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An Exploration of How Three Elementary Teachers Use Questions To Support Their Students' Literacy Development

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An Exploration of How Three Elementary Teachers Use Questions To Support Their
Students' Literacy Development

by

Megan Zarzycki

August 2012

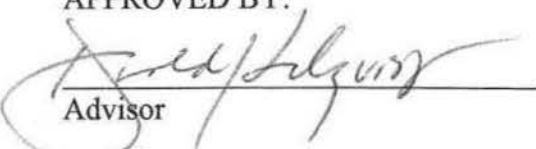
A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of
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requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

An Exploration of How Three Elementary Teachers Use Questions To Support Their
Students' Literacy Development

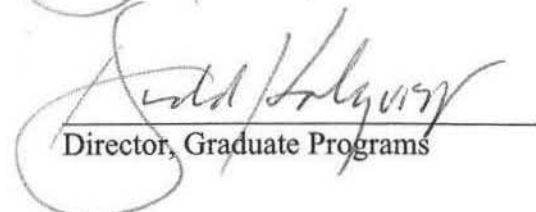
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Chapter One: Introduction

I observed twenty fourth graders who were diligently working on their morning work, which included solving a “Problem of the Day” and writing a journal entry about what they did this past weekend. The clock struck 9:45am. “Okay class, let’s put away our morning work and get ready for reading!” said Mrs. Edwards (all names are pseudonyms). Moans and groans echoed throughout the room. Mrs. Edwards disregarded the moans and cheerfully said, “Friends, let’s gather around the carpet! We have an exciting story to listen to today!”

The students straggled slowly over to the carpet and got themselves ready to listen to the story. Jaden, still at his desk, took his time putting away his materials as if to avoid joining the rest of his friends at the carpet. Alexa was the last to push in her chair and creep slowly to the carpet. Once all of the students were seated on the carpet, Mrs. Edwards began her lesson. “Today we will listen to *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg (1986). Let’s get right to it!” Mrs. Edwards began reading. A few pages in, Tyler asked, “How come the man doesn’t know how to talk?” Mrs. Edwards acknowledges his question by saying, “That’s a great question Tyler, but let’s see what happens first before we can answer that question.” Throughout her reading, Mrs. Edwards used different voices for each of the characters, which made the students laugh. When she finishes, Mrs. Edwards says, “Alright, who can tell me what happened in the story, *The Stranger*?” A few students looked up at the ceiling, shifted in their spots, and Michael stared down at his shoes and began to play with his

shoelaces. After about ten seconds passed, Samantha raised her hand. “Samantha, would you like to tell us what happened in the story today?” asked Mrs. Edwards.

Samantha responded:

Yes, Mrs. Edwards. In the story, a strange man gets hit by a car by Mr. Bailey. Mr. Bailey brings the Stranger home and tells him to come inside. The little girl...I...I...I forget her name, but she plays with the Stranger. At the end of the story, the Stranger leaves the house and does not come back.

“Very good, Samantha! Does anyone have anything else to add?” Mrs. Edwards asked, looking at the group before her. Several students again looked up at the ceiling and at each other, hoping someone would answer Mrs. Edwards. When no one did, Mrs. Edwards said, “Okay class! Great job listening to the story! When we head back to our seats today, I would like everyone to write about something that they were reminded of when they listened to *The Stranger*.”

I was puzzled and astounded about what I just witnessed. I wondered if the students understood what they just heard. I found *The Stranger* to be a powerful story about a man who essentially controls the seasons. In addition, the author plays with the line between reality and fantasy, yet only one student, Samantha, responded to Mrs. Edward’s prompt.

I also wondered why Mrs. Edwards did not ask any questions that required the students to think more in depth about what really happened to the Stranger. For example, an open-ended question such as, why do you think the Stranger

disappeared? Or what do you think the author's message was in the story? I think asking such questions would have invited the students to critically examine the complexity of the story and increase their comprehension skills.

I believe asking quality questions should be an essential part of all teachers' daily instruction. According to Walsh and Sattes (2005), quality questions are "key vehicles that elicit awareness of diversity, complexity, and richness of knowledge" (p. 9). In addition, "questions are tools for both information seeking and information processing" (Walsh & Sattes, 2005, p. 9). Walsh and Sattes believe that teachers must have a clear purpose for posing the questions that directly pertain to the goal of the lesson. A teacher's use of quality questions enables students to gain a better understanding of the material and engage in higher levels of thinking (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Significance of the Problem

Walsh and Sattes (2005) recognized that, "teachers seem to know what constitutes "best practice", but we aren't always good monitors of our own performance" (p. 11). In other words, while most teachers are aware that the questions they ask should require students to activate higher level thinking, the questions they pose do not always require or yield students to do so. (Dantonio, 1990; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

When student learning relies on teachers giving students factual information, teachers ask their students various recall and memory type questions (Walsh & Sattes,

2005). For example, a typical recall question might be similar to the one Mrs. Edwards posed, "Who can tell me what happened in the story, *The Stranger*?" Such a question asks students to regurgitate information, instead of internalizing and analyzing the information, which in turn, lowers the students' ability to truly comprehend the material because they are only asked to recall information (Dantonio, 1990; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Because society sees learning as knowing facts, this type of learning is what is replicated in the classrooms (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). In addition, the use of lower level questions provides an easy way for teachers to check their students' understanding because such questions take less time to answer. Therefore, teachers can move on with their lesson more quickly in order to get through all the material (Dantonio, 1990; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

In addition, recall questions are easier for teachers to think of on the spot versus asking questions that require students to think at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Many teachers tend to rely on recall questions because this form of questioning is easier to control and it is what they feel comfortable doing (Dantonio, 1990; Morgan & Saxton, 2006; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Recall questions provide reinforcement of what has been taught, which helps teachers feel successful when asking these types of questions (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). More often, recall questions are a true display of the teacher's knowledge of the content (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Teachers may not be well versed on the content they are teaching, which again, yields the use of lower-level questions.

According to Walsh and Sattes (2005), another purpose for recall questions is the lack of time during the lesson. Recall questions require very little time to facilitate and they are usually questions that can be answered quickly (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Wait time is defined as, “the amount of time the teacher allows to elapse after he/she has posed a question and before a student begins to speak” (Cotton, n.d., p. 5). When teachers ask questions that engage students in higher level thinking, the need for wait time increases because such questions may require students to think about their answer before they feel confident sharing and because the answer is not a “right there” answer (Hunkins, 1989; Morgan & Saxton, 2006). The amount of wait time students need to answer a higher level question may feel uncomfortable for both the teacher and the students because students will be thinking for a longer period of time, so the room may be silent (Hunkins, 1989).

Asking quality questions, questions that invite and enable students to reflect upon new material or connect their prior knowledge to, can fuel the learning process and allow students to better comprehend new literacy material from a novel, short story, poetry, creative pieces or picture books (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

I think the use of questioning is both an important and difficult process, but it can lead students to engage and critically think about their experiences with literacy. The purpose of this study, then, is to look at how teachers use questions in their

classrooms. This is an important strategy that teachers should use to develop their instruction and increase their students' comprehension (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

From the vignette that opened the chapter and through my own classroom observations along with push-in and pullout small group instruction, I have concluded that the use of quality questions proved to be a difficult skill for teachers. This strategy proved to be difficult in general for most teachers because it requires thought and preparation before and during lessons (Hunkins, 1989). I believe that teachers understand what effective questions are and the value of such an approach from their teacher preparation programs and participation in professional development seminars and reading the current literature, however, they may be uncertain of how to put the strategy in to practice.

When I conducted this study, it helped me become a better teacher because it enabled me to learn how to become an effective questioner. I believe an effective questioner is a teacher who carefully prepares and plans his or her instruction in order to ask questions that invite students to engage in a range of low level to higher level thinking opportunities.

Returning to the vignette from Mrs. Edwards' class: An example of a lower level question would be "what happened to the Stranger in the beginning of the book?" whereas a higher-level question would be, "what do you think might have happened to the Stranger after he left the house?" The lower level question only required the students to recall where they first encountered the Stranger in the story, whereas, the higher level question requires students to think beyond the text because

the answer does not appear in the text. This type of question required the students to think at a higher level (please refer to the level of Bloom's Taxonomy students would be working at to answer this question. Varying the levels of questions that a teacher asks his or her students is what makes an effective questioner (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Through this study, I experienced how teachers use questions and the types of questions they use to help their students develop their literacy skills and abilities. I learned a wealth of new knowledge about literacy instruction that will help me improve my skills as a teacher and a person who encounters literacy every day in a variety of contexts. Because I conducted my study in three different school districts and across a range of grade levels, I learned different strategies of how to teach literacy. Literacy is defined as the ability to read, write, listen, speak, and view information (National Council of Teachers of English, 2011).

In addition, conducting this study helped me become a more effective qualitative researcher. Becoming a better researcher will allow me to better myself as a teacher. As a teacher, I learned what questioning techniques can be effective with students, what makes an effective question, and how the use of questions can increase a student's ability to comprehend information. Teacher-researchers use classroom research as an ongoing process to find out what students need to be successful learners.

Study Approach

Throughout this research study, I visited three different classrooms to collect my observations and interview teachers. As a teacher researcher, I designed this study to look at how teachers use questions with their students. The use of questions can be an effective strategy to help students become involved in conversations, comprehend new material, think critically beyond the text, and reflect on what they have just learned (Hunkins, 1989; McComas & Abraham, n.d.).

In this study, I collected data through the use of observations of and interviews with a kindergarten, first and fourth grade teacher. I conducted two observations and two interviews with each teacher over the course of six weeks. Each week I observed one teacher during her reading instruction for forty-five minutes and recorded anecdotal notes on how she uses questions (see Appendix B). On the second day, I interviewed the teacher (see Appendix C) to further investigate what she wanted to accomplish during that lesson with the questions she asked her students. I carefully crafted the questions ahead of time so I would benefit from the interviews.

Rationale

I conducted this study based on observations of and interviews with three classroom teachers because I believe that this type of data will benefit my understanding of how to effectively use questions with students. Walsh and Sattes (2005) agree that a teacher's use of quality questions helps students make meaning of

new concepts and ideas. In addition, the use of questions provides a way to engage students in the learning process. I was able to see how teachers use questions firsthand with students and it has enabled me to effectively examine their process of using questions during literacy instruction. The observations of the teachers also allowed me to see how I can improve my use of questions as a teacher to better help my students comprehend new reading material, participate in discussions, think beyond a text, and learn new social skills (Hunkins, 1989).

I chose to observe teachers at three different grade levels because I believe that the teachers enabled me to gain a picture of how to use questions with a variety of students during literacy instruction. I am also interested in teaching elementary students, so conducting the study across a range of grade levels peaked my interest to see what kinds of literacy activities students are engaging in throughout their elementary school experience.

Summary

The teacher's use of quality questions is important because the questions provide opportunities for students to critically think and ponder new information (Hunkins, 1989). The use of quality questions can elicit higher-level thinking, which allows students to think beyond the text in order to examine the texts (Dantonio, 1990; Morgan & Saxton, 2006; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). A teacher's use of quality questions not only provides opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking but also, provides a scaffold for further learning (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

When teachers' ask quality questions to their students, the questions give students a model of what types of questions they can ask themselves while reading. The use of questions are a way for students to stay engaged in the content and help them organize their thoughts to communicate clearly about what is being asked (Dantonio, 1990; Morgan & Saxton, 2006; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Collecting observations and interviews with the three classroom teachers enabled me to see how purposeful questions can enhance student learning. The interviews gave me a chance to communicate with the teachers to understand their thought processes in terms of how they use questions, which in turn allowed me to develop as a teacher.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Posing questions allow people to seek out information, solve problems, and extend our thinking and understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005). Questions allow people to understand the world more clearly. When we ask questions, we hope to obtain answers to our curiosities. The best questions spark more questions and further interest in the topic. They can propel students to read on and do further research on the topic (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005). The best questions are also the driving force for instruction between teacher and student (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005).

Currently, the research says that teachers should be using questioning in the classroom to help promote comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). However, there are limited resources that actually demonstrate how questioning improves students' comprehension. Through this chapter, I will provide information about quality questions, emergent literacy, and effective literacy instruction at the fourth grade level.

Questioning

Reading Comprehension

Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, and Subrayan (2010) state that reading comprehension:

is a thinking process by which a reader selects facts, information or ideas from printed materials; determines the meanings the author intended to transmit decides how they relate to the previous knowledge

and judges their appropriateness and worth for meeting the learner's own needs and objectives. (p. 206)

Reading comprehension is an essential skill for teachers to teach their students; without it, a reader may never really be able to read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005).

Under the “big umbrella” of reading comprehension, there are skills that a reader needs to master in order to comprehend a text. Activating prior knowledge, questioning, summarizing, discussions, and assessment tools are the essential skills that current researchers are discussing. Quality questioning is one of the most crucial skills a reader can use to actively engage themselves in their reading and help improve their comprehension of a text. A quality question is one that asks students to think critically and probe students to think beyond the text (Tompkins, 2003). An example of a quality question might be, “why do you think the stranger left at the end of the story”. This type of question allows the reader to think beyond the text and analyze the true meaning of, *The Stranger*.

