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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXIT SLIP STRATEGY TO EXAMINE
THE ADVANCEMENT OF PARAPHRASING AND SUMARIZING OF
SHAKESPEARIAN TEXT

by
Andrea M. Hawn

An Action Research Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
June 23, 2009

Approved by Dr. Yvonne Rodriguez, Advisor

Date Approved June 23, 2009
June 23, 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the people who have helped and supported me during my action research and the completion of my Master of Science in Teaching degree at Rowan University. I would like to thank my parents, Hank and Charlotte Jensen, for their guidance and tireless devotion. Without their support, I would not be the person that I am, nor have been able to achieve all of my educational goals. I would also like to thank my daughter, Aubrey Hawn, for persevering and sacrificing much of her wants so I could achieve mine. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity express my appreciation to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Yvonne Rodriquez, who was extremely supportive and motivated me to strive for greatness. A special thank you to all of my students and my fellow MST cohort members, from whom I have learned priceless teaching and life lessons. All of these people noted have made a significant impact on my life, and for that I am eternally grateful.

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ABSTRACT

Andrea M. Hawn

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXIT SLIP STRATEGY TO EXAMINE THE ADVANCEMENT OF PARAPHRASING AND SUMARIZING OF SHAKESPEARIAN TEXT

2008/09

Dr. Yvonne Rodriguez

Master of Science in Teaching

This purpose of action research study was to help mediate areas of deficiency that were identified in the essay and composition writing of a group of freshman Honors' students. During this study, students were provided with specific strategies to interpret texts so they could begin to understand the author's intended message to the audience. They could then translate those understandings into their written work. Specifically, the exit slip strategy was implemented to help develop students' summarization and paraphrasing skills. Teacher feedback was also integrated onto the learning process to help reinforce and refine the skill development process. The findings in this study highlighted the importance of implementing and equipping students with specific writing strategies to interpret and make meaning from new and unfamiliar texts. The findings further suggest that individualized teacher feedback supports new skill development. This study explored the effectiveness of the exit slip strategy in helping students develop their paraphrasing and summarization skills. This study also documented the students' ability to transfer these skills to various written assessments that were incorporated into the then current unit of study, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is no secret that school curricula vary from state to state, district to district, and school to school. In English and language arts particularly, much of the specific works of literature that are mandated by schools to be taught is chosen by a small group of administrators and teachers. Though much of these works contain timeless themes and essential literary elements that are beneficial for students to study, these works are often viewed as dated or boring by some students. The problem is that students don't feel a connection to the texts; they don't feel that they have any relevance to their lives (Kane, 2007). To remedy this problem, teachers need to provide their students with a variety of strategies to process text beyond the word and sentence level, giving students strategies to analyze, synthesize, and critique texts of all sorts (Kane, 2007). In this study I used exit slips to integrate two specific strategies, paraphrasing and summarization, to try to help students identify and understand key facts, themes, and ideas in texts and put them into their own words. I wanted to see if by putting text into their own words and crafting understandings in their own terms, students would feel more connected to the text. I was also curious to see if developing these two strategies would help the students become more fluent, proficient, and organized in their writing. In the analysis of the data, many themes and understandings emerged, as well as some new questions.

Statement of the Problem

When I began my student teaching in mid-January, all of the students were in the process of taking midterm exams. This year Prosperous Point Regional High School¹ decided to design their midterms so that teachers could analyze their classes' results in conjunction with specific New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS). This meant that teachers designed their midterms to include blocks of questions that specifically addressed a particular standard or standards. Results were then analyzed for the percentage of correct answers under each particularly addressed standard; results were reported on an individual level (each student's average) and on a cumulative level (whole class average). According to the results, all of the freshman Honors English classes that I was teaching had the most difficulty in two specific areas: reading fluency and writing as a product. The specific coordinating NJCCCS that were addressed by the problematic questions on the midterm were Language Arts Literacy Standards 3.1.12.D and 3.2.12.B. Standard 3.1.12.D addresses reading fluency and comprehension, which translates to one's ability to understand and make meaning from a text, as well as identify central themes and main ideas. Standard 3.2.12.B addresses writing as a product, which is one's ability to create a coherent written product that has a clear topic and supporting statements, is logically organized, contains sentences of varying length, and has precisely chosen vocabulary. Though all of the freshman Honors English classes that I taught did poorly on the questions that addressed these specific standards, I chose to focus on only one of these classes because I knew that I had limited time in which to conduct my

¹ All names that refer to the school, towns, faculty, or students are fictitious. This was done to protect the anonymity of all people involved in the study.

research and collect my data. If the English honors' students were performing poorly in these areas, then students in regular English classes would also benefit from my researching this further. I chose my second period freshman Honors English class because the demographic of that class most closely represented the overall demographic of the school. The class average on the midterm exam in the two areas of focus was 59% in reading fluency and 56% in writing as a product.

My cooperating teacher gave further insight on what the midterm results for this class suggested. She stated that she had noticed in the written assessments, specifically essays and compositions, which the students had produced throughout the school year, that they had an overall difficulty identifying and analyzing key points from textual material. She said that they had particular difficulty articulating their understandings of the material into a coherently written product. I then examined the students' written work that was filed in their writing folders that were kept in the classroom. I noticed that all of the students had some sort of problem with their writing. The major problem was that most students' writing was poorly organized, fragmented, and somewhat incoherent, and all students had some issue with grammar, usage, and punctuation. Based on the preliminary data that I had seen, I wanted to implement an intervention strategy to try to help mediate at least some of their problems with writing.

After examining the students' work, midterm results, and from speaking with my cooperating teacher, I determined that the root of the problem was that the students were not able to make meaning from what they were reading. This inability to extrapolate key understandings then precipitated into the production of poor written work based on the

texts they were studying. I wanted to find a strategy that I could incorporate into my teaching that would help the students make text more personally relevant. Graham & Harris (2006) concluded that developing summarization skills can benefit both reading and writing skills; it makes reading material more memorable and clarifies important thoughts and ideas for later use. In a study conducted by Katims and Harris (1997), some students in multilevel middle school reading classes were given instruction using the paraphrasing strategy while some were not. The purpose of the study was to measure any increase in reading comprehension skills, and the results showed that the group that was taught the paraphrasing strategy improved over their initial pre-study testing. Developing the students' ability to summarize and paraphrase textual information seemed like a good idea to mediate some of my students' areas of need. I chose to use exit slips as a means to implement these strategies.

Story Behind the Research

As an English teacher and college student, I know the value in being able to write fluently and coherently. Throughout my life, writing well is something that I was always good at doing, and it was also an ability that I took for granted. My teaching taught me that writing well is not a skill possessed by all students. Based on the information that I gathered from the students' surveys, all of the students in my freshman Honors English focus class are planning on going to college after high school. Through examination of their written work, most of them are not very good writers. They have trouble organizing their ideas and supporting those key ideas with evidence. Their writing is often error-ridden, both grammatically and content wise. These students are not always motivated to

do their best. All of the students are involved in extra-curricular activities, sports, or some sort of activity that they valued as more important than school work; I was the same way as a high school student. Teaching an Honors level class, expected that the students would be prepared and ready to actively participate in class on a daily basis, but this was not the case. I heard such excuses as, “I was too tired from crew practice,” and, “I got in late from my baseball game,” as reasons why homework was not complete. Based on my observations, most of the students were satisfied to do the minimum requirements to get by.

The greatest challenge I faced with this class was keeping them on task, motivated, and focused. Through my observations I noticed that many of the students tended to disengage when a task seemed too complicated or overwhelming. Most needed constant reinforcement to keep on task, and many required frequent assurance that they were doing the right thing. For example, during independent classroom work I fielded many questions that simply required me to tell the students (a) that they were doing the task correctly, or (b) that they were doing the task incorrectly, followed by a clarification of how the task was to be done. From these teacher/student interactions I concluded that teacher procedural and evaluative feedback was something that the students often depended on.

When I began my student teaching and action research, we were beginning a unit on Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*. This was the students’ first formal exposure to Shakespearian drama and language. Based on my knowledge of and experiences with Shakespeare, I knew that the students would need more scaffolding and reinforcement

than usual to learn to feel comfortable with and understand Shakespeare's language. Using the exit slip strategy to develop paraphrasing and summarization skills seemed like a good fit for this particular unit and for this class. The exit slip strategy involves using index cards or slips of paper to get the class' thoughts on a particular subject or to gauge student understanding of the day's lesson. This strategy is typically used during the last five to ten minutes of class time, with the exit slip being the student's ticket out of class (Moreillon & Fontichiaro, 2008). By using this strategy, manageable chunks of information could be focused on within a short time frame. I could also give them feedback on their exit slips in the beginning stages of the strategy implementation to both reassure them that they were doing the task correctly and redirect them if they were not. I have come to have a love of Shakespeare; this is only because I had teachers and professors who took the time to help students decode the language and identify the timeless themes. It was my hope that by implementing a strategy that made the Shakespearian text more relevant and understandable, the students would at least learn to approach Shakespeare without fear, apprehension, or confusion.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to provide students with specific strategies to interpret texts so they could begin to understand the author's intended message to the audience. Once a basic understanding of the text was achieved through summarization, the students could use paraphrasing to put the text into their own words. When the students put the text in their own words, they could make personally relevant meaning from the text. If the students had a deep understanding of the essential themes and

meanings of the text, they could then write thoughtfully, logically, and coherently about the text in written assessments (Kane, 2007). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), the foundational goal of effective teaching is developing and deepening understanding of main ideas:

To understand is to make connections and bind together our knowledge into something that makes sense of things... To understand is to be able to wisely and effectively use – transfer – what we know, in context; to apply knowledge and skill effectively, in realistic tasks and settings. To have understood means that we show evidence of being able to transfer what we know. When we understand, we have a fluent and fluid grasp, not a rigid, formulaic grasp based only on recall and “plugging in.” (p. 7)

This study sought to incorporate specific strategies that would help students achieve more than just basic surface knowledge of the texts that they will encounter both their educational and personal endeavors.

Critical Questions

This study was guided by a few questions. The primary question was: What happens when I use exit slips as a technique to help develop paraphrasing and summarization skills in my freshman Honors English class? A secondary question that guided my study was: What impact does my feedback have, if any, on the development of the paraphrasing and summarization skills? While analyzing my data, another secondary question emerged as I reflected on the study: Does gaining a deeper

understanding of a text through paraphrasing and summarization increase student engagement and performance levels on written assessments related to the text?

Integrated Action and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to try to help mediate some areas of deficiency in the students' writing skills. My action research project focused on the development of summarization and paraphrasing skills through the use of the exit slip strategy. As previously stated, the exit slip strategy involves using index cards or slips of paper to get the class' thoughts on a particular subject or to gauge student understanding of the day's lesson. This strategy is typically used during the last five to ten minutes of class time, with the exit slip being the student's ticket out of class (Moreillon & Fontichiaro, 2008). I used this strategy two to three times per week for the duration of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, which spanned about seven weeks. Prior to the start of using the exit slips to develop the students' paraphrasing and summarization skills, I thoroughly explained the purpose of the exit slip and what I was hoping to achieve by using the technique. I also defined, explained, and modeled how to correctly summarize and paraphrase textual information using the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* as an example. During the implementation of the exit slip technique, I asked students to either paraphrase seven to ten lines or text from the day's reading or to summarize the key ideas or events from the day's reading. In the beginning stages of this process I provided feedback to the students on their exit slips so they could be reassured that they were paraphrasing or summarizing correctly, or I provided them with suggestions where any adjustments could be made.

