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Implementing response journals in a reading workshop : one teacher's study of the effectiveness of reader response journals in evaluating individual progress

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Implementing response journals in a reading workshop : one teacher's study of the effectiveness of reader response journals in evaluating individual progress

Abstract

This article reports on the development and implementation of reader response journals in a Reading Workshop. It is based on observations related to the effectiveness of response journals and self-evaluation in literacy instruction. Included in this article are descriptions of one teacher's previous reading practices, her desire for change, and the decisions she made regarding literacy instruction. The author guides readers through the steps involved in implementing a Reading Workshop, and also details the impact journaling and self-evaluation had on her literacy program.

IMPLEMENTING RESPONSE JOURNALS IN A READING WORKSHOP: ONE
TEACHER'S STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READER RESPONSE
JOURNALS IN EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS

A Graduate Journal Article
Submitted to the
Division of Reading
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Molly A. Knipper

May 11, 2000

This Journal Article by: Molly A. Knipper

Titled: Reader Response Journals in a Reading Workshop: One teacher's study of the effectiveness of response journals in evaluating individual progress

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

5-15-2000

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Abstract:

This article reports on the development and implementation of reader response journals in a Reading Workshop. It is based on observations related to the effectiveness of response journals and self-evaluation in literacy instruction. Included in this article are descriptions of one teacher's previous reading practices, her desire for change, and the decisions she made regarding literacy instruction. The author guides readers through the steps involved in implementing a Reading Workshop, and also details the impact journaling and self-evaluation had on her literacy program.

Total number of words: 6789 words in text and references

Submitted for consideration for *The Reading Teacher*, May 11, 2000.

Dear Miss Knipper,

So now we are done with *Prince Caspian* and are starting *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis. I don't know if you have started it or not, but Lucy, Caspian, and Edmund are main characters in this book, too. The setting is different of course because it is on the ship called the Dawn Treader, and not in Narnia. Right now, they are going to the Lone Islands to look for seven people that are missing. I think they are Narnian lords.

I agree with you. I think that C.S. Lewis jumps around in his books, which sometimes makes it difficult to remember what is happening from one chapter to the next. J.K. Rowling does not do this as much. I think this is one reason why I like the Harry Potter books better, they are easier to follow. I still like the Narnia series though, just not as much as Harry Potter.

My favorite part of the book so far is when the characters get sucked into the picture of the Dawn Treader. I think I am going to enjoy this book because it has some of the same characters in it. I think that the characters are going to get lost based on the adventures they had in C.S. Lewis' other books.

I hope to get this book done by next week. I haven't been reading as much at home now that I have started soccer. Hopefully, I will be able to read a couple chapters a night. Since I am gone every weekend for soccer tournaments, I suppose I could read while we travel.

Well, gotta go! Let me know where you are in this book and what you think will happen next.

C-ya later,

Christen

Throughout the year, weekly letters like Christen's provided an avenue for students to share opinions, summarize key events, ask questions, and discuss strategies related to their reading. As a young teacher, full of uncertainty about my reading instruction, I decided I wanted to change the way I was teaching reading. After two years of using the same textbook and curriculum, I was not excited about, nor involved with the material I was using to teach reading; yet, I expected my students to show interest in the material and learn from it. This however, was not the case. Students were not engaged with reading from the assigned text. Discussion activities were short and often limited to either right or wrong answers as determined by the textbook company. Assignments that typically accompanied the textbook consisted of knowledge-based questions. Reading skills were assessed through workbook pages. I was not happy with this type of instruction and neither were my students.