Activating background knowledge

“Research has shown that comprehension is enhanced when readers activate prior knowledge or make connections to background knowledge” (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010, p. 167). Getting to know what your students already know about a topic will improve their comprehension while making them “active readers”. The background knowledge that students have about the topic will also help them make connections between what they know and what they are reading. In addition,

activating prior knowledge can help students make predictions about what they think might happen in the story.

Making predictions

Predictions are another important piece to comprehension. When students make predictions about what is going to happen in the text, it allows them to actively listen to what happens in the story. A lot of the times students enjoy seeing if the predictions they made were correct. Kesler (2010) shares with us that in his classroom he asks students to come up with words or phrases that they think will appear in the text. These words or phrases are recorded and referred back to during the shared reading if they appear in the text. This helps build the student's awareness of the type of vocabulary that will be in the text (Kesler, 2010, p. 272). Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, and Subrayan (2010) state, "Vocabulary is essential for getting meaning from the text. Thus, it is recommended that teacher should consider using many activities before reading strategies to improve students' vocabulary" (p. 210). Mowbray (2010) also agrees that building the vocabulary and asking students to predict what will happen during the story is important for active engagement throughout the text (p.10). Activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and building vocabulary are all essential before students read the text. Various research has shown that these pre-reading strategies build the comprehension of a student before and after they are done reading.

Monitoring comprehension

Questioning is also important for students to engage in while they read a text. There are numerous ways to go about this skill. Post-it notes, reading journals, or oral questioning are ways that many teachers and researchers say to approach this skill. Fiene and McMahon (2007) discuss the power of sticky notes when they look at a child's reading of *The Rough-Face Girl*. The sticky notes helped this child to focus on making connections and writing down any questions she had about the text. Sticky notes are a great way to go back through the reading that a student did and see what they were thinking while they read. They provide a clear reference and are a great way to informally assess a child's reading. Reading journals are also another way that a child can record their thinking throughout the text. Inside these journals, they can create questions to pose during the discussions that they thought about while they read (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). It is important for teachers to teach students how to question to make sure that they do not always develop "right-there" questions that do not probe them to think beyond the text (Fiene & McMahon, 2007; Dymock & Nicholson, 2010). Critical analysis is one of the most difficult strategies for students to understand but once they get it, they are able to master the text.

Summarizing

Summarizing is another component for students to comprehend the text. Most standardized test multiple-choice questions ask students to recall specific information about the reading. Hagaman, Luschen, and Reid (2010) discuss the "RAP" (Read a paragraph, Ask yourself, "What is the main idea and two details?", Put information

into your own words) strategy discuss the important of questioning oneself after each paragraph. This strategy is a way for students to self-monitor themselves during comprehension and should be taught with the Gradual Release Model. When students are forced to stop and think about the text and summarize what is going on, they are more likely to remember the information they read at the end of the story. "Knowing how to summarize the main ideas has a positive impact on comprehension" says Dymack and Nicholson (2010, p. 172). Fiene and McMahon (2007) state, "Mentally organizing information while reading is a key feature in active comprehension" (p. 415). Using graphic organizers can help students summarize and organize information about the text that will further their comprehension of the story. Graphic organizers are a visual for students who need to see the text laid out visually for them. They also help in the pre-reading stage to organize predictions and thoughts before the text is read. Mowbray (2010) also agrees with the summarizing component of comprehension by stating, "The sharing and comparing of retells is a powerful tool that enables students to use language in complex ways". She takes summarizing a step further when she turns it into the next important skill of comprehension, which is discussion.

Discussions

Discussing the text serves many purposes for the reader as well as the teacher. When students discuss the text, it provides the teacher a way to assess the student's learning of the reading. Teachers can use anecdotal notes, or reading journals to assess the students learning. There are multiple ways to set up a discussion of the text:

book clubs, small group, whole group, or a guided reading group. Each of these types of settings will provide teachers with the opportunity to collect their assessment information. Discussions allow students to think critically about the text and hear other's thoughts about the text (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). This is the time where students share their questions about the text that they have recorded in a reading log, on a sticky note, or questions that arise while the conversation is progressing. Discussions allow for teachers to make sure that students are getting a rich understanding of the text. In a whole group setting, the teacher's role is to prompt the students with questions and let them figure out the answers through a discussion with their classmates. Discussions can also provide the ELL students and extra way for them to understand what is going on in the text. After students discuss, teachers can further their critical analysis of the text by providing them with an extended response question to answer in a reading journal (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). These extended response questions give students who did not contribute to the discussion a chance to show what they know. It also provides teachers with concrete evidence for assessment purposes. This is also a place for students to make inferences about the text (Crane & Snowling, 2005). Making inferences illustrates that a reader is thinking beyond the text because the information is not right there for them. By listening and reading what students have to say about the text, helps teachers to develop an idea of where to go next in their instruction (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). If teachers notice that students are having trouble with the vocabulary or certain concepts throughout

the text, they can create mini lessons during reading workshop or guiding reading groups to help these students grasp these concepts (Fiene & McMahon, 2007).

Purpose of Questioning

Questioning is a way of communicating with students in order to find out what they know and what they need help with (Fiene & McMahon, 2007). It is a way to informally assess the students (Fiene & McMahon, 2007).

In the past, the purpose of questioning was only to obtain direct answers out of students. This meant that students were asked “yes” or “no” questions and one-word answer questions (Cotton, n.d.) These questions did not probe students to further learn information. They were simply recall questions that teachers asked to make sure their students were memorizing the information (Cotton, n.d.).

Changes have been made to probe students to think more deeply and allow students to explore their answers when they are asked a question in the classroom (Cotton, n.d.). One method that is often used in questioning is the Inquiry Method advocated by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (1968) in their book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. Through this method, teachers or students create questions that they want to further research on their own. An inquiry method invites students to think critically about a topic and search for the answers on their own to dig deeper. Inquiry is not only a way for students to learn, but it is also a way for the teachers to check in with their students’ learning. This method provides an opportunity for students to actively learn through the use of questions. Creating a question that can spark further research for this method can be a challenge, but it is the role of the

teacher to facilitate and support students during this stage. Inquiry has proven to be highly effective in increasing the comprehension of the students because it allows them to seek the answers to the questions they have in their own way, whether it be searching through books or through the internet (Cotton, n.d.).

Questions drive instruction

Questions are guided by the purpose of instruction, content, and cognitive levels of the students (Walsh & Sattes, 2005; Cotton, n.d.). Without a deliberate plan to use questions as a learning tool, teachers may miss the powerful opportunity to create an interactive dialogue between the teacher and the students (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Questioning allows students to seek information and critically think about a topic (Cotton, n.d.).

Questions provide comprehension checks

Questioning provides comprehension checks for teachers and allows them to see where their students are with learning new information. Generating questions is a difficult task for teachers; however, it is critical for students because it probes students to learn more details about the new material. The questions that teachers ask should yield a purpose for learning. Through the questioning process, students are invited to obtain more information about the topic. Questioning plays an important role comprehension because each question will yield different types of responses from the students that will showcase their learning (Cotton, n.d.).

Questioning Models

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) is a reference tool for teachers when generating questions for their students (Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, & Subrayan, 2010). Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are the sub categories where teachers center their questions around depending on their intended outcome of the question. Each of these levels of questioning yields a different purpose and level of thinking. The levels include: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Knowledge questions simply ask the students to recall information (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Comprehension questions check for the students understanding of the information. Questions that start with the words "describe" or "explain" are questions that check for comprehension (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Application questions ask students to apply the information they already have about a topic to new material. These questions include words like, "illustrate", "interpret" or "demonstrate" (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Analysis questions require the students to uncover evidence and reach conclusions. These questions include words like, "compare", "contrast" or "criticize". Synthesis questions ask students perform creative thinking. Often, there are multiple answers to these types of questions. These questions include words like, "arrange", "compose", "design" (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Evaluation questions often ask for students' opinions on an issue; they include words like, "judge", "evaluate", "argue" (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Knowledge questions require the least amount of thinking from the students, whereas

the evaluation questions require the most amount of thinking from the students (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Currently, Bloom's Taxonomy is the most widely used format for teachers to reference when formulating questions for their students (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

When planning lessons, it is appropriate for teachers to articulate levels of questions that include the six cognitive levels and relate them to both the essential questions and the lesson objectives. Marzano's Taxonomy takes Bloom's Taxonomy and expands it from six levels of questioning to fourteen levels: recognize, recall, executing, integrating, symbolizing, matching, classifying, analyzing errors, generalizing, specifying, decision-making, problem-solving, experimenting, and investigating (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Marzano's model includes a wider range of factors that affect how students think and provides a more research-based theory that helps improve student thinking (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Marzano's model provides an expansion of thinking skills that allow students to be well rounded in the knowledge they possess about a topic.

These two models illustrate that questioning has shifted from direct instruction to exploratory and student-centered instruction (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Direct instruction is when the teacher provides the student with all the information while student-centered instruction is tailored to the needs of the students. Student-centered instruction is centered on discussion and activities based on the prior knowledge of the students within the topic. Student centered methods are more appropriate and

conducive to questioning because the method allows teachers to probe their students for answers while having a discussion (Tompkins, 2003; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

As a result, Bloom's Taxonomy and Marzano's taxonomy are guides for teachers to use in order to make their instruction more meaningful. Using these taxonomies allows students to think in different ways, which can make new information more meaningful.

Effective Questioning: Studies

There are different studies that look at how effective questioning plays an important role in what the students are able to understand. Tienken, Goldberg, DiRocco in 2009, by Dull and Murrow in 2008, by Gillies in 2011, and Nygozi in 2009 have completed some of the studies on the role of questioning in the classroom. Tienken, Goldberg, and DiRocco (2009) examined the types of questions that teachers asked their students and how often they asked these types of questions. The authors of this study found that only thirty-two percent of the questions teachers asked in the classroom were effective. Tienken, et. al. (2009) realizes that this percentage is quite low so they provide teacher recommendations about how to make questions more effective in the classroom.

Dull and Murrow (2008) looked more specifically at different socioeconomic backgrounds of the students to see how questioning differed in the socioeconomic settings. The authors wanted to know if the levels of questioning teachers asked were different based on experiences students and teachers had, their socioeconomic backgrounds, and if questioning would be able to create a quality discussion. Dull and

Murrow found that dialogic questioning does occur in classrooms however, students in heterogeneous tracks and lower-income schools appear to have few experiences with dialogic questioning that help them make connections and think critically about course content and texts. Dull and Murrow specifically focused their work in the field of social studies, whereas, Tienken, et al., (2009) focused their studies in science education.

Gillies of Australia (2011), wanted to find out specifically how questioning could affect small group discussions in the classroom. Gillies reported on the types of questioning strategies teachers used to promote thinking, problem-solving and reasoning during small group discussions. Gillies audio-taped different teachers to get a sense of the types of questions teachers were asking their students, and then how the students answered the questions in their small groups. She found that teachers were challenging their students with questions that challenged the students and their discussions within their small groups. She also found that the students were able to remember the content better individually after they had discussed the information with their groups. The most remarkable finding of Gillies' study was that after the teacher had asked the higher-level questions, the students would then use these types of questions in their small group discussions. As a result, the study demonstrates the benefits of higher level questioning in the classroom.

Nygozi (2009) conducted a study in Nigeria aimed at examining the effects of metacognitive strategies on classroom participation and student achievement in senior secondary school science classrooms. Nygozi wanted to determine if the use of

questioning would increase the level of student participation. In the study, the “Think-Pair-Share” method was used to see if the students’ achievement levels in the course content would increase after using this method. Think-Pair-Share is when the teachers pose a question giving students time to think individually about the answer, discuss their answers with a partner, and then share their answers with the whole class (Nygozi, 2009). Nygozi developed an achievement test to see if the students were able to perform better after using this method in the classroom. She found that the students did in fact perform better on the test using this method. The questions that the teachers posed were high level questions that helped the students develop the correct answers through their discussions.

Both Gillies’ and Nygozi’s studies had a common goal, which was to look at how the teacher’s use of questioning can affect the knowledge and critical thinking skills of students. However, Gillies’ study took this a step further to see if small group discussions would increase the level of what students would gain from what they were studying. Gillies’ study was proof that students gained much from the small group discussions and the use of higher level questioning.

Each of these studies proves that questioning is an important process of learning in the classroom, however there is still further research that needs to be done to look at how quality questions do improve the students’ learning.

Higher Level Thinking

The Benefits of Higher Level Thinking

“Higher order thinking skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking. They are activated when individuals encounter unfamiliar problems, uncertainties, questions, or dilemmas” (King, Goodson, Rohani, n.d., p.1) Students’ use of higher order thinking skills has multiple benefits (King, et. al., n.d.) First, it allows students to process information into their long-term memories (King, et. al., n.d.). Information that is processed using higher order thinking skills will last longer versus lower order thinking which only requires students to memorize or recite facts. For example, a teacher may ask students to interpret why “The Stranger” from the story *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg. Asking students to think beyond the text will build knowledge that can then be transferred to new concepts.