In addition to specifically focusing on the development of summarization and paraphrasing skills through the exit slip strategy, written assessments were integrated into the unit of study that incorporated elements that required these particular skills. I did this to help reinforce the development of their skills. Weekly written assessments required students to choose from a few prewritten, teacher-designed questions that addressed a central theme from each act of the play. In order to answer these question correctly and thoroughly, the students had to be able to identify and understand at least one central theme or action from each scene. The assessment entailed stating their main idea and supporting it with at least one quote and other textual evidence from the play; the students needed to be able to both summarize events from the play and paraphrase the quote or quotes that they cited. These assessments were analyzed for any improvement in these skills, as well as fluency, clarity, and organization.

The final assessment for the unit also required the students to be able to use paraphrasing and summarization skills, as well as the understandings that they had taken from the reading and discussion of the play, to successfully complete the project. For this assessment, the students worked in small groups to rewrite a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in vernacular language from a specific time period; the time periods that the students could choose from were: The Wild West, the Roaring '20s, 1950s Suburbia, or the 1960s Counterculture. Students had to research their chosen time period both during class time using classroom computers and independently outside of school. In order to translate the scene that they had selected to their chosen vernacular, the students first had to annotate the text from the scene using paraphrasing of the lines and summarization of

the events and actions. Students were required to submit this annotated text, along with their final written script for their rewritten scene. The final assessment was culminated in a performance of the rewritten scene, using proper dialect and period-specific props and costumes. I analyzed these components for the students' use of paraphrasing and summarization skills, as well as their overall understanding of the scene's themes, events, and actions based on their ability to successfully translate the scene's meaning into the rewritten text.

Assumption and Limitations

There were a few limitations to my study. The major limitation was time. I had a limited amount of time to introduce, practice, and reinforce the paraphrasing and summarizations strategies, I cannot be completely sure that the students had an ample amount of time to really learn and transfer these skills. I could have practiced the strategy more, but I did not want to seem like I was bombarding the students with a new task to complete in addition to their daily work requirements. Another significant limitation to this study was that the skills were only rehearsed using one text, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In order to evaluate whether the students were able to transfer the paraphrasing and summary skills to make meaning from other texts, I would have had to incorporate the skills into their study of other texts. I was not in the classroom to see if they could transfer the skills to the next text that they were going to study. It is suggested that other texts be used to evaluate for true mastery of paraphrasing and summarization skills. This study was also limited to one class. To increase the

validity of this study I could have implemented the same techniques and collected the same data from multiple classes.

Student absences somewhat limited the study. On most days there was at least one student absent. My research was conducted during cold and flu season, so many students were absent for days at a time. Because of this, the students' ability to practice the paraphrasing and summarization skills by using the exit slips in class was often impacted by their not being present on the days when the technique was used. My inexperience as a novice teacher also affected this study. I had multiple responsibilities as a student teacher and action researcher. As I conducted my research, I was still learning new teaching strategies and effective classroom management to make myself a more skilled teacher. My inexperience may have impacted the students' response to my lesson facilitation and directives, which may have affected how the students performed on the various assessments incorporated into the unit of study.

My students' attitudes toward different types of assignments limited this study. Students as individual learners usually have preferences for certain types of work over another (Tomlinson, 2001). For example, some students are good test takers, but have difficulty with more abstract work such as reflective writing assignments. These preferences definitely had an impact on their performance on certain tasks. To best compensate for this, I made sure to collect various types of student work artifacts that addressed the same skills and understandings that I chose to analyze during my study. Another limitation was any external, uncontrollable factors that may have influenced a particular student's performance on any given day. These uncontrollable factors may

include illness, stress, or any other personal concerns that could impede performance.

For example, I had one student who vomited while taking the midterm exam; he was sent home sick and had to finish the remainder of his exam on another day. Perhaps his illness effected how he performed on the first part of the exam that he did not have the opportunity to retake.

Potential for Bias

The strongest bias in this study was my attitude toward my students' success. Personally, I am an ambitious learner and approach all new tasks with optimism and determination. One of the most important lessons that I have learned as a student teacher is that not all students approach learning in this manner. I always want my students to succeed; I am the type of person that can always see the silver lining in any student's work. To compensate for this bias I made a conscious effort to separate my personal feelings and beliefs as best possible when I analyzed the student's work and performance. Another bias I had was my attitude toward writing. As an English teacher and good writer, I value good writing skills very highly. As a result, I may tend to over emphasize writing in both my teaching and grading. When analyzing the students' work, I took into account students' overall understanding of the material, as well as their writing skills, to compensate for this bias. I also believed that all Honors students were serious, studious, and collaborative, valuing their academic performance above their personal interests and activities. Through my observations of the students' work ethics and academic attitudes, I realized that this was not necessarily true. I realized that the students' personal lives and interests often affected their academic performance.

Definitions

There are several key terms that are continually mentioned in my study that need to be defined to more fully understand the context of the study. They are as follows:

Action Research. Mills (2007) defines action research as:

...any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved. (p. 5)

Action research is specifically relevant to the environment that the researcher chooses to study, but may also benefit other educators that seek to study the same issues in their environment.

Exit Slip. According to Moreillon & Fontichiaro (2008), an exit slip is an index card or slip of paper that is used to have the students record their thoughts on a particular subject or to gauge their understanding of a day's lesson. This strategy is typically used during the last five to ten minutes of class time, with the exit slip being the student's ticket out of class.

Paraphrasing. According to Schumaker, Denton, and Deshler (1984), paraphrasing is a reading comprehension learning strategy that helps students learn by reading a paragraph

or passage, thinking about the main points and details, and then putting the main points and detail in their own words.

Summarizing. Kane (2007) defines a summarization as stating the main points of a text without including other non-essential information or commentary.

Annotation. Annotation, as operationalized by me in this study, is any notes or indications written in a text by a reader about key themes, ideas, or information. These notes may be written in the margin or may simply be underlined or highlighted passages.

Fluency. Fluency, as operationalized by me in this study, means to have the ability to easily read and understand texts written in English; it also is the ability to create logically written texts in English based on material that has been read, viewed, or heard.

Clarity. As operationalized by me in this study, clarity is a writer's ability to get his or her intended point across to the audience without confusion or misunderstanding.

Organization of Ideas. Organization of ideas, as operationalized by me in this study, is a writer's ability to choose the most effective way to present information, based on the intended purpose and audience.

Understanding. According to Wiggins & McTighe (2006), an understanding is a particular insight gained from our ability to "make connections and bind together our knowledge into something that makes sense of things" (p. 7). It is also the ability to apply knowledge and skills effectively in realistic tasks and settings.

Engagement. Engagement, as operationalized by me in this study, is a student's desire to participate in classroom activities, including lessons, class work, and homework. A

student is engaged when he or she is a willing, active, and contributing member of the classroom learning community.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

There are several essential elements in my study that called for an examination of expertly written literature on the subject. I used several assessments to gauge the development of my student's skills and understandings, so I chose to look at literature that described the importance of having multiple forms of assessment. I used exit slips specifically to implement new skills and assess the students' performance, so I examined literature on exit slips. It was important to examine literature on the implementation and development of paraphrasing and summarization skills in the classroom because they were the skills that were the foundation of my study. I also looked at literature on teacher feedback because I used feedback to help shape the development of the students' paraphrasing and summarization skills in the early stages of the study. Understanding the cognitive abilities and processes of students aged 13 to 15 also merited some research so that I could better understand what they may or may not be able to do, from a developmental standpoint.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment is the measurement by which an educator determines whether a skill, fact, or understanding has been learned by a student. According to Woolfolk (2006), "Assessment can be any one of many procedures used to gather information about student performance. Assessments can be formal, such as unit tests, or informal, such as

observing who emerges as a leader in group work” (p. 522). Any piece of formal work, interaction or classroom activity can be used as a form of assessment by the teacher. Wiggins and McTighe (2006) give further clarification to the term “assessment”, describing it as an all-encompassing term for the “deliberate use of many methods of gathering evidence of meeting desired results, whether those results are state content standards or local curricular objectives” (p. 6). Assessment is how educators determine the extent to which the desired outcomes have been achieved or are on the way to becoming achieved (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Wiggins and McTighe (2006) further clarify the difference between assessment and evaluation, stating that assessment is a more learning-focused term than evaluation. “Assessment is the giving and using of feedback against standards to enable improvement and the meeting of goals. Evaluation, in contrast, is more summative and credential-related” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006, p. 6). The focus of the assessment then should be directly related to the skill or understanding that is to be achieved by the student. It is imperative that teachers use state content standards and local curriculums to precisely craft their assessments to ensure accurate guides by which they can see if learning has taken place or if there are still areas that need improvement.

An important aspect that a teacher must consider when designing assessments is the diversity of the learners in the classroom. All students, regardless of whether they are grouped homogeneously by ability level, have unique needs and a variety of strengths that they bring to the classroom. Tomlinson (2005) focuses on the importance of using a wide variety of assessment strategies to accommodate all types of learners. “Fruitful

assessment often poses the question, ‘What is an array of ways that I can offer students to demonstrate their understanding and skills?’ In that way assessment becomes a part of teaching for success and a way to extend rather than merely measure learning” (p. 20). Tomlinson (2005) also acknowledges that teachers should make sure their assessments, regardless of their form, focus on the key concepts and principles that give meaning to the topic, chapter, or lesson. “Key concepts act as springboards to help all learners make connections between the topic under consideration and expanded studies. And these learners are more likely to find their school experiences more memorable, useful, and engaging” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 19). Genishi (1992) also stresses the need for a “multifaceted approach to assessment” (p. 98). She concludes that teachers have a much better chance at successfully determining how individual students are learning the knowledge and skills that educators judge as valuable for them if they take certain things into consideration. These specific things are: (1) students’ interests and prior skills and understandings that they bring with them into the classroom, (2) the students’ personal social and educational goals, and (3) the social dynamics and relationships among the students as a classroom community (Genishi, 1992). Both Tomlinson (2005) and Genishi (1992) focus on the need for a greater understanding of the students in the process of developing assessments. While it is imperative to use state standards and local curriculum to guide the development of assessments that get at the key principles and understandings of our subject matter, it is equally important that teachers thoroughly understand and know their students in order to craft assessments that both check for

understanding and are still personally relevant to their students. Assessments will only be successful if the students can see the purpose in the task.