Implementing Response Journals in a Reading Workshop

This uneasiness prompted me to begin researching other instructional methods for teaching reading to adolescents. It did not take me long to become interested in the Reading Workshop method. I spent the months of July and August reading books like *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* (1987) and *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning* (1998) by Nancie Atwell along with several research studies focusing on Reading Workshop (Au, 1997; Bruneau, 1997; Swift, 1993; Kletzien & Hushion, 1992) and reader response journals (Hancock,

1993; Many, 1991; Pantaleo, 1995; Sebesta, 1997; Heiden & Schmitt, 1991). Like Atwell (1987), I began reflecting on my own reading processes and strategies. I began to realize the importance of discussing books and authors with others for a number of reasons. Based on the fact that almost all of the books I had been reading were recommended to me; I recognized that as a reader, I make selections and build meaning based on my personal interests and experiences. The Reading Workshop method provides an environment that supports and values what children choose to read. It also encourages students to think about what they are reading and integrate it with what they already know (Kletzien & Hushion, 1992). This allows students to make comparisons, evaluate texts, and develop thoughtful discussions related to their reading. These revelations brought me to the conclusion that beginning in September, my literacy instruction would be focused on Reading Workshop methods. I planned to give children choice in selecting books, time for extended reading, and the opportunity to explore and discuss their reading with others through journaling.

The notion of providing children with an opportunity to read texts of their choice was not completely new to me. In previous years, time for independent reading was available as a supplement to my reading instruction. The difference was, this year, independent book selection and reading was going to be the basis of instruction, rather than an addition to it. Providing at least thirty minutes a day for reading was another priority in my instructional plan. The type of response activities students engaged in

was another change that occurred in my classroom. Atwell (1998) states it is not enough to give children books and time to read. Literary talk needs to occur before and after reading to support and extend readers' interests and knowledge. This is where reader response journals found their place in my classroom. According to Wollman-Bonilla (1991), the purpose of reader response journals is to provide the opportunity to express feelings and socially interact through writing. My goal was to establish a reading program that encouraged all students to actively participate in reading and literature response activities, focusing on peer and teacher discussion through journaling.

Atwell (1998) also suggests that social relationships and ownership are primary concerns of most adolescents. Therefore, rather than trying to suppress these needs in the classroom, I agreed with Atwell (1998) and decided it made sense to put them to work using reader response journals. Journaling allows students to define the purpose and control the content of their responses. In my classroom, students decided what they wanted to discuss related to their reading, and when and with whom it would be shared.

Journaling was an instructional method that allowed me to engage in personal conversations about literature with my students and learn about their individual tastes, needs, and strategies. Using an adaptation of Atwell's letter to her students (1998), I provided my first letter to my students that described the purposes and procedures for the journals. Students were assigned to write a letter to me, another student, or an adult at least once a week. These letters were used to document one-third of their reading and

writing progress based on the quantity and quality of responses.

Mini-lessons on written responses were conducted early in the year to challenge students and demonstrate a variety of responses. Students were taught to provide evidence from their reading in order to explain their responses. I considered this to be the most important and challenging aspect of my students' writing. In order for a response to be complete, students were encouraged to summarize their reading in detail using story elements as a frame for their discussion. When they stated an affective response, I expected them to include examples from the story to support why they felt a particular way. In terms of using strategies, I expected a discussion of what students did before, during, and after reading, and how that helped them read and understand their books. Finally, I asked students to make recommendations about how much they felt I or another student would enjoy reading a book. Students were also encouraged to seek recommendations when they needed help selecting new and interesting texts. This was accomplished by modeling positive listening behaviors and questioning techniques during book talks. Writing letters to peers, seeking advice from the librarian, and asking me for suggestions also assisted students in locating new books. Mini-lessons were usually conducted as a whole class activity. However, as the year progressed, mini-lessons were presented to students in flexible groups, based on similar needs.

Students typically read self-selected materials or wrote in their journals during independent reading time. Occasionally, I selected materials for the whole class or small

groups to read for instructional purposes. I used independent reading time to read and confer with individuals about their reading progress and plans regarding the books they were reading. I also discussed the content of the books students were reading and identified specific strategies at this time. Rereading, predicting, using prior knowledge, visualizing, and inferencing were some of the strategies I reinforced during independent reading.