The use of higher level thinking skills will also encourage students to apply old knowledge to newer concepts in order to make meaning of the text in front of them (Barak & Shakhman, 2008; King, et. al., n.d.). Thinking does not occur spontaneously, however it is provoked by the use of questions to spark and achieve critical thinking (King, et. al., n.d.) Being able to apply previous knowledge to a new concept will increase the students’ comprehension of the new topic (Duron, Limbach, & Waugh, 2006).

Encouraging students to use higher level thinking skills may also increase the amount of discussion in the room (Cotton, n.d.; Duron et al., 2006). This is positive because higher-level thinking can allow students to communicate and cooperate with their peers in order to reach a plausible answer to the question. For example, the use of the Think-Pair-Share method can help students spark ideas and answers to questions through the use of their peers (Nygozi, 2009). Not only will these higher level questions get students to discuss with their peers, but it will also help students make sense of the information (Cotton, n.d.; Duron et al., 2006). Both Cotton (n.d.) and Duron et al. (2006) agree that the more students participate, the more they will succeed and be motivated to learn.

There are many benefits to higher level thinking; however it does require a lot of preparation and planning by the teacher. Although it might be challenging, teachers can use Bloom's Taxonomy to develop and enhance the questions they use with their students. Asking the students questions that will build them up to the ultimate goal of evaluation, according to Bloom, will allow students to creatively think, problem solve, and reflect on new course material. Provoking higher-level thinking will increase the students' knowledge and fully understand new information (King, et. al., n.d.).

Teaching Higher Level Thinking Skills

Teaching students to use higher level thinking skills is a challenge in itself because it is a complex process. It requires time and effort from both the teacher and

the students. Duron et al. (2006) recognize that this type of thinking requires five steps. They include:

1. The teacher will determine the learning objectives.
2. The teacher will then teach through a series of questions that require the students to think critically.
3. The students will then practice their learning through a series of activities.
4. The teacher will collect feedback from the students.
5. The teacher will provide feedback to the students.

This model illustrates that this type of thinking is a joint effort by teacher and student. As a result, this is an ongoing process of interaction that develops over time.

Teaching students to use higher level thinking skills requires a well-developed plan by the teacher. As stated in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), the level of thinking is a gradual process, which means that teachers cannot automatically expect that students will be able to evaluate new information just after learning it (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Cotton (n.d.); Duron et al. (2006); Walsh and Sattes (2005) agree that teachers need to lay the foundations of higher level thinking first before they require students to partake in the process. This means that teachers should model higher-level thinking before they ask students to perform this task on their own. This type of thinking requires teachers to let students build their thinking skills step by step before they reach higher-level thinking. Through this process, students will gradually move

through Bloom's Taxonomy until they are able to evaluate the information they are learning.

Wait-Time

Higher-level thinking creates longer wait-time (Cotton, n.d.; Duron, et al., 2006; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). Wait-time is defined as, "the amount of time the teacher allows to elapse after he/she has posed a question and before a student begins to speak" (Cotton, n.d., p. 5). Cotton defines a second type of wait-time as "the amount of time a teacher waits after a student has stopped speaking before saying anything" (Cotton, n.d., p.5). The average wait-time for both definitions is about a second or less (Cotton, n.d.). However, if teachers can increase the amount of wait-time to three second or higher, the amount of higher level responses will increase (Cotton, n.d.; Stahl, 1994; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

When teachers increase the amount of wait-time it benefits the students because as their participation levels increase so does the types and quality of their responses, which then increases their comprehension of the material (Cotton, n.d.; Stahl, 1994; Walsh & Sattes, 2005). A teacher's use of longer wait-time will also decrease the amount of students saying, "I don't know" (Stahl, 1994). Increasing wait-time also raises the engagement level of students (Stahl, 1994). Students have more time to think, and therefore, be more likely to respond to the question (Cotton, n.d.). The use of higher level thinking skills requires an extended period of wait-time for students to process the information and formulate their thoughts before they can participate (Cotton, n.d.)

Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy refers to the early stages of children reading and writing that provide the foundations of literacy skills (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003). Young children interact with books, write, color, draw, and use pictures to make and convey meaning. Children can experience literacy when they are in the home or the community after the first few months of life (Robb, 2003). Children learn that print carries a message and that printed language consists of letters, words, and sentences (Clay, 2000). At this stage, children use inventive spelling, which is when a child uses what they know about the English language to spell a word (Clay, 2000). Children will also begin to realize that books are organized with a cover, title, author, and that the English language flows from left to right when reading (Clay, 2000). Periods at the end of a sentence and capital and lower case letters are other skills children will start to develop at the emergent stage of literacy (Clay, 2000).

Environmental Print

During the emergent stage of literacy development, children begin to notice environmental print, any print that surrounds them throughout the classroom or in the community (Tompkins, 2003). Children start to notice the logos of fast-food restaurants, department stores, grocery stores, and household items; however, they may not be able to recognize the same words if they were written on paper (Tompkins, 2003). Environmental print is a way for students to make connections from what they see in the environment to what they learn at school. For example,

when students see the golden “M” arches for McDonalds, they begin to associate that symbol with the word “McDonalds”. Environmental print is a useful tool for students to use to learn to read, write, and learn numbers (Tompkins, 2003).

Concepts about Print

In the emergent stages of literacy development, children begin to develop book-handling skills (Clay, 2000; Tompkins, 2003). Children learn how to hold a book properly, learn to read from left to right, learn when to turn the page and that punctuation such as periods or questions have meaning. Children also learn the difference among letters, words, and sentences (Clay, 2000; Tompkins, 2003). In addition, they begin to learn how to recognize that letters represent sounds, and that they can use those sounds to begin to figure out words. When children decode words, they use meaning, structure and visual information in the text or word to figure out what the word says and means (Clay, 2000; Tompkins, 2003; Robb, 2003).

Clay (2000) developed a “Concepts About Print” assessment that teachers can administer to their students in order to learn what their students know about reading. Teachers can use this test with children in preschool or kindergarten. The results are useful in helping teachers decide where to begin instruction with these emergent readers (Clay, 2000).

Shared Reading

According to Tompkins (2003), “shared reading is when teachers “read aloud books that appropriate for children’s interest level but too difficult for them to read

for themselves” (p. 98). Normally the books are close to their reading level and are big books so the students can follow the words with their eyes as the teachers reads. Often times, students will join in the reading because the books are predictable texts that have a pattern (Robb, 2003; Tompkins, 2003). The book is often reread several times so teachers can teach high frequency words, the words that appear commonly throughout the text (Tompkins, 2003). Examples of these words are: the, at, one, what, is.

Shared reading provides teachers with the opportunity to model fluent reading. Fluent reading is the ability to read a sentence smoothly using the correct expressions along the way. At the emergent stage, students tend to read slowly, in a word by word fashion. Through shared reading, teachers can model how to read a sentence through with proper expression and phrasing (Tompkins, 2003).

Independent Reading

During the emergent stage of literacy development, it is important to give students the opportunity to independently read (Robb, 2003; Tompkins, 2003). Independent reading allows students to build their vocabulary, fluency, and background knowledge (Benchmark Education Company, 1997; Tompkins, 2003).

Creating a classroom library is a great way for students to pick out books that interest them and motivate them to read (Gregory, 2008). In a classroom library, books can be categorized by reading levels, topics, or authors in order for students to select appropriate books (Gregory, 2008). Giving students time to read independently

allows the emergent readers to develop reading skills through practice (Tompkins, 2003).

Teachers can also implement book boxes or traveling book bags. The boxes or bags consist of four or five books that the students are able to read on their own and understand (Gregory, 2008; Tompkins, 2003). The goal of the book bags is for students to practice reading these books on their own until they can read them with expression, smoothly, and understand the meaning. The traveling book bags can go home with the students so they can practice reading the books with their families (Gregory, 2008).

Reading Expectations for New York State Kindergarten and First Grades

K-1 New York State English Language Arts Standards: Retelling a Story

At ages four through seven, New York State Department of Education expects students to be able to describe the setting (where the story takes place), characters (people or animals who are in the story) and major events that happen throughout the story (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011, Robb, 2003). Students, ages four through seven are also expected to be able to retell the story including details from the story to demonstrate their knowledge of the story and the central message of the story (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011; Robb, 2003). Being able to retell the

story at ages four through seven shows the students' understanding of the story (Robb, 2003, Tompkins, 2003).

K-1 New York State English Language Arts Standards: Understanding & Describing Characters & Genre

New York State also requires students to be able to identify words or phrases in a story or poem that suggest some sort of feeling: happy, sad, upset, angry, excited (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011, Robb, 2003). Students, ages four through seven are learning how to describe their own feelings or a character's feelings (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011, Robb, 2003). Understanding and being able to describe a character's feeling are basic skills that will allow students at ages four through seven to develop a more complete understanding of the text (Robb, 2003; Tompkins, 2003).

Explaining the major differences between books that tell stories (fiction) and books that give information (non-fiction) is another essential skill at this age level. This level of understanding will help students comprehend the big ideas of the text more fully as well as be exposed to the type of vocabulary they should expect to see throughout the text (Tompkins, 2003).

K-1 New York State English Language Arts Standards: Using illustrations and connections to comprehend text

In kindergarten and first grade, students are expected to use illustrations and details in the story to describe the characters, setting, and events (Common Core Standards, 2011). Kindergarteners may need assistance from their teacher to be able to complete this task; however, this skill will demonstrate the students' knowledge and understanding of the story (Common Core Standards, 2011; Tompkins, 2003).

In addition, with the help of the teachers, students are expected to be able to make connections between the text and themselves (Common Core Standards, 2011). This means that students relate the story to events that have happened in their own lives (Tompkins, 2003). Making connections enables students to understand the main ideas of the text (Tompkins, 2003). If students can use information they learned through other stories or lessons and apply the information to the current story, they are more likely to comprehend the story (Tompkins, 2003).

Reading Expectations for New York State Fourth Graders

4th Grade New York State Standards: Purpose and Details of the Text

For grade four students, it is important that they are able to read with a purpose (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). At this stage in the students' learning, New York State expects that the students are able to determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from the details in the text. Theme is a

unifying idea, or image that is repeated or developed throughout a work (Common Core Standards, 2011). An example of theme might be love, family or friendship (Tomkins, 2003). Teachers will ask students to describe the theme using details and examples from the text to explain their answers (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). In addition to a theme, students should be able to describe in depth the character or setting drawing on specific details of the text. Characters are the people or animals in the story and the setting is where the story takes place (Tompkins, 2003).

4th Grade New York State English Language Arts Standards: Text and Genre

In fourth grade, New York State expects students to be able to explain the major differences between genres of texts. A genre is a type of text that can be realistic fiction (stories that are lifelike and believable), folklore (stories that were passed down from generation to generation), fantasy (stories that could not really take place), poetry (rhyme or rhythm), or nonfiction (stories with facts), (Tompkins, 2003). Within the different genres, students should be able to compare and contrast the points of view from which the stories are narrated (Common Core Learning Standards, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). Students may be asked to compare the story The Three Little Pigs narrated by the “Big Bad Wolf” versus the story narrated by the “Three Little Pigs”. Through these two different stories, students should be able to figure out the similarities and differences when the story is told by different points of view. It is important that students understand the difference in types of

genres because it will help them determine the meaning of vocabulary words and be able to fully comprehend the text (Robb, 2003; Tompkins, 2003).

4th Grade New York State English Language Arts Standards: Making Connections

Being able to make connections with the text is also important at ages nine through ten. There are three types of connections students can make: text-to-world, text-to-self, and text-to-text. Text-to-world connections are connections that enable students to see how the world and the text they are reading link together (Tompkins, 2003). An example of this might be that the students are reading a story about the presidents and they are able to apply information the students have learned from newspapers, or the television to the story they are reading. Text-to-self connections are those that students make between their personal lives and the text they are reading (Tompkins, 2003). An example of a text-to-self connection might be that the students are reading a story about friendships and they could draw on their own personal friendships they have to better comprehend the story. Text-to-text connections are links students make between the current texts they are reading and other texts they have read previously (Tompkins, 2003). An example of a text-to-text connection could be that the students are learning about space and they can apply information they are learning to the space story that the teacher just read them. It is pertinent that

students make these types of connections because like understanding the genre of the text, connections can enhance student comprehension (Tompkins, 2003).

Reading Programs in Elementary Schools

Reading Workshop

The reading workshop is designed to make literature the central resource to for helping students to learn. As Serafini (2001) states, “Literature illuminates life” (p. 15). Within the reading workshop, students take responsibility for their learning (Serafini, 2001; Tompkins, 2003). Students are provided with choice, space, and the activities are authentic (Serafini, 2001). Choice allows students to pick what they want to read, a comfortable, enjoyable space in the classroom gives students a supportive environment to learn in which develops readers, and authenticity provides experiences that allow students to make connections between their own lives and the real world (Serafini, 2001).

A typical reading workshop would include a small mini lesson in which the teacher teaches a skill students apply to their own reading. During the lesson, the teacher might find it appropriate to do a read a book to the whole class. Here the teacher demonstrates new skills—such as using the illustrations to figure out an unknown word, that he or she wanted their students to apply when the students read on their own (Beard & Antrim, 2010; Serafini, 2001; Tompkins, 2003). A lesson

lasts fifteen to twenty minutes and is followed by rotations through centers that consist of word activities, reading to self or with a buddy, writing, or listening to reading (Beard & Antrim, 2010; Serafini, 2001; Tompkins, 2003). The goal of the reading workshop is to create independent readers (Beard & Antrim, 2010; Serafini, 2001; Tompkins, 2003).