Exit Slips

The exit slip strategy involves using index cards or slips of paper to get the class' thoughts on a particular subject or to gauge student understanding of the day's lesson. This strategy is typically used during the last five to ten minutes of class time, with the exit slip being the student's ticket out of class (Moreillon & Fontichiaro, 2008). Exit slips can be used for various purposes. Moreillon and Fontichiaro (2008) consider exit slips a powerful formative assessment that "helps measure students' progress against the standards and gauge student progress in dispositions, as well as in their academic skills" (p. 65). The exit slip provides first hand information about what students have synthesized from the lesson and whether the desired outcome was achieved in respect to learning goals. Exit slips can also be used to help plan future lessons. According to Wormeli (2001), exit slips can diagnose areas of need and provide feedback that can help guide where subsequent lessons should go. Because exit slip questions target the key understandings that students should be taking away from the lesson, it is easier for the teacher to see the natural progression that the unit of study should take (Wormeli, 2001).

In addition to being a valuable tool to assess student understanding, exit slips can also give closure to a lesson. The exit slip allows the students to reflect on what has been discussed during class time and leave the class with a sense of fulfillment in the value of seeing what has been learned (Gere, 1985). Gere (1985) suggests keeping exit slips anonymous for any questions that are of an opinionated or sensitive nature, or for

material that may have been difficult for the students to grasp. Keeping the exit slip anonymous reduces student anxiety in respect to whether their response is perceived as relevant or correct. Another powerful use for exit slips is to promote writing fluency. Marchisan and Alber (2001) suggest having a controlled time each day when students are asked to write. This makes writing seem less tedious for reluctant writers. By requiring repeated writings and timing, fluency is thus increased. It may also be helpful to keep exit slips filed in a writing folder so students can see their improvement over time, which can serve as motivation (Marchisan & Alber, 2001). To summarize, exit slips provide a manageable way to develop writing skills and assess student understandings. They can help aid in the planning of future lessons and provide necessary closure that many daily lessons often lack. Their value lies not only in their function as an assessment tool, but also in the development of specific skills, such as summarizing.

The Art of Summarizing

Kane (2007) defines a summary as “a statement of the main points of a reading without commentary by the students” (p. 233). It is an excellent way for students to separate main ideas and important details from less crucial information and to show that they understand a text. The act of condensing a longer piece of text into a shorter one gets students to think actively about and synthesize main ideas (Kane, 2007).

Summarizing can benefit both reading and writing skills. “The act of writing a summary makes reading material more memorable and preserves important thoughts and ideas for later use” (Graham & Harris, 2006, p. 75). Summarizing is not only a way to identify the main ideas in written text, but it can also be used to highlight the key points in an oral

presentation or lecture. Gipe (2006) contends that teaching students good summary skills and asking them to summarize key points in a lecture will enable them to become better active listeners both inside and outside the classroom.

Graham and Harris (2006) highlight several benefits of using summary techniques. Learning to write good summaries enables students to write more precisely; they learn how to eliminate extraneous details that may clutter their writing. Having relevant points condensed into small, manageable pieces also makes summarizing a useful study strategy. Graham and Harris (2006) also recommend teaching summary writing strategies to students with learning disabilities. Because students with learning disabilities typically do not know or employ the processes and resources needed to write a good summary, they often get weighed down by irrelevant details in texts and lectures. This often frustrates and overwhelms them, causing them to give up. Teaching them summary writing strategies helps them “organize their writing behavior so they are more reflective, plan more thoughtfully, and expend more effort” (Graham & Harris, 2006, p. 76). Teaching all students good summarizing techniques allows them to clarify their thoughts and identify main points, which in turn can allow them to both speak and write more precisely.

Paraphrasing Strategy

Paraphrasing is a specific strategy that can be employed to summarize text. According to Schumaker, Denton, and Deshler (1984), paraphrasing is a reading comprehension learning strategy that helps students learn by reading a paragraph or passage, thinking about the main points and details, and then putting the main points and

detail in their own words. Learning to paraphrase can have many benefits for students.

Fisk and Hurst (2003) conclude the following benefits:

One of the reasons paraphrasing for comprehension works so well is because it integrates all modes of communication – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – which leads to a deeper understanding of the text. The tie between reading and writing has long been established as an effective means of strengthening comprehension. (p. 182)

For optimal student success with the paraphrasing strategy, Fisk and Hurst (2003) suggest that the teacher clearly discuss the meaning of the word “paraphrase,” explaining that it is not a word-for-word translation of text, but rather a rewriting that concentrates on expressing the main ideas and supporting evidence in the student’s own words (p. 183). Because the students translate the text into their own words, it begins to have more relevance and meaning to them; they connect with the text on personal level.

Katims and Harris (1997) state that paraphrasing strategy can be particularly helpful in the inclusion classroom. When students with learning disabilities are equipped with strategies that help them approach texts, they learn to “successfully apply skills and use knowledge to meet the demands of various in-school and out-of-school settings” (p. 118). The goal of the instruction is not simply to learn a strategy, but to help students better acquire, store, and express information both inside and outside the classroom. In a study conducted by Katims and Harris (1997), some students in multilevel middle school reading classes were given instruction using the paraphrasing strategy while some were not. The purpose of the study was to measure any increase in reading comprehension

skills. The results showed that the group that was taught the paraphrasing strategy improved by 17% over their initial pre-study testing. Of that group, the students with learning disabilities in particular improved by 22%. Students who were not taught the paraphrasing strategy only showed a 3.5% improvement in their comprehension skills. Almeida (2008) concludes that learning paraphrasing skills, in addition to other reading comprehension strategies, equips students with a repertoire of methods for accessing and comprehending new and unfamiliar texts (p. 32). He also sites results from various studies on the use of paraphrasing:

Murata & Isahara (2001) argue that paraphrasing can be beneficial to learning. In a study conducted by the University of Kansas Center for Research and Learning, researchers found that middle school classrooms, averaging 25 students per classroom, increased their scores between the pre- and post- reading comprehension test by 19%. [...] In another study conducted by Huang and Fiedler (1996), paraphrasing significantly enhanced the production of text in a linguistic experiment. When O'Reilly, Sinclair, and McNamara (2004) tested access comprehension on several short-text passages, the researchers found that paraphrasing has the highest mean in contrast with other learning strategies, e.g., self-explanation and note taking. (p.32-3)

While many studies do conclude that paraphrasing is a useful skill for students when it comes to reading comprehension, Almeida (2008) does acknowledge that an experimental design study by Betancourt (2006) found no significant differences in information recall when students were taught the paraphrasing strategy. Whether or not

paraphrasing benefits all types of learners, it does provide them with another useful method of comprehending and giving meaning to unfamiliar text. It gives them the opportunity to put what they have learned or understood into their own words, allowing them to better communicate their understandings.

Teacher Feedback

Feedback refers to the information that one provides to a learner to help guide their actions. Vacca (1981) asserts that feedback is a very well-established, valuable concept in learning. “Feedback helps individuals to modify, refine, or redirect behavior so that they will learn” (p. 91). According to Vacca (1981), feedback helps shape and organize the recipient’s understandings of what they read. In a study conducted with 14 college freshman composition students, Treglia (2008) found that feedback was very well-received by the students, stating, “Students indicated that they equally understand and revise following mitigated and directive comments. However, they found most helpful the written commentary that provided some acknowledgment of their writing, offered specific suggestions, and gave them choices” (p. 105).

In Treglia’s (2008) findings, she noted that all fourteen students in her study reported that they read every comment their teachers wrote and relied primarily on that commentary to revise their work. Elbow (1998) commented on his findings about using feedback to shape students’ writing processes specifically. He stated that he gave primarily positive feedback in the beginning stages of the writing process so as not to stifle his students’ motivation to write. Elbow (1998) relates, “Criticism would have worked against my goals for this course: to get students to write a great deal and to have

confidence in their ability to produce writing at will..." (p. 283). According to Elbow (1998), feedback must be chosen carefully and used with specific intent based on the skills or understandings that are sought to be developed.

Vitto (2003) states that effective teachers use supportive and corrective feedback in their classrooms to comment on both academic and behavioral issues. Vitto (2003) contends that immediacy is a crucial component of feedback:

One critical aspect of feedback is time or immediacy. Generally speaking, the longer one has to wait for feedback after performing a task, the less effective the feedback is. Immediacy of feedback is especially important when students are practicing a new skill, so teachers can ensure that the students are not practicing the wrong process or making frequent errors. (p. 107)

Vitto (2003) also recognizes feedback as an excellent means of enhancing student motivation on classroom tasks and assignments.

The Cognitive Processes of Adolescents

In 1972, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget devised a theory of cognitive development that describes the stages that children's thinking passes through as they grow up. He identified four distinct stages. These stages are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. These stages categorize in ways in which children and adolescents at various age groups would use different types of schema to organize and interpret new information. Beginning around age 11 and progressing through between 15 and 20 years of age, adolescents develop into the formal operational stage (Arnett, 2007). Prior to this time, children and preadolescents mostly

think in concrete ways; they have difficulty thinking hypothetically. Arnett (2007) describes the formal operational stage as adolescents having the ability to reason about complex tasks and problems involving multiple variables. They have “developed the ability to think scientifically and apply the rigor of the scientific method to cognitive tasks” (p. 68). There are also a number of other aspects of formal operations that focus less on scientific thinking and more on logical or applied reasoning. One aspect is abstract thinking, which involves thinking in terms of ideas, symbols, and concepts (Arnett, 2007). Another aspect is complex thinking, which is thinking that takes into account multiple connections and interpretations (Arnett, 2007). Metacognition is also an aspect of formal operations which deals with the one’s ability to monitor and reason about his or her thought process (Arnett, 2007).

While most psychologists agree that there is a level of thinking more sophisticated than concrete operations, there is a question of how universal formal operational thinking actually is, even among adults (Woolfolk, 2006). Berk (2005) concludes that formal operational thought processes may vary from culture to culture:

They may be the product of practice in solving hypothetical problems and using formal scientific reasoning – abilities that are valued and taught in literate cultures, particularly in college. Even so, about 50% of undergraduate students fail Piaget’s formal operational tasks. (p. 77)

Because of the cultural and maturity differences among adolescents, students will have an array of strengths and weaknesses in formal operational thought in different subject areas. Woolfolk (2006) states, “So expect many students in your middle-school or high-school

classes to have trouble thinking hypothetically, especially when they are learning something new” (p. 36).