Book talks and teacher read aloud were also part of my workshop instruction. Students were encouraged to sign up for book talks when they completed books. Book talks gave students the opportunity to discuss story elements, summarize key points, and recommend books to the whole class. This was also a time to celebrate the completion of a book. Teacher read aloud occurred at the end of the school day. At the beginning of the year, I selected texts based on interests and topics being studied in other content areas. However, as students began to read more, they requested that I read aloud some of their favorite books. I guided read aloud discussions by posing implicit and explicit questions before and after reading.

Although I did not have a specific time set aside for sharing, a time for students to discuss their reading and expand on their ideas with peers (Bruneau, 1997), it was present throughout the school day. Informal sharing often occurred immediately after independent reading as students returned to their seats and prepared for writing. Discussions about books carried on in the hallways, near lockers, and in study halls.

Sharing was also a routine that frequently took place first thing in the morning as students arrived in my classroom.

Figure 1 shows a typical week's schedule of Reading Workshop in my classroom.

Student Reactions to Reading Workshop

As the school year progressed, two aspects of the workshop became prominent in terms of student involvement and enjoyment: the amount of books students were reading and the depth of their journal responses. Many students began the year apprehensive about having 30 minutes of designated reading time. During this time, students were expected to read or write a letter to me. For students who indicated that they did not like to read, or found writing difficult, this expectation seemed extreme. However, as the year progressed, so did my students' abilities to use the 30 minutes for reading and writing.

In terms of journaling, by late October, many students moved from simply summarizing what they had read to making connections with other works, relating story elements to their personal experiences, and using a variety of reading strategies to understand, question, and reflect on their reading. More and more students were recommending books through their journals and book talks. As their teacher, I found it difficult to keep up with the pace at which they were completing books and writing letters. Reading logs indicated that students were frequently reading at home, and journals were beginning to be turned in several times a week.

Throughout the year, I observed increased interest in reading and responding to

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texts. Changes in attitudes were apparent when students that indicated they disliked reading earlier in the year were signing up for book talks on a regular basis. Another area of literacy that continually evolved was the discussion of books. In December, many students begged for more time to read, and students rarely used their 30 minutes of class time to write in their journals. Journals became a task that many students took home along with the books they were reading in class. Several students began reading at least two books a week and writing letters to me on a daily basis. As students began to read more, their written responses also grew in terms of quantity and quality. Student journals provided concrete evidence that books were being read and thoughtfully discussed. The majority of written responses and recommendations were directed to me. However, by January, parents, siblings, and friends were beginning to join the written dialogue. Stephanie and her mother had interesting discussions about the *Left Behind* series. Stephanie was reading the children's version, while her mother was reading the adult version.

Dear Mom,

I've just finished reading *Left Behind #5* by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. It was basically about how Nicholae Carpathia had changed the names of the schools and how the kids felt about it and how they dealt with it. They also talked about how Nicholae was saying things that made them wonder if he was the Antichrist. I thought this book was okay. It was not my favorite book of the series, though.

I was reading through one of the books and it said that books seven and eight came out in February, 2000. I would like to get them so I can see what happens at the end. Do you know how many books are in the adult series? I think that in the six books from the series that I have, the best ones were number one and three. The first one was when everyone disappeared and the third one was really suspenseful.

Do you still think that Nicholae Carpathia is the Antichrist? I really do now. I wonder if books six, seven, or eight reveal who the real Antichrist is. From what you have said, the adult's version and the kid's version sound a lot alike. What do you plan on reading after you are finished with this?

Write back soon,

Stephanie

Dear Stephanie,

It's fun that we are reading the same series of books. In the adult version, I do think that Carpathia could be the Antichrist. It is a very good book. I would like to read the rest of the adult series. I don't know how many books there are, though. I would like to see you read the rest of your series, so keep your eyes out for the rest of the books!

I love you, keep reading!

Mom

By midyear, I knew my students were showing progress in terms of the quantity and quality of their reading and written responses. This was obvious in their reading logs and journals. Reading logs showed that several students were reading throughout the

school day and at home. Many students were also reading and completing more than one book at a time. At the end of the first semester, I reviewed student journals in search of “best” responses. The length and simplicity of their responses in September and October amazed me. For example, Michael and I had been reading and journaling about *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in October. Rather than reflecting on what he had read or answering my questions, Michael used his journal to update me on his reading progress and to restate main events in the story.