Guided Reading

During guided reading, teachers' work with students in small groups at their instructional reading level, a book that students' can read on their own, but still may need some guidance from their teacher (Tompkins, 2003). During a guided reading lesson, students read to themselves while the teacher listens to each student in the group to hear how he or she is progressing in his or her reading development (Partnership for Reading, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2007; Tompkins, 2003). Typically, the teacher records notes on what the students' strengths and needs of their reading skills (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007; Tompkins, 2003).

Students work with one book per week and move through the five stages of the reading process: prereading, reading, responding, exploring, and applying (Tompkins, 2003). Prereading is when the teacher introduces a new book and prepares students to read (Tompkins, 2003). Here, they help the students build their background knowledge on a topic related to the book (Tompkins, 2003). Reading is when the teacher guides students through the process of reading and then gradually letting the students do this on their own (Partnership for Reading, 2011; Tompkins,

2003). Responding is when students discuss with the teacher the book they have just read through conversations (Tomkins, 2003).

Teachers move from literal questions to high level questions such as “What would happen if...?” or “Why did...?” (Tomkins, 2003, p. 347). Teachers involve students in exploring with an activity that enables students to develop a better understanding of the text; an example of this might be a story map (Tompkins, 2003). Students apply when they independently use the reading strategies that they went over with the teacher in their small groups (Tompkins, 2003). Like the reading workshop, the goal of guided reading is to create independent and lifelong readers (Partnership for Reading, 2011; Tompkins, 2003).

Literacy Centers

Literacy centers contain meaningful literacy activities that students can work on in small groups (Tomkins, 2003). Literacy centers are designed by the teachers so students can enhance and manage their own learning (Tomkins, 2003). The centers enable students to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills; they also foster an enjoying of reading and writing (Tomkins, 2003). Students keep their own checklists to make sure that they have completed all the activities required of them during that day (Tomkins, 2003).

Literacy centers might include reading the room, write the room, word work, independent reading, technology or word work. Students engage in reading and writing the room when they read or write certain words they find throughout the

classroom on a word wall or hanging posters throughout the room (Tomkins, 2003). In a technology center students use Smartboards or computers to practice and apply skills and strategies they learned (Tomkins, 2003). Students engage in word work when they practice vocabulary words or word analysis skills and strategies through activities such as word sorts, word games or manipulation with magnetic letters (Tomkins, 2003).

There are many different types of literacy centers teachers can create to help students become independent readers (Tomkins, 2003). Literacy centers enhance a student's reading skills and strategies. This type of learning provides students with choice, engagement and independence (Tomkins, 2003).

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

I recognized that asking students purposeful questions that encourage them to think beyond the text proved to be a challenge for some teachers. I also realized that asking purposeful questions are important because these questions can help extend students' knowledge of new literacy content (Dantonio, 1990; Morgan & Saxton, 2006; Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Throughout this study I focused on answering the question: How does the teachers' use of questions support kindergartener, and first, and fourth grader students' reading comprehension?

The findings from this study uncovered new ways to ask purposeful questions and enabled me to see how asking higher level questions has a positive impact on the students' ability to comprehend new literacy information.

Participants

I observed three elementary teachers: a kindergarten, a first grade, and a fourth grade teacher, who all use questioning in their classrooms. All three participants were middle-aged females who have at least three years of teaching experience in one of the local school districts. Each participant has earned her master's degree. The kindergarten teacher has been teaching for six years, and the first and fourth grade teacher have been teaching for sixteen years.

Each participant completed the informed consent statement (see Appendix A). I kept each participant's identity confidential through use of a pseudonym. I observed three teachers at various grade levels. All the teachers were females in different suburban schools districts in western New York. Each of the classrooms were inclusive settings. Table 4.1 below lists the demographics of the classroom, and the teachers' amount of experience. I have given each teacher a pseudo name to ensure their confidentiality: Mrs. C., Mrs. B., Mrs. S.

Table 4.1: Teacher Information

	Current Grade Level	Number of Students in the Classroom	Years of Teaching Experience	Certifications	Other Grades Taught
Mrs. C.	Kindergarten	21	6	Early Childhood, Childhood, Special Education, Literacy	1,3,5
Mrs. B.	1	21	16	Childhood, Special Education, Literacy, Reading Recovery	Classroom (2,5,6) Reading Specialist (1,3,4) Special Ed. (6)
Mrs. S.	4	19	16	B.S. in chemistry, M.S. in Education	1,3

I had the opportunity to visit each classroom two times for forty-five minutes during each teacher's literacy block. I also interviewed each teacher twice to collect additional information about their views of questioning and how they use this strategy in the classroom.

Context of the Study

The kindergarten teacher taught full day kindergarten program in a school located in a suburban area in a medium sized school district in western New York. There were 21 students in her classroom.

The first grade teacher taught in a school located in a suburban area and the district was considered to be larger than most school districts in western New York. There were 21 children in her classroom.

The fourth grade teacher taught in a school located also in a suburban area in western New York. It was a medium sized school district in western New York. There were 19 children in her classroom.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am a 23 year old Caucasian student living in western New York. I received my bachelor's degree in 2010 from SUNY Fredonia in childhood inclusive education, grades one through six. In addition, I have an early childhood inclusive education certification, grades birth through second. I received my master's degree from The College at Brockport, State University of New York in the area of literacy. I aspire to be a literacy specialist. I graduated in the spring of 2012.

Currently, I substitute teach for multiple school districts, which allows me to gain further experience in teaching before I get my own classroom. Working as a substitute teacher in a variety of classrooms and with a variety of students has definitely taught me the 'do's' and 'don'ts' in the classroom. This includes making

sure I hold the attention of the class, as well as keeping the students engaged in their learning throughout the day beyond the plans of the classroom teacher. I have learned to be consistent with how I discipline students while still allowing them to enjoy learning. For example, I have learned that being patient and calm with students will keep students at ease, and making students aware that they can come to me with any problems will help them trust me as a teacher.

I would like to become a third or fourth grade teacher because students at that level and age have matured a bit to the point where I believe teachers can joke around and have fun with the students. In addition, the type of literacy material students use in third and fourth grade has always interested me. I like teaching creative writing as well as reading stories that students can discuss afterwards.

As a teacher-researcher, my educational philosophies influence how I instruct and run the classrooms in which I teach. I believe it is my job as an educator to expand the students' knowledge through scaffolding and differentiating my instruction to meet their needs. For example, before reading a story, I ask the students to predict what they think will happen in the story by connecting knowledge they have to the current story. For instance, I might ask them to tell me from the cover page what they think will happen in the story and then ask them to think about how those predictions can connect to their own lives. In addition, I make sure that I vary the way I invite students to engage with the content so each student has the opportunity to participate and learn. I use a mixture of discussions, hands-on activities, or mini lectures to introduce and share new information. I believe in using

real-world experiences that enable students to make connections. For example, during reading I encourage students to reference the materials around the room to help them decode words they may not know or understand. Using the materials available to the students is a skill that is essential in the real world to develop independence. This is because referencing teaches students that the answer to their questions can be solved on their own using what they have in front of them to help answer that question.

In addition, I think it is important to engage students in hands-on activities that are engaging, meaningful, and memorable and challenge or expand their thinking within different subject areas. An example of a hands-on activity I would use is word sorts to learn new words.

Student participation is very important to me and I am always thinking of ways to alter the plans the classroom teacher leaves for me that motivate all the students to participate. During the day I make sure to invite students to interact with the Smartboard or the whiteboard during math or literacy activities, as I believe learning should be active. I use praise and encouragement to get all students to participate. I believe using praise and words of encouragement are two ways that create an inviting, warm, and welcoming tone in the classroom. I use praise when I catch a student following directions, participating, or helping other students. I believe that when I notice these types of behaviors and actions, it is important to reward the student with a direct compliment, such as "Thank you, Alexa for following directions" or positive encouragement, "Alexa, thank you for following directions. Keep up the good work!" I understand that students want to feel accepted and

recognized throughout the day; the environment can be a big contributing factor. My use of consistent modeling and feedback can encourage the students to be the most successful in their learning. I also recognize that providing students with ample think time and practice with new material will ensure their success.

In addition, I recognize the importance of communicating with parents and peers to ensure students' success. In my future classrooms, I will make sure that I maintain constant communication with the parents so they can be involved in their child's success. Communicating with my colleagues will also be pertinent in order for me to brainstorm and share and ensure that our students are learning and succeeding at their highest potential.

As an educator I believe that there is always room for improvement. Like the students, I believe I can always be always learning from them as well as my peers. Therefore, I believe it is important to partake in professional development seminars to better my skills as a teacher. Participating in professional development seminars enables me to keep learning the most current ways to educate my students and allows me to improve my teaching skills as well as improve my students' learning. As a result, I believe it's also important for me to reflect on my own teaching practices so I can better help my student's succeed.

Data Collection

Through this study, I collected data using observations of each teacher's literacy block. I also conducted two forty-five minute interviews with each teacher.

Classroom Observations of Literacy Instruction

I observed each teacher once every three weeks during her literacy instruction. During my observations, I recorded the teacher's interactions with her students and how the students respond as a result (see Appendix B).

Teacher Interviews

During the interview phase, I asked nine general questions in the first interview and four questions in the second interview (see Appendix C and D). The answers gave me more insight into what the teacher's thought processes were during her instruction. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes in school during a free period, or after school. I interviewed each teacher twice within the six weeks. I asked open-ended questions during the interviews to promote thoughtful answers. The first interview asked the teachers mainly about their questioning philosophy, whereas the second interview asked more direct questions about how they used questioning in the classroom. I explained that my intention of the interview or observations is not to inhibit or criticize their teaching in any way. The interviews provided an insight for me, as the teacher-researcher, to gain a clearer understanding of their questioning philosophies.

Data Analysis

Classroom Observations

After conducting the first classroom observation, I read and reread the data looking for any patterns related to how the teacher's language, her use of questions,

student response and so forth. After my second classroom observation, I engaged in a similar process of reading and rereading the data, again coding for teacher's language, her use of questions, students' response and so forth. After completing the coding of the second observation, I looked across the two observations to see what, if any, similarities exist and how I may be able to develop themes across the observations.

Teacher Interviews

After conducting the first interview, I transcribed the teacher's response verbatim. I then read and reread the responses coding the interview data for aspects of how the teacher planned her instruction, the types of questions she anticipates asking and her thought process while she is interacting with her students. The second interview will then allow me to ask further questions on these aspects of teaching allowing me to gain a deeper insight as to how she prepares for her instruction to make sure the students are able to meet her lesson goals.

Procedures

Weeks One, Two, Three

Before beginning the research process I asked each teacher to sign the informed consent form (see Appendix A), which allowed me to being the research

process. Each week consisted of two days: the first day, I conducted a forty-five minute classroom observation during the literacy block. Here, I looked at how each teacher used questions during her group or guided lessons. On the second day, I conducted a forty-five minute interview with the classroom teacher to learn more about her questioning philosophy in the classroom.

Weeks Four, Five, Six

During these weeks, I conducted a second forty-five minute observation as well as a second interview with each teacher. During the second observation, I was able to make connections with the first interview by witnessing how her questioning philosophy came into play throughout the lesson. With the second interview, I learned more specifically what her goals were when she asks her students questions during her lessons. Therefore, I observed and interviewed each teacher twice over the course of six weeks.

Weeks Six

During the sixth week, I looked at both observations and interviews to detect any patterns across the three teachers in their responses or interactions throughout the research process. These patterns allowed me to draw some conclusions about how teachers' use questioning in their classrooms.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

During my six-week study I increased the validity of the study's findings through my use of the two observations and the two interviews. This study allowed me to see how teachers' use questioning in their classrooms.

I triangulated the observation and interview data, which also increased the credibility of my study because I gathered information from three classroom teachers to prove my study is valid (Tracy, 2011). In addition, the validity of my study increased because I drew my conclusions based on the observation and interview to illustrate what I found.

The findings helped me discover what other teachers believe the purpose of questioning is in the classroom and how the teachers' use the strategy in their classrooms. I believe that the findings from this study are useful for any teachers or teacher researchers because they allow them to see the benefits of using questioning the classroom. Because studies are full of interpretation and opinions, I used grounded theories to make sure that my data and findings are valid and credible (Tracy 2011).

Limitations of the Study

As with all studies, I recognized that there are a few limitations to note about this study. The first is the number of participants. I conducted my study with three

elementary teachers, which provided a small picture of what each teacher was doing with her students and what was or was not happening at each grade level. A second limitation is my interpretation of the data. Because I used interviews and observations, my interpretation of the data is informed by my perspectives and my experiences and as a result, different from another person. A third limitation relates to the interview process. I acknowledge that the teachers' responses to the interview questions may potentially be deceptive (Tracy, 2011). During the interviews, the questions that I asked may have skewed the teacher's response. For example, the teacher may have withheld information because she did not feel comfortable or she wanted to appease me, the interviewer. In addition, all of the teachers I observed and interviewed were females. This may have influenced the questions that each teacher asked the students or the responses they gave in the interview process.