According to the cited relevant literature, teachers should always be looking for several ways to thoughtfully and accurately assess student knowledge and understandings. Tests, formal papers, and projects should not be the only means that teachers judge student understanding of subject matter. Formative assessments, such as exit slips, are simple and effective ways to assess students’ understanding of a lesson. They ensure that students have taken away the key points from the lesson or from a text. Using exit slips to develop summarizing and paraphrasing skills can be extremely helpful for many reasons. Because exit slips are used in a relatively short span of class time, they do not tend overwhelm students. Students understand that their exit slip is not judged on whether it is right or wrong; instead, it is just for them to demonstrate what they have taken away from the lesson in their own words. The exit slip can be used to address written, viewed, or oral information that has been presented. The feedback that the teacher gets from the exit slips will help them see if the proper message has been received or if perhaps it needs to be further explored. The key to any good writing strategy is making sure that the students fully understand what they are expected to do. Properly explaining summarization and paraphrasing techniques is imperative to having students be able to execute their skills to the best of their ability. Having good summarizing skills allows students to be both better writers and clearer thinkers. During the development of these, and any other skills, teachers should be cognizant that all students are on different learning levels. Though the students may be the same age and placed in the same level

class, they all are at a different place in their cognitive development. Because of this, some students may need more practice, scaffolding, and feedback, while other may need little to hone their skills successfully.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Brief Overview of the Action Research Process

The goal of action research is help to improve the lives of students and teachers, as well as improve the effectiveness of functions inside the school and classrooms. Mills (2007) explains that the process of conducting an action research study has four steps: identifying an area of focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and devolving an action plan based on the emergent findings. Once an area of focus is identified, data should be collected from multiple sources to support findings; this process is called triangulation. Data is analyzed and interpreted using specific techniques that are relevant to the context of study. The teacher researcher then draws conclusions about the findings of action research and creates an action plan. Action research is an ongoing process with an action plan often leading to identifying a new area of focus.

My action research study focused on the integration of a specific technique, exit slips, to help students focus on the development of paraphrasing and summarization skills. Additional activities and assessments were also integrated into the study in order to support skill development, as well as to evaluate the students overall understanding of the text that they were studying.

Context of the Study

School and Community. Prosperous Point Regional High School (PPRHS) is a four-year public high school located in southern New Jersey. PPRHS serves three communities that have a total population of about 26,500 residents. The community is primarily residential with some small, mainly professional business, such as medical offices, lawyers' offices, and specialty retail shops. In 2004, the community was ranked among the "Top 25 Communities to Call Home" by New Jersey Monthly Magazine. The community is located about eight miles from a small city, Atlantic City, which is dominated by the casino gaming and tourism industry. It is located about 60 miles from Philadelphia, a large metropolitan area; it is located about 125 miles from New York City, another large metropolitan area.

Prosperous Point has three sending districts: Merrywood, Deerfield, and Sea Point. Merrywood has two K-8 elementary schools, Deerfield has two K-8 elementary schools, and Sea Point has three K-8 elementary schools. According to the State of New Jersey Department of Education School Report Card (2006-2007), all of the sending districts' elementary schools performed above the state averages for proficiency in all academic areas on the NJASK and GEPA tests. The 2006-2007 New Jersey School Report Card for PPRHS shows that the high school students also performed above state average proficiency levels in all academic areas on the HSPA. Ninety-three percent of students scored in the "proficient" or "advanced proficient" ranges in Language Arts Literacy (state avg. = 85.4%), 84.6% scored in the "proficient" or "advanced proficient" ranges in Mathematics (state avg. = 73.4%), and 87.4% scored in the "proficient" or

“advanced proficient” ranges in Science (state avg. = 72.7%). In school year 2006-2007, PPRHS’s graduation rate was 95.3%, above the state average of 89.3%. The school has received recognition for its above average performance. In 1997-98, PPRHS was selected as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the United States Department of Education. In New Jersey Magazine’s September 2004 issue, PPRHS was ranked in the top 75 high schools in New Jersey, the highest ranking high school in the immediate area.

According to the most recent data provided by the school (2009), PPRHS services 1,635 students. The school is rather heterogeneous in socioeconomic terms; most students come from middle or upper-middle class households. According to data from the United States Census Bureau (2000), the average median family income of the three sending districts is about \$62,000. This data about socioeconomic status is reflected in the number of PPRHS students that qualify for free or reduced lunch: 167 students receive free lunch, and 61 students receive reduced lunch. This means that only about 14% of the total school population is classified as coming from a low income household, as is necessary to qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. There is also little diversity amongst the student body: 91.5% of students are Caucasian, 2.7% are Black or African-American, 4.4% are Hispanic or Latino, and 1.4% are Asian. Ninety-four percent of students are native English speakers, and only 0.5% of the students are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

The length of a normal school day at PPRHS is seven hours and nine minutes, which is longer than the New Jersey state average school day of six hours and 51 minutes. Each class period is 42 minutes long. The school has 39 clubs and 26 athletic

activities. The school also houses the community's aquatic center, which offers fee-based swimming and CPR instruction to all members of the community. In addition to the many extra-curricular programs, PPRHS has also developed and implemented a writing lab program that all students must participate in; it is part of the school's English curriculum. The students work in the writing lab for six consecutive weeks during the school year with their English class. During this time, students complete an assignment that is designed to develop their abilities to utilize technology to do research, word processing, and PowerPoint presentations. The writing lab program is also designed to help students become better at formal writing. All writing lab projects incorporate the use of MLA format, references, and citations. According to the school's New Jersey School Report Card district narrative, PPRHS is "committed to continual improvement in curricular and co-curricular programs and to a school environment which enhances active student-centered learning..." (p. 1).

Classroom. The classroom that I chose to conduct my action research study was one of my freshman Honors English I class at Prosperous Point Regional High School. The focus of the curriculum in this class was world literature. The class period was 42 minutes long, and it took place between 8:28 and 9:10 a.m. In this class there were 20 students; there were ten males and ten females. 16 of the students were Caucasian, 2 were African-American, and 2 were Latino. The Latino students, one male and one female, spoke both Spanish and English. Both reported that they didn't remember which language they learned first; they just remember knowing how to speak both of them as children. I chose this class as my focus class because of the equal ratio of males to

females, and because it most closely reflects the diversity breakdown of the overall student population of the school. Eighteen out of 20 students were working at appropriate grade level performance levels. Although this was an Honors class, the students had very different levels of motivation.

Participants. I chose to ask all students in the class to be participants in the study, and all 20 students consented and returned the provided consent form (Appendix A) signed by a parent or guardian. Because the class was an Honors level class, I believed that all of the students were all capable of completing the tasks that I had integrated into the study. Through my observations I noticed that some students were good self-starters when it came to completing tasks, and some needed constant monitoring and redirection to stay on task. All of the students in this class responded well to my external motivation to complete tasks. I also noticed that the frequency and quality with which they completed work varied greatly. Most students regularly completed independent work, such as homework assignments, but some were very inconsistent in their work habits. Through my observation of the students' excuses, I attributed this inconsistency to their involvement in clubs, sports, or activities. I heard such excuses as, "I was too tired from softball practice," and, "I got in late from my track meet," as reasons why homework was not complete. As freshmen, I believe they are still trying to find the balance between extracurricular activity involvement, school responsibilities, and social time. The students in this class have a wide variety of interests and talents. All students were involved in at least one club, sport, or activity; some of these activities were connected with the school and some were not. For example, I had one student that played the

trombone in the school marching band, another student who participated in competitive equestrian events, and another who wrote poetry for the school literary magazine.

There were two students that have been performing at a very low level in this class: Giovanni and Mary Kate. Since this was an Honors class, all students had to achieve certain levels of proficiency on their GEPAs and also had to be recommended by their 8th grade teachers in order to be placed in this class. Further investigation yielded possible causations of their low levels of performance. Giovanni's behavior in class was very erratic; some days he participated actively in class and was thoroughly engaged for the entire class period, while other days he was completely non-responsive and often had difficulty staying alert and keeping his eyes open. On his bad days I often had to ask him repeatedly to pick his head up off of the desk and sometimes asked him if he needed to leave to go speak with his guidance counselor. After speaking to my cooperating teacher and Giovanni's guidance counselor, I learned that he had become severely depressed over the course of the school year and had even had an emotional episode in one of his other classes in November during which he cried, screamed, and threw his belongings about the room. His guidance counselor, Mrs. Weston, stated that, "Giovanni is having issues at home and is being helped by the school's counselors, child study team, and professionals outside of school." His mother stated at a parent conference that she had sought professional help for Giovanni's depression and possible bi-polar disorder.

Mary Kate had similar home-related problems that were impeding her ability to complete the required work for her classes. Her father, who was the sole supporter for her family, passed away within the past year. Her mother stated in a phone conversation

that she was, "having a very hard time coping with the loss and also suffers from health issues that make it difficult for her to take care of Mary Kate properly." According to her mother, Mary Kate's reaction to the situation has been one of resentment toward her mother and anger. Mary Kate's guidance counselor told me that she learned from both conversations with Mary Kate and her mother that Mary Kate has been engaging in high-risk activities; she would not elaborate on the specifics of these activities. Through what I observed during my time in the classroom, school was not a priority for Mary Kate at this time. She frequently came to class unprepared, did not complete assignments, and failed in-class quizzes and tests.

Method

Multiple sources of data were collected for the study. The data was sorted and analyzed. As the data was analyzed, it was coded. During the sorting process, I created a file for each of the 20 students in the class and organized their work chronologically in their personal file. I noted on each student's file their individual percentages of proficiency on the midterm questions that were isolated for the context of this study and coded them as proficient if they had a score of 68% or greater and not proficient if they had a score below 68%. The percentages used to rate proficiency were based on Prosperous Point Regional High School's grading system.

Coding, as outlined and prescribed by Mills (2007), is the process of examining data to try to find the patterns, meanings, and connections in it. I coded the data in the following manner. I coded the students' written essay and compositions for proficiency of paraphrasing and summarization skills. I also coded the written work for overall

fluency, clarity, and organization of ideas. The students' questionnaires were coded for similarities and patterns in the answers given regarding specific challenges with reading new texts, teacher feedback, and methods of interpreting new texts. I transferred all of the chunks of coded data onto a 5" x 7" note card for each individual student to make the information more manageable for the purpose of analysis and interpretation.

Data Sources

I collected five different data sources between February 18 and May 8, 2009: statistical results from the midterm exam, a survey, a questionnaire, various student work artifacts, and informal field notes from observations. The statistical data from the students' midterm exams that I collected showed their proficiency on blocks of questions that addressed designated core curriculum standards. This data helped me develop my research question and also provided the baseline information for my study. It revealed where the students had areas of need and allowed me to choose strategies to try to best help remediate those areas. The statistical results were already analyzed prior to my study, and the results were reported both as a whole group and individually. Surveys produced another source of data in this action research study. The survey (Appendix B) was the instrument that I used to get to know my students. The survey asked demographic questions, such as the student's age, sex, whom he or she lived with, and his or her ethnicity. The survey also asked for more specific information, such as the activities that he or she was involved in, interests and hobbies, college and career plans, and any other interesting information about his or herself that he or she cared to share with me. I used the data from this survey to help give me a fully developed context for

my study. I used a questionnaire (Appendix C) to find out the students' attitudes about approaching and understanding new and unfamiliar texts. The questionnaire asked three specific questions: What do you find most challenging about reading new or unfamiliar texts, what do you think is the best way to make understanding new or unfamiliar texts easier, and do you think teacher feedback is an important part of helping you understand new texts or concepts?