Dear Miss Knipper,

I am still reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J. K. Rowling. I am on Chapter 10 where Harry finds out that he lost his broom in a wreck during a quidditch match.

Sincerely,

Michael

Until I looked back in their journals, I had no idea how little students discussed earlier in the year. Needless to say, I was surprised with, but proud of the progress they made in terms of the length and depth of their written responses. In examining the content of individual journals I identified patterns in students’ writing. I found evidence related to the topics which were discussed in mini-lessons earlier in the year. I also discovered that students generally focused on a combination of topics within their written responses. The most common and widely written response was story based discussion. This included dialogue about story elements, such as titles, authors, characters, plots, settings, and themes.

For example, Benjamin had just finished *Frozen Fire* by James Houston and began reading Gary Paulsen's novel, *Hatchet*, the same day. He incorporated several topics in his journal response, however, the focus of his writing was describing the events as they happened in the book. Benjamin was able to use his knowledge of literature to describe the book as a survival story. He mentioned some of the characters, discussed the setting, and through a description of the plot, identified the problem of the story.

Dear Miss Knipper,

Hi, how are you? I am fine. The book I have been reading is called *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. This is the kind of book that you just don't want to stop reading. Everyone says it is a great book. It is a survival book like *Frozen Fire* by James Houston. I would rather be in *Hatchet* because he is in Southern Canada, not Northern Canada like Matthew and Kayak.

So far where I left off, the plane had taken off from the airport in Manhattan and was heading for the Canadian oil fields where Brian's dad lived and managed the oil fields. When they were about 50 miles away, the pilot had a heart attack and Hatched had to take the controls. He ripped away the headset and put them on. He started calling, but no one answered. He didn't know the flight number, so he didn't know where he was. As he looked at the pilot, the pilot was dead and he did not know how to fly the plane by himself. So he looked for an open area and took the plane down into the middle of some trees. The wing broke off and the plane slid right down into the lake and he got thrown out of the window. That is where I left off.

Sincerely, your student,

Benjamin

Another type of response evident in many journals was affective response. This type of response reflected personal thoughts, feelings, and agreement or disagreement toward authors, characters, or events in books. Like Benjamin's writing, Danielle's letter also included more than one topic. I liked this particular letter because Danielle provided insight in terms of how she would have handled the problems Vicki had to face to in the book, *Left Behind: The Kids: Vanishings*, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

Dear Miss Knipper,

I have just finished my book, *Left Behind: The Kids: Vanishings* by LaHaye and Jenkins. My book was about four kids with no Christian religion. They are "left behind" when Jesus brings their religious friends and family to heaven.

One of the most troublesome characters in the story is Vicki Byrne. If I were in her shoes, I would get help. I would go to a drug awareness quitting sort of place, since she drank, smoked, and other stuff. I would go to God for forgiveness, like her family did. I would not think my parents were crazy for believing in Christ and Christianity like Vicki did all of the time, and later found herself 'left behind' because of this. It would be easy to be the exact opposite of her, and that I am. I believe in Christ and Christianity since I go to church and do extra church activities. Plus, I do not do drugs because I know they are wrong to do, and I am involved with the DARE program anyways.

I want to start reading the second, third, and fourth books in the series since they are very good books to read, as I will recommend them to you. I found them at Sam's Club, since you like collecting children's books.

I hope to hear from you soon!

Your student,

Danielle Bascom

Several students also began to realize some of the strategies they were using to assist them with their reading, understanding, and book selection. In the letter below, Danielle identified making predictions as a specific strategy she uses when she reads. She also made a personal connection between herself and a character from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, a book she had previously read by J.K. Rowling.

Dear Miss Knipper,

The book we are reading in class, *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry, is a very good book, I agree. I like predicting what is going to happen next, since after all, I'm the bookworm, or the Hermione Granger in class. Doing the packet lets us keep in touch with our reading! I hope the other class books we do will include packets!