Summary

Through my study of how three elementary teachers used questions with their students, I learned how the use of questioning increases student's knowledge and understanding of what they have read. I believe that the use of effective questions is important and that it is my job as a teacher to ask questions that enhances and builds my students' knowledge. Providing my students with a chance to think beyond the text can only enhance their cognitive thinking skills (Morgan & Saxton, 2006).

Through my research, I learned more about how the teachers' use of questions benefits students in a positive way.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how three elementary teachers used questions during literacy instruction. Throughout the study, I focused on how each teacher used questions to support her students' reading comprehension. During my study, I collected data based on each teacher's educational philosophy and how she implemented questions during guided reading, sharing reading and read aloud lessons.

In this chapter, I present the three teachers case studies and then provide a cross case analysis of the approaches and practices of the three teachers to answer the research question: How do elementary teachers use questions in the classroom?

Three Case Studies

Mrs. C.: Kindergarten

Mrs. C. has been teaching for six years. She has taught kindergarten for two years at the same school. During her literacy instruction she likes to focus on a balanced literacy approach in order for her emergent students to gain an understanding of literacy. In her interview Mrs. C. stated:

Some students respond strongly to the whole language approach, others respond best to a phonics-based approach, while others are most

successful when exposed to both types of teaching and learning activities. This is likely why the Balanced Literacy Approach has become widely used in many districts. (Interview, 2/10/)

Mrs. C. divides her instruction into smaller meaningful parts so that her students are able to develop new skills, make connections, and make new meaning of the texts they read (Interview, 2/10/12). She says, “through constructivism, students are able to explore, make connections, and develop their own meaning” (Interview, 2/10/12). Over the years, Mrs. C. has learned that students learn in many different ways so she tries to make her Reading Workshop time accessible to all students by creating different learning centers. In each of her centers she includes, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and technology.

Mrs. C.’s Goals for Questioning

“When I ask my students questions, I hope to help my students make connections, think critically, and remain focused on learning. For myself, I hope to develop a sense of what my students know, have learned, and still need exposure to.”

Mrs. C. (Interview, 2/10/12)

How Mrs. C. Demonstrates Her Goals of Questioning

Whole Group Lesson

It is January 18, 2012; my very first observation of Mrs. C. Mrs. C. has the students gathered at the carpet. She tells them that they are going to be reading a book

about sledding today. She points to the cover and asks, "Why can't we do what is on the cover today?" Some of the students are looking around not listening, while others let their eyes wander to the window. Five students raise their hands. Mrs. C. calls on one who says, "Because there is no snow outside!"

Mrs. C. then proceeds to say, "Friends, I would like you to listen for all of the 'winter items' mentioned throughout the story" (Observation, 1/18/12). The text describes activities that people participate in during the winter such as sledding, making snowmen, and snow angels. After Mrs. C. finishes the short, non-fiction story, she asks, "What winter items did you see in this book? Remember they should only be things we see or use in the winter." The students answer with "scarf," "snowman," "sled," "gloves." One student says, "a hat." Mrs. C. stops and asks the students, "Well, what kind of hat did you see in the story? A baseball hat?" The students laugh and one says "No, a hat for when it's cold out!" Mrs. C. replies, "What could we call that type of hat?" Another student answers, "A winter hat." "Great job! Yes!" says Mrs. C.

Guided Reading Lesson

As the students are working on their center work, Mrs. C. calls four students to the blue half-mooned reading table (Observation, 1/18/12). They were working on a text about emotions called *We are all Glad* (Fetty, 2000). Mrs. C. says, "Friends take a look through the book at each page by yourself and then we will talk about why some people feel glad in this book and why some people feel sad."

After the students have had a few minutes looking through the book and all have closed their books, Mrs. C. asks, "So why do some people feel glad and some people feel sad in this book?" One student answers, "The castle is falling, so the boy feels sad. Then his friend helps him and he feels happy." Mrs. C. says, "Excellent! I like how you showed me which picture you were referring to."

Summary

Both the whole group lesson and the guided reading lesson illustrate Mrs. C.'s ability to ask her students questions where they are able to demonstrate their knowledge by providing the evidence from the text. "I ask a lot of 'how do you know that questions' so students are able to prove their thinking to me" says Mrs. C (Interview, 2/18/12). This was evident when she asked the student in the whole group lesson to make meaning and clarify what he meant by a 'winter hat' (Observation, 1/18/12). She also said, "I use questioning to spark connections with my students. I want them to use their personal lives and connect it to what we are reading or doing in class" (Interview, 2/18/12). This was evident in Mrs. C.'s whole group lesson when she asked students to make the connection to sledding and how they were not able to do so that day because there was no snow outside.

In the guided reading lesson when the students read *We are all Glad* (Fetty & Bell, 2000) Mrs. C. asked them to look at character development by asking about the different emotions that the characters were feeling throughout the story. When she asked the students to tell her why the characters were feeling a certain emotion, she

was asking the students to think critically and analyze the text. Thinking about how the characters felt throughout the text required to think deeply because the students had to put themselves in another person's shoes. Here, Mrs. C. was creating opportunities for the students to begin to develop these skills.

Mrs. C.'s Views on Using Questions

"I utilize questioning frequently in my classroom for a variety of purposes. These purposes include evaluating student knowledge (prior to, during, and at the end of a lesson), motivating students to be active participants in the learning process, as well as to assist in developing connections."

Mrs. C. (Interview, 2/10/12)

How Mrs. C. Uses Questions

Whole Group Lesson

It is February 8, 2012; the students are gathered on the carpet listening to a non-fiction text about penguins. Mrs. C. begins the lesson asking the students, "What do you already know about penguins? Turn and tell a friend." Students turn and begin to share facts with each other about penguins. After a minute, Mrs. C. asks for students to share what they talked about with their friends. Students share all kinds of facts: "they waddle," "they slide on their bellies," "they eat fish," and "they do not fly." One student says, "Well, the mommy penguin has to go collect food." Mrs. C. asks, "Do you remember why she has to do that?" The student replies, "Well, the

daddy penguin has to sit on the egg for a while until it hatches so they need food before they sit on the egg for a while.” “Yes! It is kind of like hibernation. The dad has to sit on the egg for a while so they need to collect enough food before they have to sit on the egg,” shared another student (Observation 2/8/12).

After Mrs. C. activates the students’ prior knowledge about penguins, she goes on to read the book, *Watch Me Grow Penguins!* (DK Publishing, 2004). She stops at the page where the text explains that penguins have claws and she asks the students, “Why do you think penguins have sharp claws?” One student replies, “So they can walk on the snow and ice.” Mrs. C. replies, “Well, why would that help them?” Another student shares that the claws will help them dig in the snow and ice to help them walk. Mrs. C. gives the student a smile and says, “Exactly!”

Mrs. C. ended the lesson by asking the students to “think about where penguins live, what kind of weather do they need to stay alive?” About seventy-five percent of the students raised their hands to answer the question. She called on one student who said, “Snow, and cold weather!” “Yes, you are right! Cold weather is where we find most penguins. It helps them stay alive.”

Guided Reading Lesson

In Mrs. C.’s guided reading group on February 8, 2012 there are three students. Mrs. C. calls each of them to the blue half mooned reading table while the other students continue their individual work or move on to their center work. The level of noise in the room seem a bit high to me as the students are working in groups

at each center; however, the reading group located in the back of the room is able to focus on Mrs. C. who sits across from them. At the table sits three students, each of them side by side. Mrs. C. displays three punctuation cards, each with a different form: question mark, comma, exclamation point. "What do we use a question mark for?" Mrs. C. asks the students. "Well, when we are asking someone a question," a student replies. "Great answer! What are exclamation points used for?" "When you are excited," replies another. "What about a comma?" asks Mrs. C. The students seem unsure of the use of the comma and no one volunteers an answer. "Well, we use a comma when we are listing things. Like if I said I would like the blue, green, yellow, and red tables to clean up from their centers, I would put a comma in between each of the table names." She then proceeds to write the list on a whiteboard.

After she is finished, she asks, "If I were to say your bus was haunted, which of these would I use?" (she points to the punctuation cards). The students look at each other a bit confused. She waits a few seconds before asking the students what the word, "haunted" means. One student shares that word means "scary." Mrs. C. says, "Would I say, my bus is haunted. My bus is haunted? Or my bus is haunted!" The students laugh and conclude that the correct punctuation for the sentence is an exclamation point.

After the students finish the mini lesson, Mrs. C. says, "When you read *What Do You Have?* (McCracken, 1993) think about the punctuation we talked about today in our lesson. Think about what kinds of punctuation you notice, and what readers do when they come across that kind of punctuation. You may 'whisper read' the book to

yourselves.” After the students ‘whisper read’ the books to themselves, Mrs. C. says, “The next time we meet, we will practice reading this books again and then talk about what we read. Take this book home with you tonight and practice reading it to a family member!”

Summary

Throughout Mrs. C.’s whole group lesson, it was evident that she was activating the students’ prior knowledge because she asked students to talk about what they know about penguins before she read *Watch Me Grow Penguins!* (DK Publishing, 2004) aloud. In addition, she also asked her students to apply what they know about penguins throughout the story to her questions by asking them to think about why penguins might need sharp claws. This required the students to think critically and use information they had already learned and apply it to Mrs. C.’s question.

It was also evident that Mrs. C. asked her students to demonstrate their knowledge using specific examples. When Mrs. C. conducted her mini lesson on punctuation, she gave her students an example (“My bus is haunted”) and asked, “Which one of these would I use?” (Pointing to the punctuation cards). Here she wanted her students to demonstrate what they know and have learned about punctuation. In addition, Mrs. C. asked her students to apply their of punctuation while they read *What Do You Have?* (McCracken, 1993).

Mrs. C.'s View on the Benefits of Higher-Level Thinking

"Asking higher-level questions allows students to make sense of the content in relation to their prior knowledge."

Mrs. C. (Interview, 2/10/12)

How Mrs. C. Demonstrates Use of Higher-Level Thinking Through Her Use of Questions

Whole Group Lesson

As mentioned in the previous section, Mrs. C. provided opportunities for her students to develop their higher level thinking throughout her group lesson on February 8th, 2012 when she conducted a read-aloud with *Watch Me Grow Penguins* (DK Publishing, 2004). As she is reading aloud, she asked the students to think about why penguins have sharp claws. One student responded, "So they can walk on the snow and ice." Mrs. C. elicits further clarification by asking, "So why would penguins need sharp claws to walk on the snow and ice?" This creates an opportunity for the students to work on their analytical thinking skills through her questioning.

Guided Reading

On January 18, 2012, Mrs. C.'s students are sitting at the half-moon guided reading table. The students are working on a new book called *We Are All Glad!* (Fetty, 2000), Mrs. C. says, "While you are taking a picture walk, think about why

some people are happy and others are sad.” When the students are finished, she asks them, “Why are some people in the book happy and others are sad?” (Observation, 1/18/12). One student used a specific example from the story and says, “The blocks fell over, so the girl feels sad. Then her friend helps her and she feels happy.” “Has something like this ever happened to you?” asks Mrs. C. “Yes, one time I was trying to build a tower with the blocks during centers and someone knocked it over.” “How did that make you feel?” “I made me feel sad because I worked really hard to build it.” This illustrates that this student has done exactly what Mrs. C. hoped she would do. Here, Mrs. C. is expecting that her students what they know about feeling happy, and sad to analyze the story and how the characters are feeling.

Summary

These examples indicate that Mrs. C. uses questions for a variety of purposes. During the whole group lesson, she asked her students to use their comprehension, application, analytical thinking skills when she further prompted her students to think critically about why penguins might need sharp claws. This kind of questioning allows students to apply their knowledge of what they already know about penguins to answer her question fully.

Mrs. C. also used questions to help her students make text-to-self connections in the guided reading lesson when she asks her students if they could relate to the characters in the story. This helped students make connections and think critically using their own emotions to make connections to the characters in the story.

Mrs. B.: Second Grade Teacher

Mrs. B. has been teaching for sixteen years. She has taught general education in grades second, fifth and sixth; reading recovery in grades one, three and four; and students with disabilities in grade six. She is currently teaching second grade in a suburban school district in western New York.

Mrs. B. believes that in order for learning to take place, “children need to feel safe, respected, and cared for every day. They need to be in an environment that fosters growth and promotes life-long learning” (Interview, 2/2/12). She believes that children need a “positive and enthusiastic role model” (Interview, 2/2/12). In addition, Mrs. B. believes that, “children need differentiated instruction based on their learning styles, academic needs, and unique qualities” (Interview, 2/2/12).

Mrs. B. feels that a balanced literacy approach is the most successful in the classroom (Interview, 2/2/12). She asks her students on a daily basis to partake in reading and writing workshop. In reading workshop, students participate in a whole group mini lesson, guided reading groups, as well as The Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006). In addition, Mrs. B. conferences individually with her students during reading and writing, taking anecdotal notes on each student. Mrs. B. says, “Embedded in my literacy approach is purposeful and explicit instruction where I teach strategies and skills that ensure learning and allow my students to become more independent” (Interview, 2/2/12).