I collected various student work artifacts during this study. I collected the exit slips (Appendix E) that the students used to practice their paraphrasing and summarization skills. The exit slips that I collected in the beginning stages of the implementation of the research strategies had my feedback to the students written on them (Appendix D) so that they could later be analyzed for the perceived effect of the feedback on the shaping of their skill development. I collected various writing samples that the students produced during the course of their freshman year. These writing samples were essays and compositions. These helped me see how their writing skills had developed prior to the implementation of my research strategies. I also collected written assessments that I incorporated into the *Romeo and Juliet* unit that specifically called for the use of paraphrasing and summarization to successfully complete the assignment.

Another data source that I collected was students' final assessments for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit. This assessment required students to work in small groups to rewrite a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in vernacular language from a specifically chosen and researched time period. In order to translate the scene that they had selected to their chosen vernacular, the students first had to annotate the text from the scene using

paraphrasing of the lines and summarization of the events and actions. I analyzed the annotated text (Appendix E) for the students' use of paraphrasing and summarization skills. I analyzed their rewritten scenes for overall understanding of the scene's themes, events, and actions based on their ability to successfully translate the scene's meaning into the rewritten text. I took informal field notes to document my perception of the students' levels of engagement while they worked on their *Romeo and Juliet* final assessment project. I documented their engagement levels on a rubric (Appendix F) that rated them on a scale from zero to five, five being fully engaged participation. I used the data from these notes to make judgments about their understanding and enjoyment of the text based on their level of engagement and performance on the project.

CHAPTER IV

Findings, Analysis, and Interpretation

Findings

The data that I collected from the student demographic surveys confirmed what I had already suspected about my students: they each had a unique combination of background information, interests, and career aspirations. This data supported the trustworthiness of the study for a sampling of Honors level freshman English students. The data from the student demographic study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Student Information

“Name”	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Lives With (parent/ guardian)	Languages Spoken	College?/ Career Plans	Activities, Interests, Hobbies
Belinda	F	15	African American	mom	English	Yes/writer or doctor	yearbook club, drawing, reading, writing
Robert	M	14	W	mom, step- father	English	Yes/video game designer	literary magazine club, drawing, video games, paleontology, astronomy
Giovanni	M	15	W	mom, step- father	English	Yes/computer programmer	plays trombone in school marching band and jazz band, video games
Melissa	F	14	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/veterinary medicine	soccer, track, competitive equestrian events, horseback riding
Melanie	F	14	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/English teacher	school choir, writing, reading

Mary Kate	M	15	W	mom	English	Yes/undecided	soccer, softball
Ingrid	F	15	Latino (Colombian)	mom, dad	English/ Spanish	Yes/undecided	crew, surfing, SCUBA diving, skateboarding
Chase	M	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/electrical engineering	soccer, basketball, football, track, plays drums, drawing
Brendan	M	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/business	lacrosse, street hockey, Key club, surfing, BMX
Kevin	M	15	African American	mom	English	Yes/web or graphic design	crew, vice president of freshman class, bowling
Shelly	F	14	W	mom	English	Yes/chef or teacher	yearbook club, plays flute in band, reading, cooking/baking
Will	M	15	Latino (Colombian)	mom, dad	English/ Spanish	Yes/doctor	soccer, basketball, listening to Spanish music
Alex	M	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/business	crew, swimming, history
Jane	F	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/physical therapist	swim team, cross country running, track, student council, surfing, photography, writing poetry
Doug	M	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/accounting	tennis, basketball, football, Key club
Kyle	M	14	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/ professional baseball player	baseball, basketball, tennis, playing video games

Christian	M	14	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/acting or film making	football, track, weightlifting, writing
Tara	F	14	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/professional dance	crew, Interact club, dance
Sara	F	15	W	mom, dad	English	Yes/business	cheerleading, playing piano, playing guitar, singing, ceramics
Elizabeth	F	15	W	dad, step-mother	English	Yes/gym teacher	soccer, Girl Scouts, track, art, writing

The statistical data from the midterm exam revealed that six out of 20 students, three males and three females, scored in the proficient range on the questions that addressed reading fluency and comprehension. The highest level of proficiency of those six students was 85%, which was achieved by both Giovanni and Belinda. Three out of 20 students scored in the proficient range on the questions that addressed writing as a product. All three of the students, two males and a female, achieved 100% proficiency. Giovanni was the only student who scored in the proficient range for both blocks of questions. Based on the statistical data, I could not conclude that there was any tendency for one gender to be more or less proficient in reading fluency or writing as a product; the results showed an equal distribution. The statistical data from the midterm exam is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Midterm Statistics

“Name”	Standard 3.1.12.D (# of questions)	# of questions correct	% of questions correct	Standard 3.2.12.B (# of questions)	# of questions correct	% of questions correct
Belinda	13	11	85%	3	2	67%
Robert	13	6	46%	3	2	67%
Giovanni	13	11	85%	3	3	100%
Melissa	13	9	69%	3	1	33%
Melanie	13	8	62%	3	3	100%
Mary Kate	13	6	46%	3	1	33%
Ingrid	13	7	54%	3	2	67%
Chase	13	8	62%	3	1	33%
Brendan	13	3	23%	3	0	0%
Kevin	13	7	54%	3	2	67%
Shelly	13	8	62%	3	2	67%

Will	13	8	62%	3	1	33%
Alex	13	9	69%	3	1	33%
Jane	13	10	77%	3	2	67%
Doug	13	5	38%	3	2	67%
Kyle	13	8	62%	3	1	33%
Christian	13	10	77%	3	3	100%
Tara	13	5	38%	3	1	33%
Sara	13	7	54%	3	2	67%
Elizabeth	13	8	62%	3	1	33%

From the analysis of the students' writing samples produced prior to the implementation of the exit slip strategy, I found that two out of 20 students, Giovanni and Melanie, were able to paraphrase correctly and coherently. Eight out of the 20 students, five females and three males, had a good grasp of proper summarization skills. Many of the students struggled with fluency in their writing. Based on the writing samples, only seven out of the 20 students could fluently articulate information that they had read or viewed into a logically written product. The work of the other 13 students had numerous grammatical and usage errors and lacked an overall cohesion among the ideas and points

that they were trying to make. Students were slightly better at organizing their ideas in their writing. Ten out of 20 students were able to group ideas in a coherently organized manner, keeping like ideas together and not jumping back and forth between several different ideas. Clarity was an issue for all of the students in the class. The writing samples of 13 of the 20 students left me with the feeling of some sort of confusion after I read them. Even students who were able to write fluently and organize their ideas, such as Giovanni, struggled with clarity. The proficient writers tried to use vocabulary that was perhaps above their level because they were not able to use it in the correct context. I asked one student, Melanie, who I deemed to be one of the stronger writers in the class, about some of her word choices in a particular essay that she wrote. She told me that she had used the thesaurus option in Microsoft Word to replace some commonly used words with a synonymous word suggested by the program. She stated, "I didn't really know what the word meant, but it sounded smarter than the word I was going to use."

After introducing the exit slip strategy for the first time, I analyzed the students' performance to paraphrase and summarize the selected text. Only six out of 20 students were able to grasp the concepts based on my explanation of the processes and without any feedback. Over time, I noticed that their skills became more refined both on the exit slips and the essay writing assignment that incorporated the skills. Through my informal observations of the class while they completed their exit slips, I also noticed that as they became more familiar with the exit slip routine they seemed more comfortable attempting to paraphrase and summarize the textual information. When I looked at the data that

focused on skill development based on the student's gender, I did not see any significant patterns that suggested that one gender grasped the skills more quickly than the other.

There was one student, Mary Kate, who failed to proficiently grasp both the paraphrasing and summarization skills. No matter how much rehearsal she did or how much feedback that I gave to try to point her in the right direction, she still was unable to consistently perform either skill. For example, on the third exit slip that I collected that called for the paraphrasing of eight lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, Mary Kate still did not write the text in Standard English, as if the speaker were saying them. When I returned the exit slip to her, in my feedback I took the time to paraphrase the lines for her; I modeled a correct example of how to paraphrase. When we used the exit slip strategy for the fourth time to paraphrase text, she still was not paraphrasing correctly, even after being given an example. This situation perplexed me greatly, so I investigated further to find out a possible reason for her unresponsive behavior. It was at this time when I found out, through talking to my cooperating teacher and Mary Kate's guidance counselor, about her personal problems which I noted earlier in the context section of this report. I deduced that it was her personal issues that were impeding her ability to focus on learning new skills or understandings.

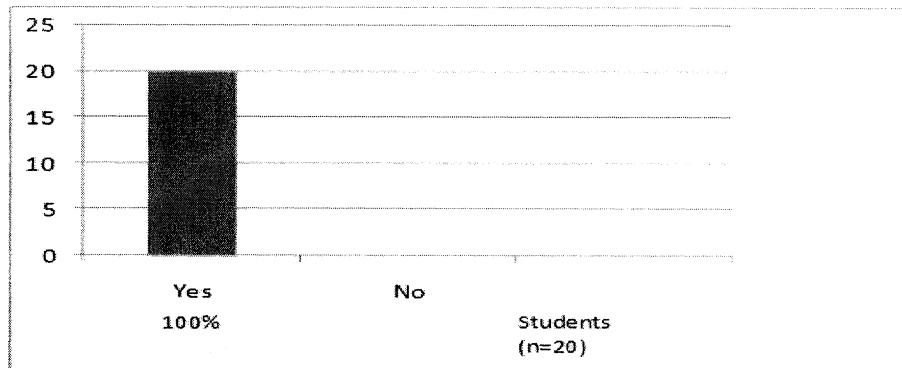
The data that I analyzed that dealt specifically with the impact of teacher feedback came to two conclusions: it helped students refine their skills, and all students reported that they found feedback helpful. When I looked at the exit slips that I provided specific feedback to the students on, I noticed that all of the students with the exception of Mary Kate, did better with each progressive time that they attempted to paraphrase or

summarize. Those students who were doing either of the skills proficiently or somewhat proficiently, I complemented on their work, assured them that they were doing the right thing, or gave any suggestions or clarifications that may have been necessary. This feedback enabled them to keep performing proficiently. Those who struggled with the skills, I modeled what a correct paraphrasing or summarization of the text should look like. This technique was really what put those students on the right path. Within three times of rehearsing the paraphrasing and summarization skills and taking into consideration my feedback, 19 out of 20 students were doing the skills proficiently.

When I reviewed the students' responses to the questionnaire question that asked them their opinion of the helpfulness of teacher feedback when learning new skills, I found that all students reported that they found it helpful. Kevin stated that feedback, "... makes it easier to understand and correct things." Another student, Doug felt similarly. He stated, "It lets me know if I am doing something wrong so I can fix it and if I understand things the right way." Jane gave a particularly insightful response to the question. She stated, "I like getting feedback from the teacher because she knows a lot about the subject and wants to help me do the best I can on my work. Feedback is helpful because it helps me understand what it is I should be doing." These examples are typical of all of the student responses. They all expressed a willingness to know if they were doing the right thing and a desire to improve their skills and understandings. Figure 1 below shows the number of "yes" and "no" responses to the questionnaire question, "Do you think teacher feedback is an important part of helping you understand new texts or concepts?"

Figure 1

Questionnaire Response 1: Do you think teacher feedback is an important part of helping you understand new texts or concepts?