I wonder what will happen next, because predictions can never tell! I think Ellen's parents were killed, and Annemarie will go get Ellen's necklace and get caught as a Jew. This is a very good book! I love it!

Your student,

Danielle Bascom

Like Danielle, as students read more they began to discover interests in themes and authors' writing styles which helped guide their book selection. Most students were also making connections between books, authors, and genres. As the year progressed, Mary Downing Hahn became one of Leanna's favorite authors. In an attempt to read all of Mary Downing Hahn's books, Leanna searched the school library and three local libraries to find new titles. In many journals, Leanna noted connections between Mary Downing Hahn's writing style and relationships between characters.

Dear Miss Knipper,

I finished *The Dead Man at Indian Creek*, *The Spanish Kidnapping Disaster*, and *Following My Own Footsteps* all by Mary Downing Hahn. My favorite book out of those three was *Following in My Own Footsteps* because I really liked *Stepping on the Cracks!!!*

Gordy and his mom, sister, and brothers are in it. One of Gordy's brothers comes back from the war and lives with them. They moved to Gordy's grandma's house. That's where the story takes place. I think you should read it!

About your prediction, you are kind of right. Gordy is always having to apologize for doing something. He becomes friends with someone that has a sickness or disease. His name is William. He is in a wheelchair and Gordy tries to help him walk.

Gordy also meets another kid. He is a bully, just like Gordy was in College Hill. They get into fights and something happens to the boy that Gordy meets. You can figure that out when you read it!

See you later!

Leanna

As the amount of reading increased, several students began to recommend books to me and others, as well as to follow recommendations regarding new books, authors, or genres. In a previous letter to Sarah, I indicated that I could recommend some of my favorite mystery books, since Sarah had reached the end of her book list. Sarah not only responded to my suggestion, but also made a recommendation to me.

Dear Miss Knipper,

I think it would be a great idea to give me a list of good mystery books! I just started the *Unprotected Witness* by James Stevenson. So far, it is good, but I'm not sure about the end.

If you like true stories, I read a very good one. It is called *The Child Called, "It"*. It is about a boy who is very badly abused. I liked it because throughout the book, "It" tells you about his everyday thoughts. The boy is so scared to tell somebody, he just keeps getting badly hurt. I also like this book because the child who was abused is the person who wrote it.

Sincerely,

Sarah

Evaluation of Reader Response Journals

Although I could identify areas in which students were improving, I was not sure that my students, or their parents were aware of the things they were accomplishing as readers and writers. Obviously, it was extremely rewarding for me to sense that all of my

students were showing progress, yet, I felt it was equally important that they realized their growth in reading and writing.

Using the patterns I had observed in my students' writing, I developed a rubric as a way to show students and parents growth over time. The rubric, however, caused several problems. First, I had a difficult time defining stages of competency because individuals set their own purposes and determined the content of their journals. Secondly, I intended to use the rubric as a tool which would enable me to score each journal efficiently and effectively. However, the additional amount of time it took to score journals surprised me. After I had already devoted a considerable amount of time to reading and responding to the journals, I found I had to go back and critically think about each response in order to assign a score. Finally, because I was the one reading the journal and reflecting on the content within it, I was also the one seeing the progress, which did not solve my problem.

I went back to the drawing board and using the concepts from the rubric, I decided to devise a map in which students could plot their responses according to four general categories. The most common types of journal responses were story discussions, affective responses, use of strategies, and recommendations. Within each of these categories, I listed up to eight guiding elements to assist students in putting data into the map. This technique was more efficient for me because after modeling the process, students were able to accurately complete their own maps. One of the problems with

this procedure was it required students to put forth additional time and effort. However, it made them aware of the progress they made in terms of the quantity and quality of their written responses. By mapping out their responses, students also had a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses within their written responses. The mapping concept was a step in the right direction. Yet, when looking at the discontent in my students' faces when asked to complete this task, I realized this was not an ideal assessment for them.