Mrs. B.'s Views on Using Questions

"I use questioning in my classroom to connect new learning for my students, find different approaches to solve problems, dig deeper for understanding, and assess comprehension of the text."

Mrs. B. (Interview, 2/2/12)

How Mrs. B. Demonstrates Her Goals of Questioning

Mrs. B. uses questions in the classroom to allow the students to demonstrate their knowledge, comprehension, application, and analytical skills. While observing Mrs. B., I could clearly see that she connects new learning for her students, works on problem solving, digging for deeper understanding, and assesses her students' comprehension of the text. On January 24, 2012, I observed Mrs. B. conduct a guided reading lesson with five students. She was reviewing the book *The Broken Flower Pot* (Smith, 2000) with the students and introducing *Popcorn Fun* (Smith, 2001). The students are sitting at the half-moon table while the other students are working on *The Daily 5* (Boushey & Mosher, 2006).

Mrs. B. holds up *The Broken Flower Pot* and asks her students, "What happened in this book? Use the book to go back through and look if you don't remember." One student responds, "They broke the flower pot." Mrs. B. is looking for further clarification so she asks, "Who is they?" The student says, "Joe and Katie broke the flower pot." After Mrs. B. reviews more details in this book, she tells the

students that *The Broken Flower Pot* is important to *Popcorn Fun* because the characters in the story are the same.

As the students have finished previewing *Popcorn Fun*, Mrs. B. listens in on one student. She asks the student what has happened so far in the book to check and make sure that she has understood the story. “Why do you think the mom wants honey? You looked confused,” says Mrs. B. The student replies, “I don’t know?” Mrs. B. then asks the student to go back and reread the paragraph again that discussed why the mother wanted honey and the student figures out that the mother wants honey for the popcorn. Here, Mrs. B. is checking to make sure that the student in comprehending the storyline.

Summary

From this lesson, it is evident to me that Mrs. B. allows her students to use past knowledge to connect to new knowledge. She is guiding the students to make text to text connection between the characters they have read about so they can predict what will happen in *Popcorn Fun*. Mrs. B. says, “I try to invite the students to make connections as often as possible so they can make meaning of the text” (Interview, 2/2/12). Mrs. B. encourages her students to use text to self, text to text, and text to world connections throughout each book she reads with her students.

Mrs. B.'s Views on Using Questions

“Most of my questioning relates to what I am teaching at the time. For example, when teaching and talking about story elements, I want to find out if students can identify the setting, characters, problem, and solution.”

Mrs. B. (Interview, 2/2/12)

How Mrs. B. Uses Questions

As I continued to observe Mrs. B. in her guided reading group on February 2, 2012, Mrs. B. wants her students to find the problem in the story *Popcorn Fun* (Smith, 2001). To accomplish this, she asks her students to put a Post-it note with the word ‘problem’ written on it to illustrate where they had found a problem in the story to create a visual reminder. This was Mrs. B.’s goal of the lesson (Interview, 2/2/12). She made it clear to the students that there might be more than one problem in the story.

After the students finished reading the story she asks her students, “What was one problem in the story?” One student says, “They ate all the popcorn before Mom.” Another student says, “Well, it’s raining out so they are bored.” Mrs. B. then says, “It seems like the main problem in the story is that they ate all the popcorn. How did they solve that problem?” Then one student says, “They made more!”

Summary

This lesson demonstrates to me that Mrs. B. was using questions to get the students to see the main problem of the story and what the characters did to solve it. “I used the Post-it notes to make sure that each student did his/her own thinking and it made it visible to me” (Interview, 3/1/12). One of Mrs. B.’s goals for using questions in her classroom is, “I want my students to discover and think about how characters solve problems throughout the story” (Interview, 2/2/12). This lesson illustrates that she is able to conduct this type of thinking with her students through her use of questions.

Mrs. B.’s Views on the Benefits of Higher-Level Thinking

“I believe that all students need opportunities to think critically and problem solve. I also find differentiating my questions helps me reach students that need to be challenged.”

(Interview, 2/2/12)

How Mrs. B. Demonstrates Use of Higher-Level Thinking Through Her Use of Questions

When talking to Mrs. B., she stated that higher level thinking skills such as connections, visualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and thinking about how the characters and the setting might affect the story play a major role in higher level

thinking (Interview, 3/1/12. Mrs. B. says, “These higher level thinking skills will help them throughout life.” (Interview, 3/1/12).

Observing Mrs. B. for the first time on February 2, 2012, the students are reading *Popcorn Fun* by Annette Smith (2001). In this guided reading lesson, Mrs. B. wants the students to make predictions about the text but did not use the word ‘prediction’ yet because she said her students would not quite understand that vocabulary yet (Interview, 3/1/12). She asks her students, “What do you think might happen in this story?” “I think that there would be a problem in the story because the same characters from the other story got into trouble,” says one student. “Excellent! I would like you to please read *Popcorn Fun* and be thinking about the kinds of problems that these characters run into.”

After the students read the book she says, “I want you now to place a Post-it note wherever you think there is a problem in this story.” Mrs. B. asks, “What was one problem you found in the story?” The student says, “They ate all the popcorn.” Mrs. B. says, “Actually, that is a retell of the story, lets focus more on the problems in this story.” She proceeds to prompt for further discussion by asking everyone, “Was there anything else that went wrong?” Another student replies, “Well, it’s raining outside, so they are bored” (Observation, 2/2/12).

During my second observation on March 1, 2012, four students are reading *A Bike for Alex* by Elsie Nellie (2000) in a guided reading group. All of the students are seated in the back at the half-mooned reading table. Mrs. B.’s goal for the lesson is to

engage students in higher-level thinking—making connections and predicting—by asking them questions that pertain to the characters and the problem in the story.

Prior to the students reading the book, Mrs. B. asked the students to make predictions based on what they experienced during their book walk. After a few students shared their responses, Mrs. B. asks, “Do you think there might be a problem in this story?” (Observation, 3/1/12). The students all reply with, “Yes!” and then she asks one student to predict, “What do you think the problem might be in this story? Use the pictures in your book to help you with your prediction.” The student answers, “Well, I think that the problem might be with Alex’s bike because on this page the bike is in pieces.” “Great observation and prediction!” says Mrs. B. (Observation, 3/1/12). As the lesson finished, Mrs. B. asks all the students to, “Think of a time when you got something new and I want you to tell me how you felt. You can even close your eyes if you want to help you think about it. Put a quiet thumb up when you are ready to share.” (Observation, 3/1/12). Through her prompt, Mrs. B. is inviting the students to make connections to the text about how Alex felt when she received her new bike. One student says, “I got a new bike!” another says, “I got a new stuffed animal that made me really happy and excited!” Mrs. B. replies with, “those are all great connections that can help you understand how Alex was feeling throughout this story!”

Summary

When talking to Mrs. B., she stated on March 1, 2012, “sometimes she struggles to ask the right questions because I think of my questions on the spot.” For her lesson on March 1st, 2012 she said that she planned out her questions for that lesson in advance and she felt her questions were more targeted. She focused on her language of the questions after reading the article, “Using Higher Order Questioning to Accelerate Students’ Growth in Reading” (Peterson & Taylor, 2012).

Mrs. B. used question in a variety of different ways similar to Mrs. C. She asks questions to make sure that students are making personal connections to the story like they did after they read *A Bike for Alex* as well as a formative assessment to guide her instruction. She also asks questions to elicit the students’ comprehension, application, analytical and synthesis skills. This is evident when the students are reading *Popcorn Fun* (Smith, 2001). She asked her students to think about what kinds of problems the characters encounter and why they are big problems for the characters. Mrs. B. also invited them to think about how the problem is resolved in the story. As a result, I observed Mrs. B. asking questions that allowed the students opportunities to make personal connections as well as develop critical thinking skills.

Mrs. S.: Fourth Grade Teacher

Mrs. S. has been teaching for sixteen years in a suburban school district in western New York. Mrs. S. states:

My teaching approaches include, constructivism, brain-based, and social/cultural tactics. I try to give the students as much hands-on learning experiences as possible in order to make connections to the students' prior knowledge and experiences. I believe that learning is innate and I look for patterns in student learning to improve my teaching. I believe that motivation and positive reinforcement are the key to success in a classroom environment. (Interview, 1/30/12).

Mrs. S. likes to use a balanced literacy approach when teaching reading and writing. She includes all aspects of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in her lessons. Mrs. S. says, "I try to focus on strategies for decoding, comprehension, language development, mechanics, strategies for writing and the development of writer's craft" (Interview, 1/30/12). Mrs. S. asks her student to read and write often, providing them feedback through conferencing. She also uses a variety of groupings during reading and writing workshop. In regards to using questions, Mrs. S. states, "I usually plan out my questions ahead of time to make the time with her guided reading groups more effective" (Interview, 1/30/12).

Mrs. S.'s Views on Using Questions

"I use questioning to promote analysis of text, activate prior knowledge, prompt a deep discussion leading to a deeper meaning of text, evaluate, and generate new knowledge."

(Interview, 1/30/12)

How Mrs. S. Uses Questions

On February 2, 2012, I observe Mrs. S.'s fourth grade classroom; she is working with six students in a guided reading group in the back of the room. All the students gather around a square table with the story, *Marven of the Great Northern Woods* (Lasky, 2002) for discussion. The story is based on a true story of a Jewish boy and a lumberjack and how they become friends. Marven is sent by his parents to a camp far away from the city to try and find help for his family that is experiencing influenza.

At the table, Mrs. S. has her list of questions that she wanted to ask her students. Prior to the lesson Mrs. S. told me, "My goal for this lesson through my questions is for the students to be able to synthesize their ideas, create new ideas, and check for the understanding of vocabulary" (Observation, 2/2/12). Mrs. S. begins the guided reading group with the question, "What was happening in the beginning of the story?" "to get the students' brains thinking about the context of the text" (Interview, 2/29/12). One of the students says, "There is influenza and people are dying" (Observation, 2/17/12). "Yes, there are people dying. An influenza means that there is a serious disease going on throughout the country," says Mrs. S.

Summary

In the beginning of the lesson, Mrs. S. is checking the students' understanding of the text to assess their comprehension skills. This allows her to get an idea of what

the students were able to understand while reading the story on their own before she prompts the students for further discussion (Interview, 2/29/12).

Mrs. S.'s Goals for Questioning

"I want my students to be able to make connections, synthesize, evaluate and judge when I ask them questions."

(Interview, 2/29/12)

How Mrs. S. Demonstrates the Goals of Questioning

One of her final questions for this group about *Marven and the Great Northern Woods* (Lasky, 2002) was, "How does Momma show her deep love for Marven? Use specific evidence to show me your thinking." This proves to be a challenging question for the students many give general answers such as, "They don't speak English, and she wants him to be strong." However, Mrs. S. lets her students know that she wants them to use specific page numbers and examples from the text. In the end, Mrs. S. models for her students: "Okay, on page 414 here's one thing..." Mrs. S. reads a passage about latkes and knishes that illustrates Momma's love for Marven and explains why this shows Momma's deep love for Marven. Then she says, "Now, I want you try finding your own example like I just did about how Momma illustrates her deep love for Marven" (Observation, 2/17/12). After Mrs. S. demonstrated her thinking, one student is able to use evidence from the text and say, "On page 416, Momma sews lining in Marven's hat. This will help keep him warm and it shows how much she loves Marven" (Observation, 2/17/12). From this lesson,

it is evident to me that Mrs. S. works with her students to promote discussion of a text to help her students gain a deeper understanding of the text.

Summary

In this observation of Mrs. S.'s guided reading lesson, I saw her ask students to provide her with specific evidence to illustrate their understanding of the story and be able to back up their statements with examples from the text. When this skill proved to be challenging for the students, she modeled her own thinking and the process so the students are able to see what she was asking them to do. Asking students to back up their statements with evidence from the text, "promotes analysis of the text and it creates deep discussion which can lead to a deeper meaning of the text," says Mrs. S. in her interview on January 30, 2012.

Mrs. S.'s View on the Benefits of Higher Level Thinking

"When asking my students higher-level questions, I want them to synthesize their ideas, evaluate, and create new insights."

(Interview, 2/29/12)

How Mrs. S. Demonstrates Use of Higher-Level Thinking Through Her Use of Questions

When I interviewed Mrs. S. on February 29, 2012, I ask her, “What are the benefits to having a list of questions in front of you to ask your students during guided reading?” She replied, “My questions are more thought out and they are more purposeful. It benefits both me and my students because they get more out of the lesson and I do not have to think of those types of questions on the spot.”

I also asked Mrs. S. to explain her thought process of how she asks students questions throughout her lessons. She first talked about how she used to ask her questions in a hierarchy to build the students’ knowledge using *Bloom’s Taxonomy*. However, now she asks questions at different levels. For example, she said that she might ask her students an evaluation question or a critical thinking questions right away because she finds that some texts might lend themselves to that better than asking a knowledge question.

Mrs. S. finds this technique useful now because she believes it keeps her students who need to be challenged as well as her students that are achieving on the lower end, “thinking on their toes” (Interview, 2/29/12). She also noted that, “higher-level questions can be challenging to ask because of the types of students in your classroom. Sometimes I find it frustrating since this is a concern in the new *Common Core Standards*” (Interview, 2/29/12).