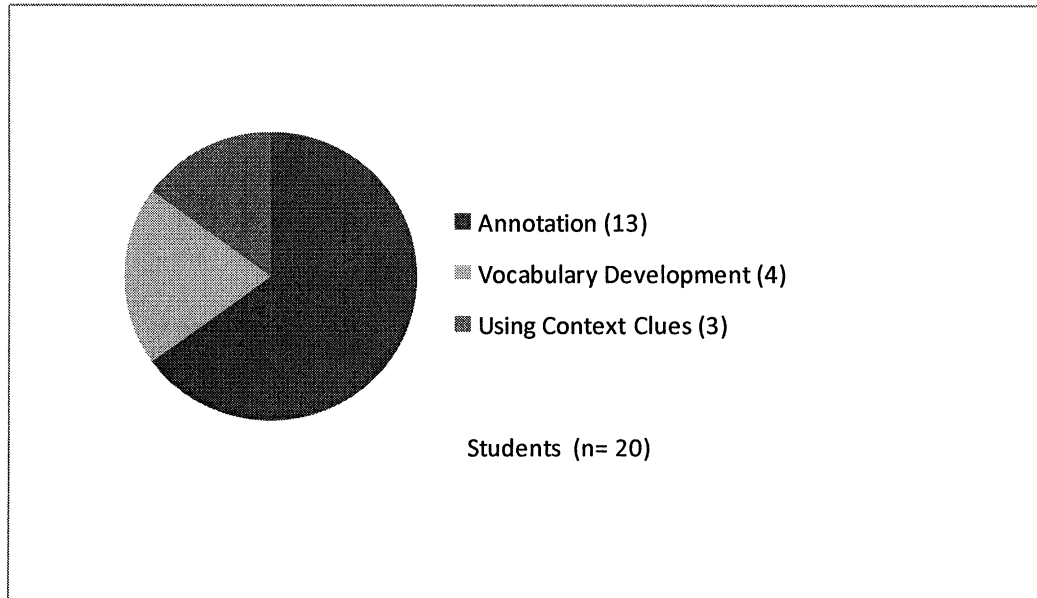
Based on the annotated texts that I collected and analyzed from the students' final assessments for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, I noticed that the students were able to use paraphrasing and summarization to illustrate their understanding of the text. The students worked in small groups of two to five students to construct the project, and all had a responsibility to assist with the annotation and rewriting of the text into the chosen vernacular. In order to do this successfully, the students had to be able to interpret the text, put it into their own words, and then make the necessary vernacular modifications. All of the groups did this proficiently. For example, one group comprised of three female students annotated their text by underlining several key passages and making notes as to what was going on or what the character was saying. They also made several notes to remind themselves of specific information and actions from the scene that they chose. By having their notes, written in their own language, they were able to remember the key facts, themes, and ideas from the original play that needed to be transferred to their rewritten scene in order to successfully keep the underlying meaning of the text. Based

on the annotated texts of each group, I was able to notice that the students were successfully making meaning from the text, and being able to make their own notes in the margin of original text helped them make the connections between the Shakespearian text and their interpretation.

Information from the student questionnaires solidified these findings. Thirteen out of the 20 students specifically mentioned annotation as one of the most effective ways that helped them understand new texts. One female student, Sara, stated that, “When I annotate and I can make little side notes, it helps me remember things that are important and I remember what it was I was thinking about so I can make the connection again when I come back to the text later.” A male student, Christian, said, “The best way to understand new texts is by annotating the text and paraphrasing it into informal dialect, or any words I would say on my own.” Based on the responses of all of the students, it was my understanding that they all thought that a thorough interpretation of a new text in a straightforward way was key in order for them to be able to understand the meaning of the text. For example, one female student, Jane, responded that, “I am best able to understand new texts when we discuss what is actually going on in the story in normal language.” Though she did not mention annotation in her response, she inferred that putting the text into commonly used terms allowed her to make meaning from the text. The students’ responses to this particular question regarding specific methods for understanding new texts fell into three main patterns, which were annotation, vocabulary development, and using context clues. Figure 2 shows what the students’ indicated was the best method of understanding new texts.

Figure 2

Questionnaire Response 2: What do you think is the best way to make understanding new or unfamiliar texts easier?



I analyzed the field notes that I took and the rubric that I used while observing the students work on their final assessments for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit to determine the level of their engagement on the tasks. It was my belief that the higher the level of the students' understandings of the play, the higher the level of their engagement while completing the project. Based on my observations, I noted that all of the students were engaged during the classes in which they were working on the project. Even Giovanni, who varied greatly in his levels of engagement from day to day, was engaged and involved with his group every day that they worked on the project. One piece of evidence that led me to believe that the students were highly engaged in the project was their comments made to me while they were working on the project. There were many instances when students called me over to show me something interesting that they were

doing with their scene rewrite. One student, Penny, called me over several times by saying, “Hey, Ms. Hawn, listen to this line that I wrote.” She was clearly proud of her ability to get into the rewriting of her group’s scene because she understood the meaning of the lines that she was putting into 1960s vernacular. A group comprised of four boys chose to rewrite a scene that had parts for female characters. The boys that were playing the female roles seemed to enjoy rehearsing their roles with feminine voices; they laughed and joked with their group while doing this and still managed to stay on task. There were no issues as far as group members not getting along or with students failing to complete their individual responsibilities. They worked from the beginning of each class period to the end of each class period. I believe that they made good use of their allotted class time so that they did not have to do too much of the project requirements at home.

After all of the pieces of data were collected, I analyzed all of the students’ written work samples completed after the implementation of the exit slip strategy for any improvements in clarity, fluency, and organization of ideas; I looked specifically at essays and compositions. The only improvement that I could definitely discern was in the clarity of their explanations of events, themes, and passages from *Romeo and Juliet*, and the fluency with which they were able to paraphrase and summarize the textual information that they used in their essays. As I previously noted, ten out of 20 students were able to organize their ideas in a coherent and logical manner prior to my study. Of the ten students who were not able to organize their ideas well in their written work, only two students, Will and Melissa, showed significant improvement in this area. By the end of the study, these two students’ work was logically organized and they did not jump

back and forth between points in their essays. The work of the remaining students who did not show discernable improvement in their organization of ideas was very sporadic in this area. Some essays seemed to indicate that they were improving, but then a subsequent essay would contradict that assumption. I surmised that the sporadic performances in their abilities to logically organize their ideas may be related to the amount of time that they spent composing the essay. As I noted earlier in this study, the students had many activities that detracted from the amount of available time to complete their school work. The less time that they put into the work, the less likely they were to have revised and edited it for coherent organization.

Analysis of Data

I began the in depth analysis of the data that I collected after the implementation of the exit slip strategy, I had to evaluate at what level each student was performing prior to the implementation of my study. This required looking at the statistical data from the midterm exam and the students' writing samples. As previously stated, the specific coordinating NJCCCS that were addressed by the problematic questions on the midterm were Language Arts Literacy Standards 3.1.12.D and 3.2.12.B. Standard 3.1.12.D addresses reading fluency and comprehension, which translates to one's ability to understand and make meaning from a text, as well as identify central themes and main ideas. Standard 3.2.12.B addresses writing as a product, which is one's ability to create a coherent written product that has a clear topic and supporting statements, is logically organized, contains sentences of varying length, and has precisely chosen vocabulary.

I examined and analyzed the student's writing samples that they had completed in the months prior to my study. I looked at their abilities to paraphrase and summarize textual information, as well as the overall fluency, clarity, and organization of ideas in the work. I labeled blocks of text where students used or attempted to use paraphrasing and/or summarization skills. I also coded their work for fluency, clarity, and organization of ideas. The exit slips were analyzed for the proficiency and fluency with which the students used paraphrasing and summarizing skills to make meaning from the selected pieces of text from *Romeo and Juliet*. They were also examined and coded for improvement of these skills based upon the feedback that I gave them on the slips in the beginning stages of the study. The writing assignments that I incorporated into the unit of study that were specifically designed to utilize the students' summarizing and paraphrasing skills were analyzed for the proficiency of the skills, fluency, clarity, and organization of ideas.

The students' final assessments for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit were analyzed and coded in a variety of ways. The annotation of the original text was examined and coded for the students' abilities to summarize and paraphrase the textual information, as well as their understanding of the main ideas, themes, and facts based on their annotated notes. The rewritten script that they created based on the text and their research of the period-specific vernacular was analyzed and coded for their understanding of the main ideas, themes, and facts from the play and also for the fluency with which they were able to translate these understandings into their original script. The field notes from the informal

observations that I conducted during the construction and performance of their final assessments were coded for the levels of student engagement on the tasks.

The data from the surveys that I used to gain a greater understanding of my students was recorded in chart form, noting the age, gender, languages spoken, and activity involvement for each student. I did this to have this information condensed and centrally located. I used some of this information to analyze the students work samples based on gender. The questionnaire that I gave to the students that asked them specifically about ways of examining new texts and the helpfulness of teacher feedback were analyzed and coded for patterns of similarity in the responses that were given. I used the data from these questionnaires to understand the students' challenges when reading *Romeo and Juliet*, which was a previously unfamiliar text, what specific techniques made the text more approachable and understandable, and if they felt feedback was helpful. This data helped me measure the effectiveness of the strategies that I used to help make the text more understandable and meaningful to the students, as well as the effectiveness of my feedback in helping them develop their paraphrasing and summarization skills.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Validity, in terms of action research, refers to the accuracy with which the data collected reflects what one is proposing to measure. In order to protect the validity of my action research project I used Guba's Criteria for Validity of Qualitative Research (1981, as cited in Mills, 2007). Four specific criteria are identified – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability – that must be adhered to in order to ensure

trustworthy, valid action research. I took care to conduct a valid action research study in the way that the data was collected, measured, and reported.

The credibility of this action research study pertains to the ability to address all of the complexities and unexplained patterns that emerged during the study. My action research did not seek to validate only the information that fell into organized and logical patterns, but took into account all of the information (Mills, 2007). I tried to address all of the complexities in the study as best possible, but theoretically it was impossible because there were too many, and I had too little time to fully analyze and interpret them all. In my action research, credibility was upheld through triangulation, or the use of multiple data sources and collection methods to assess all facets of the study. The data sources that used in my action research were a student survey, questionnaire, statistics, various student work artifacts, and field notes from brief observations of students' summative assessment construction and presentations. These data sources were analyzed for emergent themes and patterns, which were then reported honestly and accurately.

Another aspect of action research is the study's transferability. Transferability of qualitative research hinges on the belief that all aspects of the study are directly related to the context and environment in which they are being conducted (Mills, 2007). To ensure transferability, I was as detailed and specific as possible in their descriptions of the learning environment, participants, and data collection. Prior to my research, I gathered data on the communities, school, classroom, and students that I would be studying. The information that I synthesized from these sources helped me better understand the context, occurrences, and results of my study. This information was then reported so that

those who may want to implement or investigate techniques from my study can understand the variations between my context and theirs.