After many attempts, I developed a prompt sheet and an assessment device based on my ideas from the rubric and mapping procedures. The organized writing prompts and long-term graphing system were two pieces that students could use to easily and accurately evaluate their progress in terms of quantity and quality within their journals (See Appendixes A and B). Using the prompt sheet, students graphed the content of their journals after I had responded to them. Over time, students began to see patterns revealing strengths and areas in need of improvement. The graphing system also helped me determine what I still needed to teach.

After revealing the graph of possible responses, an interesting change occurred in my students' writing. I began to notice that students were deliberately trying to incorporate several areas of the graph into their responses. For students that were already expanding their responses into all facets of the graph, this improved the depth and organization of their writing. Sarah explained the relationships between the characters in

Stepping on the Cracks and made a prediction and devised a plan to assist her in understanding and completing the book. She also included her feelings toward Mary Downing Hahn's writing style and her interest in the book.

Dear Miss Knipper,

Some of the characters in my book, *Stepping on the Cracks*, are Gordy, Margaret, and Elizabeth. Gordy is always mean to Margaret and Elizabeth. They were never friends. Margaret and Elizabeth are best friends. They do everything together because they are next door neighbors.

Stepping on the Cracks is very interesting. The characters thoughts, feelings, and how they react to things makes it interesting. The author, Mary Downing Hahn, expresses this very well in her writing. During seminar last week, I could barely put the book down!

My prediction is that the clubhouse Margaret and Elizabeth damaged is the "Crazy Man's" house. I think this because Gordy was talking about the "Crazy Man" so much. I don't know if the "Crazy Man" is real or not.

I plan on finishing this book in about one and a half weeks. I have been reading about 20 pages a day. If I read at home this weekend, I am sure I will finish it!

See Ya!

Sarah

However, after reviewing the graph, students that typically wrote summaries of a story occasionally struggled to include too many prompts, therefore, making their

responses less focused. Christen's journal is an example of this. She did well in terms of summarizing and making plans and recommendations for future reading. However, it is obvious that Christen was trying to make connections that were not there when she was reading.

Dear Miss Knipper,

Haunted Sister by Littke is great! The main characters are Lenor, Janie, Scott, and Rafe. It took place in Lenor and Janie's home and at the hospital. The major problem is when Janie gets into a car accident with Scott and goes to a "heaven/hell" place. Janie sees all the people she knows who have died. Then she sees her twin, Lenor, that died when she was four. Now, when she returns (in a lot of pain), her sister is inside her body with her. She is talking inside her head too.

In a couple days, Janie goes to see her boyfriend, Scott, who she got into the car accident with. There she sees Scott with another roommate, Rafe. Lenor is trying to gain more and more of Janie's body.

I think it is a great book. My favorite part of the book was the end. I would not like someone in my body trying to control me. Would you?

I am trying to think of connections...Oh, in the book Janie tries to tell people that Lenor is there, but people thinks she needs mental help. My mom's friend's sister is a nice person when she is takes her medicine, but she is really crazy.

Like I said, I am trying to read one book a week. So far I am doing that. I recommend that you read this book, *Haunted Sister*.

Thank you for getting me this book. I really enjoyed it a lot. I also think Leanna would like this book. It seems that we like a lot of the same books.

I'm glad we're writing!

Christen

Christen was not the only student that tried to include discussion that was not related to her reading processes. Actually, several students began to do this. Based on this observation, I conducted mini-lessons explaining and modeling the purpose of the graph. It was intended to be used as a tool for self-assessment and as a means of providing ideas for writing. It was not intended to be an outline in which each item was to be included in every response. I did, however, make it clear that at this point in the school year, all students should be able to arrange their thinking into paragraphs that covered more than one type of response.

Following the mini-lessons concerning depth of responses, Christen's next letter showed that she spent more time developing a few thoughts, and less time ensuring that all four areas of the graph were covered. In this journal, Christen described several story elements including characters, plot, and setting. She also made statements regarding her interest in *The Horse and His Boy* when comparing it to other books she had read by C.S. Lewis.