Summary

Through my observations of and interviews with Mrs. S., I found that she asks questions to “mentally prepare” students for a more rich discussion. These questions are simple like I saw in the beginning of the guided reading group when Mrs. S. asked her students to summarize what was happening in the beginning of *Marven and the Great Northern Woods* (Lasky, 2002). In addition, Mrs. S. also asks her students to think critically about the characters. This was evident when Mrs. S. asked her students to think about how Momma showed Marven her love. Here, she asked each student to take his or her answers directly from the text. Mrs. S. is checking to make sure they provide links back to their reading to make sure their answers make sense and connect with the reading.

Looking Across the Case Studies

Research Question: *How do elementary teachers use quality questions during literacy instruction?*

Looking across the case studies, I see similarities among the teachers’ use of questions during literacy instruction. .

Use of Questions

Most of each teacher’s questions, during her guided reading groups, derived from the context of the text. Mrs. C. and Mrs. B. both asked questions that invited their students to make predictions about the text they were reading and to think about

the characters emotions in the text. For example, when Mrs. C. asked her student's questions about the text called *We are All Glad*, (Fetty, 2000) she asked them to think about why some characters were feeling happy while others felt sad. Mrs. B. was asked her students to make predictions based on their own experiences connected to the context of the text as well as their preview of the text before actually reading.

When watching Mrs. S., she asked questions to check students' comprehension of the story. She asked them questions that invited the students to go back in the text and prove their answers using text-based evidence.

When I interviewed each teacher, all of three stated, in some form or another, that they use a wide variety of questions throughout their literacy lessons. Some questions were closed questions, for example, "what was happening in the beginning of the story?" (2/29/12) while others would be open-ended questions, for example, "what do you think might happen in this story?" (Observation, 3/1/12). They indicated that the questions that they developed for each lesson were based upon their goal of the lesson. For example, in my interview with Mrs. B. on March 1st, 2012, she indicated that her goal for the lesson was to get the students to make predictions. Therefore, many of her questions invited the students to make predictions before and throughout the story. In addition, the questions were also used to get a sense of what their students' knew and if they needed additional practice.

Goals for Questioning

When I asked each teacher about her goal of questioning, most of her answers derived from her purpose for the lesson. Each teacher made it clear that she figured out what her goal of the lesson was before she thought about the types of questions wanted to ask her students.

All three teachers expressed that they struggled to always plan out their questions before the lessons. Both Mrs. S. and Mrs. B. tried planning out their questions during the second observations and said that this technique helped them be more focused, thorough, and purposeful. This was evident with the types of responses the students gave to these questions. Mrs. B.'s students were able to look at the cover of the book and discuss what they were wondering before they read the story. Many of them wondered if there would be a problem in the story because they notice Alex's bike was in pieces. They also were able to make strong emotional connections to the character in the book. Many of their connections built off each other's. Mrs. S.'s students were able to use text evidence to show how their thinking connected with the text after Mrs. S. modeled this skill for them. The students' answers led to a much richer, deeper discussion that allowed for a deeper understanding of the stories they were reading.

Benefits of Higher Level Thinking

The common thread between each of the teachers in my interviews and observations was that higher-level thinking was beneficial because it enables students

to think beyond the text. Thinking beyond the text is a type of thinking that requires students to think critically, synthesize and evaluate the text. Higher level thinking requires students think beyond the literal meaning of the text. Each teacher expressed that this type of thinking enables their students to get a deeper understanding of the text that involves synthesizing, predicting, making thoughtful connections, as well as evaluations. Both Mrs. C. and Mrs. B. encouraged their students to make emotional connections to the text. Both stories these teachers used were stories that involved a lot of emotion. Mrs. B. also invited her students to make predictions about the text through the picture walk as well as examining the cover. Mrs. S. wanted her students to synthesize the text when she asked her students to provide evidence from the text during their discussion. Predictions, connections, and synthesizing is higher level thinking that encourages students to take ownership of their own learning and provide thoughtful, insightful comments. It also supports students' abilities to connect new and prior knowledge together that will help them develop a deeper understanding of the text.

Mrs. C., Mrs. B. and Mrs. S. all agree that this type of thinking enhances their students' comprehension and allows students to examine a text beyond the literal meaning. In addition, students will become stronger, intellectual thinkers. Mrs. C. pointed out that with higher-level thinking questions, she usually has to provide more "wait-time" for her students because these types of questions require more thinking (Interview 2/10/12). An example of this is when Mrs. C. asked, "why do you think penguins have sharp claws?" (Observation, 2/8/12).

During my observations each teachers asked more probing questions like, “Please tell me more about that” or “Why do you think that?” (Observations, 2/17/12 & 3/1/12). Mrs. B. pointed out in her interview with me on March 1st, 2012 that one of her strengths is modeling this type of thinking for her students. This was prevalent when Mrs. B.’s students were answering her questions during guided reading because they take the time to think about their answers before they share out with the group. Mrs. B. encourages this when she asks the students to put a thumb up when they are done thinking about the questions. This lets her know when all the students are done thinking and gives her an indication what students may need more assistance when thinking about the questions.

Mrs. C., Mrs. B., and Mrs. S. provide some similarities on how they use questions in their classrooms; however, there are differences that are evident. Some of these differences may be due to the grade level they teach and the expectations of the *Common Core Standards* at that grade; whereas some of the differences might be based upon their age, or their years of experience in the classroom. Mrs. S. expects her fourth grade students to go more in depth when answering a question, giving more specific evidence from the text and examples, whereas Mrs. C. wants her Kindergarten students to answer the question with some detail but she isn’t as concerned about her students providing an as in depth answer as a fourth grader would.

Conclusion

It is evident through this study that teachers use different types of questions during literacy. Some teachers use simple questions that illustrate the students' comprehension of a text; whereas other teachers are working with their students towards thinking beyond the text to create critical and analytical thinking. These questions invite students to make predictions, connections, analyze the text, and synthesize. In addition, when a teacher has a set goal for the lesson, many questions are centered around it in order to achieve the goal. This is evident in both Mrs. B. and Mrs. S.'s observations and interviews. Therefore, developing critical and analytical questions will invite students to give higher level responses because it will push students think on a deeper level.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Throughout this study, I examined how three elementary teachers use questions during literacy instruction. More specifically, I wanted to see how elementary teachers used questions to promote literacy discussions with their students and invite them to think beyond the literal comprehension of the text using analytical, synthesizing, and critical thinking skills.

Through my observations of and interviews with the three teachers, I was able to gain a wealth of information in relationship to my research question: how do elementary teachers use questioning during literacy in the classroom? For example, it is evident that each teacher used questions to help her students think about the text because they used questions that enable the students to make connections, predictions, analyze, and synthesize the text. Mrs. B. and Mrs. S. planned their questions ahead of time, and as a result most of the questions they asked were centered on the goal of the lesson. I believe that determining the questions prior to the start of the lesson benefited the students because the questions were more developed and specific, which allowed the students' responses to be more developed and specific.

In this chapter I provide conclusions and explain why I am drawing these conclusions. I also provide implications for student learning, implications for my work as a teacher and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The Teachers Asked Questions to Enable Students to Make Connections

Both Mrs. C., a Kindergarten teacher and Mrs. B., a first grade teacher asked questions that enable their students to make text-to-self and text-to-text connections. For example, Mrs. C. ask her students to make a text-to-self connection when she asked students to think about the characters emotions in *We are all Glad* (Fetty, 2000) and how those emotions connected with their own.

Mrs. B. asked students to make a text-to-text connection while they reading *Popcorn Fun* (Smith, 2001). In *Popcorn Fun*, the characters were the same as in a book the students had read previously. During the lesson I observed, Mrs. B. expected the students to draw on what they remembered about the characters from the earlier story and connect that to the current story when she asked the students to make a prediction, “Do you think there will be a problem in this story based on what happened during *Popcorn Fun*? Tell me why?” (Observation, 2/2/12). She also invited the students to make a personal or text-to-self connection during *A Bike for Alex* (Nellie, 2000) when she asked, “Think of a time when you got something new. How did it make you feel?”

I observed all three teachers inviting students to make connections predominately using text-to-self connections. It is evident to me at that at times the teachers needed to push their students to make connections that encompassed all three types of connections: text-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. These three types of connections enable students to go beyond the literal meaning of the text and draw on

a variety of sources of information to help them make sense of the text (Peterson & Taylor, 2012). Making some of these connections invites the students to better comprehend the texts they are reading because they are making personal connections, connections to the world and other texts that allow them to see similarities in the current text they are reading (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010).

The Teachers Asked Questions to Elicit Students' Predictions, and Connections, and Support Students' Abilities to Synthesize and Analyze

Mrs. C., a Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. B., a first grade teacher and Mrs. S., a fourth grade teacher supported their students' abilities to develop predictions, make connection, as well as practice synthesizing and analyzing through the questions they asked. Mrs. C., for example, asked her kindergarten students, "Why do you think some characters feel happy, and others feel sad?" She invited her students to think about characters' emotions and explain why they might feel a certain way. This type of thinking invites the students to make connections to their own lives, which may then allow them to analyze the text beyond literal comprehension, which will help students fully understand the story.

Mrs. B. asked her first graders, "What problems did you see in the story?" She then asked them to place their Post-it notes to the page illustrating a problem. She followed up by asking students to explain how the problem was solved in the story. Her questions invited the students to think about story structure, which might help them better comprehend the text.

Mrs. S. asked her fourth graders, "How did Momma show her love for Marven? Show me evidence from the story to prove your answers." while discussing

the story *Marven of the Great Northern Woods* (Lasky, 2002). Mrs. S. wanted the students to use what they knew about the story to infer about the text, which allows the students to gain a better understanding of the text.

Each teacher asked her students questions that invited them to perform a level of analysis that goes beyond literal comprehension. Thinking beyond the literal enables students to become better readers because they think more in depth about the text (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). This can help students become more effective readers because predictions, connections, synthesizing, and analyzing skills can start to become more automatic independently without the support of a teacher.

The Teachers Asked Questions to Engage Students in Discussions

During my observations, I noticed how Mrs. C., Mrs. B., and Mrs. S. asked their students questions to elicit discussion during guided reading groups. The teachers' questions invited the students to build off one another's comments. Some of these questions included, "What do you think the author's message was in this story? Talk about this with your groupmates" (Observation, 3/1/12). Mrs. B.'s and Mrs. S.'s students demonstrated how to create a discussion when they listened to one another and would respond with such phrases as "Adding onto that" or "I think you are right" to recognize and acknowledge each other's thinking.

Creating discussions among students can help students make predictions, connections, synthesize and analyze the text because it offers students the chance to hear each other's thoughts and then respond to it using the teacher's question as a

frame of reference (Peterson & Taylor, 2012). Responding to one another involves students synthesizing the information they heard and thinking about it before forming a response in which they agree/disagree or make connections.

Implications for Student Learning

A Teacher's Use of Questions Can Promote Students' Comprehension of the Text

Through my study, I believe that if students are asked to make predictions, connections, analyze, evaluate or synthesize during a read-aloud or guided reading lesson that they may be able to better understand the text. During my observation of Mrs. B, it was evident that she asked her first grade students open-ended questions, which had a purpose for where she wanted the discussions to go with her students. For example, Mrs. B. asked her students to, "Think about a time when you got a gift. How did this make you feel? Can you relate your feelings to Alex's from the story?" (Observation, 3/1/12). In addition, if Mrs. B. noticed that her students were not able to answer the initial question, she asked she would rephrase the question or she modeled her own thinking for the students. This provided the students with a chance to see the type of rich responses she anticipated. Therefore, I think Mrs. B.'s use of open-ended questions (e. g., questions that elicited students to make connections or predictions) enabled her students to gain a deeper understanding of the text because she was able to help them to think about and beyond the text by drawing on their background knowledge.

A Teacher's Use of Questions Can Enable Students to Become Independent Thinkers

Through this study, I have seen how students benefit from a teacher's use of questions such as connection questions ("How do you connect with what the character is feeling?") prediction questions ("What do you think will happen if...?"), or synthesis questions ("How do these two characters relate?"). These types of questions are what each teacher wants her students to begin doing independently. If students accomplish this beyond the text thinking on their own, it will invite them to become better readers and thinkers.

Predictions, connections, synthesizing and analyzing can promote a more meaningful and in depth conversation between the students where they are generating the discussion themselves and the teacher acts as the facilitator. Engaging in these types of thinking on a daily basis will allow students to comprehend the text literally as well as beyond the text when they start applying additional information to the text in front of them.

In addition, synthesizing (putting the text together) and analyzing (looking at different parts of the text and deciding what they mean) a text can also carry over to help a student improving his or her writing skills. If teachers prompt students by asking them to evaluate or compare/contrast, or draw in personal, text, or world connections, they may be able to write more meaningful and analytical discussions in their journals or reports.