Guba (1981, as cited in Mills, 2007) defines dependability as the stability, or consistency, of the data collected. My action research was dependable because I used overlapping methods of data collection that served as a check and balance system; data that may have been weak in one particular area was validated by strengths in another data source. Having multiple data sources solidified my study's dependability. I established dependability in my study by looking at several examples of students' work. By keeping individual files for each student, I catalogued and analyzed their work in chronological order. I looked at essays and compositions done prior to the implementation of my research strategy and those done during the implementation of my research strategy. I looked at several types of student work that address the skills that I attempted to develop. The survey and questionnaire that I used in the study identified students' interests and attitudes, which gave further context to their work performance.

The confirmability of this study was achieved by keeping data collection neutral and objective. This aspect was addressed by efficient triangulation of data sources my adeptness at being reflexive, or identifying my biases or preconceived notions as an action researcher (Mills, 2007). I ensured confirmability in my action research study by collecting and analyzing various pieces and varieties of student work, analyzing statistics from the midterm exam, observing student presentations that use the skills addressed in my study, and using a student survey and questionnaire to give further context to my study. I practiced reflexivity by developing a rich context for my research and by

analyzing myself to identify and understand my own bias and limitations that could have affected how I viewed or thought about aspects of my study. Again, I reported all of this information truthfully and as accurately as possible so readers could understand my biases, the context of the study, and the emergent findings in the data.

Interpretation

There were several themes that emerged through the data analysis process. These themes were skill development through multiple forms of rehearsal, teacher feedback, increased understanding of a text through the use of annotation, and student engagement.

Skill Development through Multiple Forms of Rehearsal. One theme that developed as I analyzed the data chronologically was the improvement of paraphrasing and summarization skills through the use of multiple forms of rehearsal and assessment. The primary action of this study was to help the students develop their abilities to paraphrase and summarize text through the integration of the exit slip strategy. By incorporating other assessments into the unit of study that reinforced these skills, such as the weekly essays and the final project, the students were not only able to further hone their skills, but I was also able to better assess their understandings of the skills and the text. The students were well aware of the purpose of the exit slips and what I was trying to help them achieve through my action research. What they didn't consciously realize was that they were using these skills to help them successfully complete various other assignments during the course of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit. Because they were practicing their summarization and paraphrasing skills of multiple occasions and in multiple ways, it started to become automatic.

Teacher Feedback. Through the examination of the data that measured the effectiveness of teacher feedback on the development of new skills and understandings, which were the exit slips and the questionnaires, it was evident that the feedback that I provided to the students helped shape their skill development, reassured them that they were on task, and allowed them to see where their work need any correction. As previously reported, by the third time that the students used the exit slip strategy, all but one of the students could summarize and paraphrase proficiently. I believe that this was a direct result of my personalized feedback to the students. In my opinion, feedback was essential to this study because I wanted my students to be as clear as possible about what they were expected to do. The most effective way to do this was to provide each student personalized feedback pertained specifically to him or her and the job that he or she was doing. The data from the questionnaires that asked specifically about how the students felt about teacher feedback completely supported the findings. All students reported that they liked and appreciated teacher feedback when developing new skills and understandings.

Increased Understanding of Text through Annotation. An interesting finding that developed through the examination and analysis of the data was the effectiveness of annotation in helping the students make meaning from text. As part of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, the students were provided with a photocopied text of the play so that they could annotate their text during reading and group discussions. Students could write any notes that they deemed beneficial to helping them remember key themes, events, literary techniques, and understandings from the play for use on assessments. Though I did not

analyze the entirety of each student's annotated text, I was able to ascertain from the examination of each group's annotated scene from their final projects that they had an in depth understanding of the scene based on the notes that they made in their texts. They used several methods to annotate their texts. They used underlining, highlighting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and other personally relevant written notes to identify the key elements from the scene and articulate them into their own words. It was this ability to articulate the text into their own words that demonstrated their deep understanding of the text. The annotated text also served as a cognitive organizer, allowing the students to understand and reorganize the wording, while still maintaining the overall meanings. The data from the questionnaire that specifically addressed students' thoughts on the best way to understand and interpret new texts confirmed my assumptions about the effectiveness of annotation. Thirteen out of 20 students specifically mentioned annotation as one of the most helpful ways of learning to interpret new texts.

Student Engagement. When I observed the students working on their final projects for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, I noticed another significant theme develop; this theme was student engagement. Every day that the students worked as a group on their projects they were completely engaged in the tasks that they were working on. I measured and monitored this by walking around and making notes on a rubric; I monitored each student within the groups and each group within the class. I monitored their participation and progress through observation, making notes on a rubric and rating each student's level of engagement and participation. I checked each groups' progress daily by this method, making sure that they remained on schedule to complete the project

by the specified due date. The overall atmosphere in the room was relaxed and jovial, which at first struck me as somewhat odd considering they were working on a fairly intricate and important project. There were no major issues or problem in any of the groups. Based on my observations, my examination of the work that they did on their projects, and my daily monitoring of students based on the rubric, data suggests the high level of student engagement was directly related to the fact that they had a deep understanding of the play, their scenes, and what needed to be done to successfully complete their projects. Because they had all of the understandings that they needed to do well on the project, they did not seem stressed or confused. They could clearly focus in and complete the required tasks while still managing to interact and have fun with their group and the other groups during the final performances of the scenes.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The findings in this action research study highlighted the importance of implementing and equipping students with specific writing strategies to interpret and make meaning from new and unfamiliar texts. This study explored the effectiveness of the exit slip strategy in helping students develop their paraphrasing and summarization skills. This study also documented the students' ability to transfer these skills to various written assessments that were incorporated into the then current unit of study, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

The study focused on only one text that the students were studying. The findings supported that when students are taught a specific strategy to interpret new text through the use of paraphrasing and summarization, the students' skill levels are increased, as well as their level of understanding of the text. The results of the study suggest that the exit slip strategy was an effective method to help students rehearse their skills during controlled amounts of class time. The exit slips also provided a useful strategy to convey personalized feedback to each student to help shape their skill development and provide written reassurance that they were on task. By incorporating multiple assessments into the unit of study that reinforced paraphrasing and summarization skills, the students became more fluent with these skills, and the clarity with which they were able to

interpret the text of *Romeo and Juliet* improved during the course of the unit. Even though most of the students did not show any significant or noticeable improvement in the overall clarity and organization of ideas within their writing, their ability to make meaning from text and translate that meaning coherently into their own writing improved. This improvement mediated some of the problems that had previously existed in their written compositions.

The findings of this study also indicated that when the students were able to make their own meaning from the text, draw their own relevant conclusions, and then articulate those understandings into their own words, their level of engagement increased on tasks and assessments that were associated with text being studied. Based on my observations of the students' in-class work on their final assessments, they were fully engaged in the construction of their project and took great pride in demonstrating their understandings through the presentation of their final products.

Conclusions and New Understandings

This study brought about many new understandings. One such understanding was the effectiveness of the exit slip strategy. The exit slip strategy allowed me to do a multitude of things. It allowed me to introduce new skills, assess the students' progress with their skill development, assess their understandings of the text, and it provided a medium on which to give personalized feedback to each student. Using the exit slip strategy was not a time consuming process. The students did not become overwhelmed by the process and focused on the required task at hand each time they did it. The more the students practiced summarizing and paraphrasing through the use of the exit slip

strategy, the more comfortable they became with the skills and the more familiar they became with the text. They were then able to transfer these skills and understandings into their written work that called for the use of paraphrasing and summarization skills.

The power of feedback was another key understanding that I made from this study. Providing personalized feedback to the students when introducing a new task, paraphrasing and summarizing text using exit slips, was essential to helping them develop those skills properly. Since I was addressing my feedback to each student individually and confidentially on their exit slips, they knew that I had taken the time to read their work and tailor my comments to their particular needs. The students' performance and engagement in class indicated that because I took the time to give them each feedback, they were more inclined to put forth a good effort to show me that they read my feedback and were trying to do their best work. The responses that I received from the students on the questionnaire conveyed that the students undoubtedly found teacher feedback helpful and appreciated any communication from the teacher that would help them understand and do what was expected of them.

I wanted to help remediate some of the problems that I had noticed in the students' writing. Some of these problems were fluency, clarity, and organization of ideas. Because of my naivety as a novice teacher and my bias of having very high expectations for my students, I unrealistically expected that the implementation of the exit slip strategy to develop their paraphrasing and summarization skills would greatly improve the overall quality of their writing. This study showed me that the mediation of students' writing skills is a process that requires a lot of time and the implementation of several methods,

strategies, and techniques; there is no magical or quick solution to turn students into better writers. In reflection, I am happy about the outcome of the study. The skills that I sought to help the students develop did scaffold their ability to interpret and write about a text with more fluency and clarity.

The relationship between student understanding and student engagement was another understanding that I gained from this study. This study equipped the students with strategies to help them interpret text and put it into their own words. This allowed them to understand the text on a personal level. The achievement of an in depth understanding of the text caused the students to become more engaged in the tasks that called for them to demonstrate their understandings, namely the *Romeo and Juliet* final project. Because they had a high level of understanding, they felt comfortable articulating those understandings without fear or anxiety.

I have also reached some new understandings, with respect to my teaching, as a result of this study. One thing that I have learned is that I need to make sure I clearly articulate and demonstrate my expectations for my students. No one likes being confused or unclear when it comes to completing tasks and assignments. I must explain expectations in multiple ways, model procedures, provide rubrics, and be ready to provide further explanation and scaffolding whenever necessary. My job as a teacher, first and foremost, is to meet my students' individual needs and help them achieve their goals and those of the school curriculum. I have also learned that teaching can be simultaneously rigorous, meaningful, and exciting if I know my students' needs and interests. The key to making subject matter engaging to students is to present it in a way

that is interesting and relevant. This study taught me that if students are shown ways to make text personally relevant and understandable, it then becomes approachable and enjoyable. In turn, when students enjoy what they are studying, they are more apt to achieve higher levels of understanding about the subject matter.

Implications

This study has significant implications for the power of a strong relationship between a teacher and each one of his or her students. In my future classroom, I will use various surveys, questionnaires, and activities to get to know my students strengths, challenges, and interests. This will help me establish a personal relationship with each student which I believe is key to being able to tailor my instruction to each of their needs. After these relationships are established, I want to be sure to keep the lines of communication open. One effective way to do this is through feedback. Whether the feedback is written or oral, I want to make sure that I take the time to give my students personalized feedback to both help shape their learning process and to reassure them that they are doing a good job. I believe that establishing and maintaining these personal relationships will increase how successful each of my students will be academically, emotionally, and socially.

The findings from this action research study have helped me set goals for my future teaching. I know that before I introduce any new skills to the students, I must make sure to fully explain my expectations and model the skills accordingly. Providing sufficient scaffolding for the students, in the form of additional modeling or feedback, will allow the students to successfully achieve both their and my goals. I have also

learned that small steps are required to achieve the big goals. Breaking lessons, understandings, and skills down into small pieces and teaching those small pieces one at a time will help the students achieve mastery of each fundamental skill. They can then combine all of these skills to demonstrate their understandings in a coherently constructed final product.

