crazy wild boy that they’re talking about, John?”

Tr: I think a couple of people think he is, but I am not sure

T: But when they say the crazy wild boy, they are talking about John?

Tr: I think.

T: Next time you come read to me – is he doing lots of strange things that would seem strange to him? Is he doing things that would be strange in our world?

Tr: Um . . . well . . . Not much

T: So next time you come, see if you can make any connections, but really (gets up to get post-it note), I’d like you to think about this now, so when you come back next time, even more than connections, if you think – I want you to think about (writes on Post-it) “Does John, act the same way in this strange world he’s fallen into as he did in the normal world?” See if he’s noticing strange things

[TN: the teacher is moving beyond the mini lesson strategy here. She is pushing him beyond just making a connection to looking more closely at the character. This is evidence of individualization of instruction.]

Tr: I don’t think he did it in his normal world. Well, maybe he did

T: What is he noticing? Is he scared? How does he feel? [**Characterization – questions to ask to determine character traits/description**]

Tr: I’m not sure.

T: I’ll meet with you again on Wednesday or Thursday.

[PN: Does the student have a sense of what to do now? I wonder how effective the *Post-it* reminder will be.]

The teacher calls Braden to the table to confer. They meet briefly to talk about the genre of his book and the connections he has made. He is able to articulate text to self and text to text connections. He explains that the book is a fantasy and so he was unable to make any world connections since it was set in a fake land. The conference wraps up after 3 minutes.

[PN: shorter conference – seems to be a proficient reader who is grasping the strategy and applying it. I wonder how/if she will use conferences as a means to enrich students.]

[TN: Appropriation? Was there an earlier conference where the teacher worked with him on connections?]

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