Dear Miss Knipper,

The story I am reading now is called, *The Horse and His Boy*

by C.S. Lewis. The main characters are Bree, a horse; Aravis, a royal girl; Hwin, a horse; and Shasta, a boy who has escaped. Their problem is that they cannot find their way to Narnia and have had many disadvantages in a smelly, grungy, nasty town called Tashban. They have escaped from their families because they hate what is happening in their lives. They are trying to get through this town in order to get to Narnia.

This book makes me feel excited because it is full of adventures. I am excited because Shasta got taken because these people thought he was royal. Another adventure is when Aravis sees her friend and she tries to bring her back to her house. When Shasta finds out they are not at the tombs he gets all panicky. Those are just some of the exciting adventures.

I do not think this book is nearly as good as the other two books I have read by C.S. Lewis. Maybe it is because I'm not getting into the story yet. However, I think the group will get to Narnia at the end of the book. I think the book is kind of slow, so there will have to be a lot more adventures.

Three pages left!

Christen

Along with graphing individual progress, I wanted students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as readers and writers in order to set goals and monitor progress. With the help of Nancie Atwell (1998) and Les Parsons (1990) I constructed a self-evaluation form that encouraged students to reflect on the quantity and quality of their reading and written responses (See Appendix C). This process assisted students in

setting meaningful goals for the following grading period. It also helped them explain their growth to their parents at parent teacher conferences.

Parental Involvement in a Reading Workshop

An important part of my literacy program was involving parents from the beginning of the year. Beginning on the first day of school, I asked parents to write me a letter describing their child. I received letters about each of my students within a week. Parents were extremely proud of their children and were excited to have had the opportunity to tell me about them. I also presented information and answered questions regarding Reading Workshop during Open House in September. As students grew accustomed to Reading Workshop, they wrote letters to their parents describing their reading instruction and their feelings toward it. At the end of the first quarter, students began writing literature response letters to their parents instead of me. This type of writing continued to flourish as the year progressed.

Informing parents and including them in their child's literacy instruction has been extremely beneficial to the success of my program. Not only do parents support the idea of self-selected reading and journal responses, they also look forward to communicating through reading and writing with their children. Many parents indicated it had been a long time since they had the opportunity to play a direct role in supporting their child's reading and writing development.

During conferences in February, students discussed their reading with their

parents using journals, graphs, and reflection sheets as evidence of their progress and achievements. It was important for me to see if parents realized the value of reader response journals. I wrote a letter explaining the purpose of the journal and developed a questionnaire for parents to complete at home regarding their child's journal (See Appendix D). The questionnaire consisted of six statements that ranged from identifying progress in their child's reading and writing to assessing their child's attitude toward reading and responding to literature. I asked parents to either agree or disagree with these statements and provided space for elaboration or comments under each statement. Parents overwhelmingly indicated that they were pleased with the role of response journals in their child's reading instruction. Several parents went as far as to add comments about their child's interest in reading and responding to literature, along with their own interest in reading the journal. For example, one parent wrote:

My child has enjoyed reading a lot more this year compared to last year. She enjoys talking about her reading and her journal writing. I think my child is aware of her progress, but she feels she needs to improve more and still struggles with her confidence. She has told me that she enjoys corresponding with you about literature. The journal has given her more confidence as she improved in reading this year.

Annette, mother of Jennifer

Concluding Thoughts and Goals for Next Year

Reader response journals have been extremely useful tools in my literacy instruction. By reviewing journals on weekly basis I was able to observe the types of

books students were reading and encourage them to use a variety of strategies and responses. Students and I were able to identify strengths and weaknesses in responses, as well as, find evidence of processes and strategies students used to organize their thoughts and integrate new ideas and information from their reading. By providing a wide selection of literary materials, time for reading, and the opportunity to share interpretations, interests, and strategies, my students were able to make good choices and take responsibility for their learning.