This action research study has also helped me grow professionally. I was able to take the skills and understandings that I learned in my college classrooms and apply them in actual high school classroom practice. I have also learned that one of the most valuable resources in the teaching profession is one's colleagues. Without the help, guidance, and insights provided by my cooperating teacher and the other professionals mentioned in this study, I would not have been as able to fully understand the context of this study or implement a strategy that best fit my students. Establishing a professional learning community allows for collaboration and the sharing of great ideas, which can help give new insights and inspiration to those who share the common goal to help students. In conclusion, this study helped to remind me that I am also a student of my students. From my students I will learn to be a thoughtful and reflective teacher who puts their personal needs above my own. It is my responsibility to use all new information to adapt and grow, both personally and professionally, so I can best serve my students.

Recommendations

There are a few recommendations that I would make for consideration to those who are interested in the areas of focus in this study. One consideration is the writing skills of the students being studied. The class that I chose to study was an Honors level

class, so I assumed that they possessed certain fundamental writing skills. Though some of the students did have notable issues with grammar, usage, and punctuation, I would not have classified them as poor writers. Students who are poor writers may have difficulty using the exit slip strategy to paraphrase text to make meaning. If their writing is too fragmented, it may affect their ability to achieve a level of understanding of the text that the students in this study achieved.

This study also highlighted the powerful effect of teacher feedback. Another consideration might have been the incorporation of peer feedback in some facet of the study. For example, having the students evaluate their classmates' performances of their *Romeo and Juliet* final projects would have further engaged students, allowing them to give praise and recommendations to their peers. This would allow the students to have feedback for consideration from two sources, the teacher and their peers. It would also be interesting to ask students which feedback they found most helpful, that of the teacher or that of their peers.

New Directions and Questions

Equipping students with specific strategies to help them learn to interpret and make meaning from new texts is essential. As a beginner in this practice, I looked at only one specific strategy, the use of exit slips to help develop paraphrasing and summarization skills. I saw only positive outcomes from using this technique. This leads me to wonder, what other skills can I use exit slips to help develop? The exit slip strategy was very simple to integrate into daily lessons, and the information that the slips provided me about my students' skills and understandings was extremely powerful. Not

only does the technique help develop specific skills, but it also increases the amount of student-teacher communication if feedback is incorporated into the process.

Feedback is another topic that I would like to further explore. In this study I found teacher feedback to be a very effective means of helping my students learn and understand new tasks. As previously mentioned, it also allowed me to communicate with them on an individualized level. Should teachers be more willing to give their students a certain amount of immediate feedback when they are learning new skills? Could this feedback help students who may be too fearful or reluctant to ask for clarification or help? I believe that teachers can never be too in tune to their students' specific needs. Just because a student doesn't ask for help, doesn't mean he or she couldn't use it. Giving specific, personalized feedback to students during the development of new skills promotes that students develop these skills to the best of their ability, thus achieving goals of the classroom and school curriculum.

Another direction I would like to explore is the incorporation of peer feedback into my classroom. I know that teacher feedback is very important to students, but what is the potential value of peer feedback? Could peer feedback be just as useful a tool as teacher feedback? I would first make sure to teach students how to give constructive feedback; the key to the successfully implementing any new task is modeling and practice. By teaching students how to give feedback to and receive feedback from their peers they can become more empathetic, making the classroom a true learning community. Also, if students are entrusted to give helpful and constructive feedback to

their classmates, they may truly understand how important they are as a contributing member of the classroom community.

Based on the examination of my students written work during the course of my study and their success with learning to articulate their understandings of a text into their own words through the use of the exit slip technique, I am curious to explore other techniques that help mediate specific issues that students have with their writing skills. I found many of my students had a problem with clarity and organization of ideas within their writing. What specific strategies exist that can help mediate those and other problems that students have with their writing skills? The ability to communicate coherently in writing is a skill that all students must achieve. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to find the means, techniques, and strategies to help students be better communicators, so they can grow to become successful, contributing members of our society.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

February 12, 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Andrea Hawn, and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Science in Teaching program at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Beth Wassell as part of my Master's thesis concerning how students learn to summarize and paraphrase unfamiliar text in their own words using a teaching strategy called exit slips. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. This strategy will be incorporated into the everyday classroom teaching and will not require any additional work on your child's part.

Students may be photographed during observations I conduct of the class. I will destroy the photographs at the conclusion of the study. The photographs may be viewed by other researchers when the data are presented at a professional conference. All data will be reported in terms of group results; individual students will not be reported. To preserve each student's confidentiality, only pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to identify students that participate in the study.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study **will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class**. At the conclusion of the study a summary of group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (609) 927-4151 ext. 1211, or by email at Ahawn@mainlandregional.net or you may contact Dr. Beth Wassell at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3802. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Andrea M. Hawn

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by February 20, 2009.

I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

(Parent/Guardian signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX B

Student Survey

STUDENT SURVEY

I want to get to know you better! Please take this opportunity to tell me more about you. Thanks!

Directions:

1. Read each question carefully
2. Mark the box next to your answer with an X, or write in your answer on the line provided.

Name: _____

How old are you: _____

- Male Female

About me...

I am:

- African-American or Black
- Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander
- Latino(a), Hispanic, or Mexican-American
- Racially Combined or Bi-racial
- White (non-Hispanic)
- American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut
- Other

I live with my:

- Mother & Father
- Mother/Father & Step-parent
- Mother only
- Father only
- Mother and other adult
- Father and other adult
- Other relative or guardian (specify)

I am planning on attending college. Yes No. Career aspirations: _____

Please list any activities/sports that you participate in either at school or outside of school:

Please list any other interest, hobbies, etc. that you have or any other interesting or important information about you.

APPENDIX D

Exit Slip with Teacher Feedback

II. II 142-148

In Act Two Scene Two Juliet tells Romeo how she feels. In line 142-148 Juliet says that if Romeo loves her and he wants to marry her then he has to meet someone so they can talk about it. Also, the intentions of his love for her has to be true. Then the nurse calls for Juliet to come in so, Romeo agrees with her request.

Example:

Just a few more words, Romeo,
and then I have to say goodnight.
If your love is honorable and
you really want to get married,
I will send someone to you and
you can let me know where and when
the marriage will take place.
And all that I have will be yours,
And I will be with you wherever you go.

* You need to paraphrase:

I can tell you know what was said in these lines, but you are "summarizing".
Don't summarize what happened, rewrite it just as Juliet says it.

APPENDIX E

Exit Slips

[REDACTED] 16

80 money is worse than
poison because it is
doing more murder than
the poison is.
Goodbye. Take the money and buy food
85 He is going to Juliet's grave
to use the poison.

[REDACTED] 12

Money is worse than my poison
It kills a lot of people in the world
than poison can
I am selling you poison and your friend
Goodbye. Go buy food and get clothes.
Come hear of mutant and not poison of a
with me to Juliet's grave

[REDACTED] 17
3/24/19

V. i. 80-86 (p. 394)

Here is your money, which is more danger to
people in this world than the poison you weren't
supposed to sell me. I am giving YOU poison, not
the other way around. Goodbye. With the money, buy
food and get healthy. This is no poison, it is a
savior. Come with me to the tomb where I will drink you

APPENDIX F

Annotated Text from *Romeo and Juliet* Final Project

With gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed,
 Could not take truce^o with the unruly spleen^o
 Of Tybalt deaf to peace, but that he tilts^o
 With piercing steel at bold Mercutio's breast,
 Who, all as hot, turns deadly point to point,
 And, with a martial scorn, with one hand beats
 Cold death aside, and with the other sends
 It back to Tybalt, whose dexterity *is over is winning*
 Retorts^o it. Romeo he cries aloud,
 "Hold, friends! friends, part!" and, swifter than his tongue,
 His agile arm beats down their fatal points,
 And 'twixt them rushes; underneath whose arm
 An envious^o thrust from Tybalt hit the life *— he ran away*
 Of stout^o Mercutio, and then Tybalt fled; *— tybalt came back*
 But by and by^o comes back to Romeo,
 Who had but newly entertained^o revenge, *Romeo wants*
 And to 't they go like lightning, for ere I *revenge*
 Could draw to part them, was stout Tybalt slain,
 And, as he fell, did Romeo turn and fly.
 This is the truth, or let Benvolio die.

LADY CAPULET. He is a kinsman to the Montague;
 Affection makes him false; he speaks not true.
 Some twenty of them fought in this black strife,
 And all those twenty could but kill one life.
 I beg for justice, which thou, Prince, must give.
 Romeo slew Tybalt; Romeo must not live.

PRINCE. Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio;
 Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe?
 MONTAGUE. Not Romeo, Prince; he was Mercutio's friend.
 His fault concludes but what the law should end—
 The life of Tybalt.

PRINCE. And for that offense
 Immediately we do exile him hence.
 I have an interest in your hate's proceeding,
 My blood^o for your rude brawls doth lie a-bleeding;
 But I'll amerce^o you with so strong a fine
 That you shall all repent the loss of mine.^o

(Shouting above loud outcries from MONTAGUES and CAPULETS.)
 I will be deaf to pleading and excuses;
 Nor tears nor prayers shall purchase out abuses.^o
 Therefore use none. Let Romeo hence in haste,
 Else, when he's found, that hour is his last.

*Prince is going to exile Romeo instead of killing him. If he comes back then he will be killed.
 * Romeo tragic flaw - kills Tybalt b/c he wasn't thinking*

*Mercutio is also already
 Come to break up fight
 Romeo is upset
 Below
 fight
 killed
 Mercutio*

*Romeo was being civil
 Mercutio fights b/c he's angry
 Romeo wants revenge
 Thinks Benvolio is lying to protect Romeo
 Tybalt killed Mercutio and Tybalt needed to die anyway so Romeo did what the law called for*

*take truce, make peace.
 unruly spleen, ungovernable rage.
 tilts, strikes.*

Retorts, returns.

*envious, malicious, stout, stouthearted, i.e., brave.
 by and by, immediately, entertained, harbored thoughts of.*

*My blood, the blood of my kin.
 amerce, punish by fine.
 mine, my blood.*

purchase out abuses, exempt misdeeds from penalty.

Act Three, Scene 1 347

APPENDIX G

Student Engagement Rubric

Romeo and Juliet Final Project
Daily Class Participation/Engagement Rubric

<u>Score</u>	<u>Expectations</u>
0	Does not work on project during class time; does not work with group; talks extraneously and/or distracts other students
1	Works on project components for 15 mins. or less of class time; collaborates with group limitedly; talks extraneously and/or somewhat distracts other students
2	Works on project components for 15-25 mins. of class time; collaborates with group limitedly; some extraneous talking to other students
3	Works on project components for 25-35 mins. of class time; collaborates with group for most of the time on task; some extraneous talking to other students
4	Works on project components for more than 35 mins. of class time; collaborates with group for most of time on task; very little extraneous talking to other students
5	Works on project components for entire class period; collaborates/works with group for entire class period; very little to no extraneous talking to other students

Group Members	Score	Notes