I have also realized that self-evaluation and a framework for responses are meaningful pieces in the workshop puzzle. By using the evaluation and graphing procedures, the students in this study understood where they were as readers and writers, where they are now, and where they want to be in the future. They also found pleasure and developed ownership in their reading and written responses. Throughout the year, I eagerly anticipated reading and responding to individual letters every day. Personally, I feel the greatest benefit of reader response journals was the personal relationships that I developed with individual students through written discourse about books and reading.

When I decided to implement aspects of Reading Workshop in my classroom, I had a goal in mind, I wanted students to find pleasure and purpose in reading and responding to literature. I never expected to see the levels of enjoyment and engagement that my students expressed throughout this process. As I continue to use Reading Workshop in my classroom, students still have choice, time, and opportunity to explore

and discuss their own meaning relative to what they have read. I cannot wait to do this again next year!

Christen's letter sums up what I had hoped children would gain from my literacy instruction, the understanding that reading and responding to literature is fun!

Dear Miss Knipper,

It seems too long to go without writing you. I think it is fun doing this. Thanks to you! I don't see why people wouldn't like it.

Well, I see we have had fun writing to each other because I am almost at the end of this journal, so I should get a new one. I want to read for 30 minutes so gotta go!

Keep writing like ya do!

Christen

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Figure 1
Reading Workshop Schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1:25-1:45	Mini-lesson	Mini-lesson	Mini-lesson	Mini-lesson	Mini-lesson
1:45-2:15	Independent Reading	Independent Reading	Independent Reading	Library Lab	Independent Reading
2:50-3:05	Teacher Read Aloud	Teacher Read Aloud	Teacher Read Aloud	Teacher Read Aloud	Book Talks

APPENDIX A

Journal Prompts

STORY BASED RESPONSE:

Discussion about a book

- Title/Author
- Characters
- Setting
- Problem
- Resolution
- Plot
- Theme
- Author's Style

AFFECTIVE RESPONSE: *What or how did you feel when reading?*

- I agree with...
- I disagree with...
- I like/enjoy...
- I dislike...
- I feel...
- My favorite...
- Other

STRATEGIES: *What did you do before, during, and after reading?*

- Make connections:
 - with yourself
 - between characters
 - with other works, titles, or authors
- Planning:
 - time needed to complete a book
 - what book you plan to read next
 - why you abandoned a book
 - difficulty and length of a book
- Predicting
 - I think...
 - I predict...
- Questioning:
 - I wonder...
 - unknown words
 - confusion

BOOK SELECTION: *How are you selecting and helping others find books?*

- Read other works by the author
- Interest in a specific genre
- Book Location
- Difficulty and length of a book
- Seeking recommendation
- Recommending books to others
- Respond to recommendations

APPENDIX B

Name _____

STORY BASED DISCUSSION									
Title/Author									
Characters									
Setting									
Problem									
Resolution									
Plot									
Theme									
Author's Style									
NUMBER OF RESPONSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
AFFECTIVE RESPONSE									
I agree with...									
I disagree with...									
I like/enjoy...									
I dislike...									
I feel...									
My favorite...									
Other...									
NUMBER OF RESPONSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
STRATEGIES									
Making connections									
Planning									
Predicting									
Questioning									
NUMBER OF RESPONSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
BOOK SELECTION									
Read other works by author									
Interest in a specific genre									
Book location									
Difficulty and length of book									
Seeking recommendation									
Recommending books to others									
Respond to recommendations									
NUMBER OF RESPONSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

APPENDIX C

Independent Reading and Journal Self-Evaluation

Name _____
Evaluation Period _____

1. How many books have you completed over this period? _____
2. What kind(s) of book(s) have you been reading? _____

3. How do you feel about the amount and type of reading you have been doing?
(Please circle one emotion and comment on why you feel that way.)

Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Dissatisfied

4. How do you feel about the responses you have made in your journal?
(Again, circle one emotion and explain why you feel that way.)

Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Dissatisfied

5. Which response was your best? Explain why you have selected this particular response.

6. What are your strengths in your journal? _____

7. What are the areas you can improve in your journal? _____