A Teacher's Use of Questions Can Prompt Student Discussion

Through my observations of the three teachers and their students, I noticed how the teachers' use of questions prompted discussion among the students, which enabled them to delve into the text to further their thinking. For example, Mrs. S. prompted her students to use the text to prove their thinking so they could make more meaningful analyses. I think students can benefit from discussions such as these because they are able to hear the perspectives and opinions of their peers and then formulate their own thoughts before contributing to the group. For example, in Mrs. B.'s class there was a very quiet girl who always listened to her peers first before contributing to the rest of the group. When I asked her why she did this, she said "because I am too scared to go first and I get more time to think" (Observation, 3/1/12). I believe these types of discussion creates positive communication between students and strengthens their communication skills.

I think it is important to encourage students to discuss what they have read because it provides an opportunity for them to think about what they have read and perhaps offer new insights. I believe if students are provided with opportunities to discuss books, the teacher's hope is that they will gain a love for reading.

A Teacher's Use of Questions Can Encourage Students to Use Self-Monitoring Strategies as They Read

When students are exposed to questions that ask them to make predictions, connections, synthesize, or evaluate a text during guided or shared reading, they may start to internalize how to make predictions, connections, synthesize and evaluate as

they read independently. During independent reading they may begin to ask themselves the same types of questions because this type of thinking has been modeled during guided or shared reading. When students are consistently exposed to synthesizing and evaluating what they read, they begin to internalize this type of thinking and then apply it to their own reading and thus become more confident readers. For example, in Mrs. B.'s class the students were working on making predictions in one of her lessons, however one of the students through her discussion was able to work in a personal connection—a skill they learned in a previous lesson.

Implications for My Teaching

Use Questions to Elicit Students' Independent Thinking

I believe asking students to make predictions, connections, synthesize, and evaluate a text is a way for that I can invite my students to independently perform these types of thinking

In their *Prompting Guide 1* Fountas and Pinnell (2008) provide sample prompts that teachers can use to develop questions they can ask their students during reading instruction. An example of one such question that a teacher might use after her students are finished reading might be, "How do these characters relate to you?" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008, pg. 10). This question invites students to make connections to themselves, which can help them better understand how the character feels throughout the story. I think this is a great resource for me to have, especially as a

new teacher. I can use the information in the guide as a reference tool to further develop questions that are research-based and have been proven to work with students.

I anticipate that I will carefully plan my questions that I want to ask my students before the guided reading or shared reading lessons. I think that planning my questions ahead of time will help me to focus on the goal of my lesson. For example, if I want my students to focus on making predictions, I could ask my students “What do you think will happen in the story based on the cover and the pictures inside the story or “What do you think would happen if...?”. The *Prompting Guide* from Fountas and Pinnell (2008) can help me do this (Do what?). The *Prompting Guide* “stands up” allowing teachers to reference this guide during their lessons depending on the reading skills they are working on with their students. It is divided into different tabs so that teachers can easily access this during a guided reading lesson if needed.

I believe that using questions such as, “What do you think the author was thinking about while writing this story?” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) can promote thinking beyond the literal meaning of the text. Mrs. B. used this same question when I observed her on March 1st, 2012. This question gives students a chance to think about what the author might have been thinking about while writing the story.

Model Thinking Beyond the Literal Meaning of the Text for My Students During Guided Reading

One of the most important strategies for me as a teacher that I have learned through my graduate studies is the use of modeling. Modeling directions, tasks, and thinking can help students make the most of instructional time providing a scaffold for students that can enable them to become successful readers and thinkers. I saw Mrs. C., Mrs. B, and Mrs. S. all use modeling when they were instructing their students during guided reading. The students seemed to grasp the concepts better after the teacher modeled them. Therefore, I believe it is important for me to model how to make predictions, connections, synthesizing and evaluating during my literacy instruction. For example, if I wanted my students to think about how the character solved a problem using specific evidence from the story, I could explain my thinking by using illustrations and details from the text to show how that character was able to problem-solve. I observed Mrs. B. do this in her classroom on March 1st, 2012. I think by frequent modeling of combining skills such as, recall, understanding, applying, synthesizing, and evaluation, students will be able to perform these types of thinking independently with gradually less support from the teacher.

Provide Frequent Opportunities for Students to Engage in Discussions

In order for students to be able to combine thinking skills involving recall, understanding, predictions, connections, application, synthesizing, and evaluation, I believe it is important for students to discuss their thinking with their peers. Discussing in small groups before sharing their thoughts in a whole group can help

students formulate their thoughts and help them to be more confident in sharing their answers with the rest of the class.

During my guided reading lessons, I will provide frequent opportunities for students to talk with each other about a question they or I pose. For example, if I want my students to make text-to-self, text-to-world, or text-to-text connections, I will ask them to think individually about their answers and then give them time to discuss their answers with their peers. I observed all three teachers during my study do this and they seemed to have a lot of success. Making connections is an important skill to develop while reading because they can help students apply what they already know to what is happening in the text. Connections can allow students to further comprehend the text, which is a skill I observed Mrs. B. working on during my visits to her classroom.

During shared reading, I could ask students to pair up to think about a response to a question that I pose to them. Providing students with time to make predictions, connections, and be able to synthesize and evaluate, recall, and apply what they already know through discussions with their peers can help develop the whole-group discussion further because it can build confidence in the students.

In addition, I think giving students time to share their ideas and insights about a text can promote positive communication among students. Effective communication skills are important life skills that students need practice developing, and in the literacy world it can help build confidence to provide in depth text discussions that

can lead to a higher comprehension of the text that encompasses recall, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluation.

I also think that giving students time to discuss allows students to bounce ideas off of one another without feeling the pressure of being right or wrong. Each of the three teachers (Mrs. C., Mrs. B., and Mrs. S.) conducted open-ended discussions with their students and acted as the facilitator. Talking with their peers can allow students to hear what others think about the question and it builds their confidence as readers because they can share their own ideas about the text. They may be more apt to share their thoughts in a large group setting because they have talked with their peers beforehand in a one-on-one or small group setting.

As a result, asking students carefully crafted questions can promote beneficial discussions and ultimately, build prediction, connection, synthesizing, and evaluating skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

Increase the Duration of the Study

I think it would be beneficial to increase the length of this study because doing so would give the teacher-researcher time to interview students, collect student samples, and conduct more observations.

I believe that given more time—perhaps one school year that I would have been able to collect more information that would lead to more complete or developed

picture of the various way in which teachers use questions during literacy instruction.

Look at How a Teacher's Use of Questions Might Increase Students' Comprehension

In addition to exploring how teachers use questions in the classroom, I think I would find it beneficial to look at how a teacher's use of question impacts their students' comprehension. Exploring how questioning can affect comprehension can benefit teachers because they can see specifically what types of questions help students comprehend the text. Teacher-researchers might be able to use the information in the study to plan their literacy instruction more effectively and positively affect students' comprehension. I also think that a teacher researcher could look at how *Prompting Guide 1* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008) can be incorporated into instruction would be useful to teachers because it is a great resource that may help improve students' comprehension.

Through this study, teacher-researchers may need to interview and observe students to see how the types of questions teachers ask affect student performance. I think a pre and post assessment could be used to track the progress of the students' comprehension. In addition, teacher-researchers may want to develop a chart or graph that they could use to track student progress in self-monitoring, recall, connections, predictions, evaluation, and synthesis skills based on their answers to the teachers questions.

How Do Different Reading Programs Teachers Choose Use Affect the Questions They Ask Their Students?

Looking at what reading program the teachers are using may also play a role in determining the types of questions they ask their students. If teachers are using a basal program, the questions they ask their students may be more recall questions because the goal of the program can be based on literal comprehension of the text. However, if the teachers are using Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program, *Prompting Guide 1* (2008) invites teachers to ask their students more open-ended questions to target thinking within the text, thinking about the text, and thinking beyond the text. I think the goal of different reading programs can greatly affect the types of questions teachers ask their students.

In addition, I think that if teacher-researchers kept the reading program in mind while reviewing the types of questions that they ask their students, they might find that the types of questions teachers ask can directly correlates to the reading program they are using. Therefore, if teachers looked closely at the questions they asked their students on a daily basis, they may find they need to refine their questions to make them more beneficial for the students

Final Thoughts

Through the course of this research study I have learned that asking students questions about what they have read can be viewed as an art. I observed that it takes teachers time and practice to ask questions in ways that makes sense to students and that accomplish the goals of a lesson. Perhaps Mrs. B. said it best:

Using questions enables teachers to verify learning, dig deeper for understanding, find different approaches to solve problems, assess comprehension of text, find out how students are feeling, connect new learning, and spark conversations amongst students. (Interview, 2/2/12).

A teacher's questions can help students develop and practice their thinking skills once a teacher has modeled and practiced making predictions, connections, synthesizing, and evaluating with her students.

I believe it is important for teachers to brainstorm the types of questions they want to ask their students before they begin a lesson. This prevents teachers from asking too many recall questions that do not elicit their students to think beyond literal comprehension (Walsh & Sattes, 2005).

Both Mrs. B. and Mrs. S. said in their interviews (3/1/12 & 2/17/12) that planning their questions ahead of time allowed them to reach the goal of the lesson with the students more effectively. It also gave them a direction of where they wanted their questions to ultimately lead. As a result, careful planning and preparation can help create the best questions that allow students to think more analytically (Peterson & Taylor, 2012).

Mrs. B. explained for her the ultimate goal of questioning in her first interview (2/2/12) when she shared that it is important that teachers model effective questioning so that they can scaffold and support their students "as they take on more ownership of learning the strategy."

I believe that the goal of using questions should be to help students begin to internalize the use of question that enable them to make predictions and connections, and to evaluate and synthesize while they read individually. I believe if the students begin to ask themselves questions while they read, they would develop the ability to comprehend new texts.

Conducting this study has enable me to become a better teacher because I have learned that a teacher can be an effective questioner when she carefully prepares and plans questions that invite students to engage in a range of non-critical questions versus critical questions that require the students to analyze the text. As I move forward, I recognize that I can use questions to help my students comprehend a text more effectively and efficiently and develop skills that enable them to become independent thinkers.

Appendix A: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

The purpose of this research study is to explore how teachers use questions and questioning strategies during their literacy instruction. The researcher, Megan Zarzycki, is a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY in the Department of Education and Human Development. This study is a requirement for completing a graduate thesis. The researcher will conduct two observations and two interviews with teachers to gain insight in how they use questions with their students.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will take part in two observations and two interviews, which will last no longer than forty-five minutes each. During the interviews, you will be asked about your perspectives and experiences using questions with your students. During the observations, the researcher will be observing how you use questioning in the classroom.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to participate in the study. If you are willing to participate in the study, and agree with the statements below, please check your consent option and sign your name in the space provided at the end.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to be observed or answer any interview questions.
2. My name will not be recorded. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. My participation involves completing a personal information sheet regarding my education, experience, and certification. The information sheet will only be read by the researcher and only used for contextual information.
4. My participation also involves answering nine open-ended questions during the first interview and four questions during the second interview. During the second interview there will be some questions based on the researcher's observations. All questions will pertain to how I use questions in my classroom. The questions will be provided to me prior to my scheduled interview, so that I have an opportunity to gather any resources I would like to share with the researcher.
5. Time is a minor risk. My participation will be no more than 45 minutes for each interview.
6. My responses to the interview questions will be recorded both on paper and with an audio taped by the researcher. Only the researcher will read and listen to my responses. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis by the researcher.

7. I have the right to decline being audio taped during the interview process.
8. I understand that I will be observed twice throughout this process.
9. I understand that I may refuse to be observed without penalty. The researcher will use field notes to record observations. All field notes will be shredded after the thesis research has been accepted.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, with the understanding that I may withdraw, without penalty, at any time during the observation or interview process.

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____

I wish to participate in the interviews **without** being recorded.

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____

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Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: _____ Observation Date & Time: _____

Length of Observation: _____

Observations	Reflections

Appendix C: First Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: _____ Date of Interview: _____
Time: _____

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a better understanding of how you use effective questioning to increase your students' comprehension levels during literacy activities. Any insights and perspectives that you share will allow me to improve my skills and abilities and use of questions with my students. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may stop the interview at any time. I anticipate that our interview will last 30 to 45 minutes.

1. Please tell me a little about the educational theories that guide your work with students.
2. Please describe your philosophy of teaching literacy.
3. How do you use questioning in your classroom? (e.g., Verify student learning, extend student thinking)
4. What do you hope to accomplish when you ask your students questions?
5. What do you think makes an effective question?
6. Talk about how your use of questioning has evolved over your teaching career.
7. What strategies do you use when questioning your students?
8. What do you believe are the benefits of providing students with opportunities to engage in higher level thinking?
9. Do your students ask questions? If so what kind?

Closing:

I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your time and expertise with me. Your participation will give me insights on how I can use questioning more effectively in my own classroom. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity and your responses confidential.

Appendix D: Second Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: _____ Date of Interview: _____
Time: _____

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this interview is for me to understand how you use questioning to interact with your students during literacy activities.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may stop the interview at any time. I anticipate that our interview will last 30 to 45 minutes

1. Talk about what you hope your students accomplish from the questioning process.
2. Explain your thought process of how you redirect students to expand their thinking.
3. What do you believe are your strengths in getting students to achieve higher level thinking?
4. What do you believe you need to work on to elicit higher level thinking from your students?

Closing:

I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your time and expertise with me. Your participation will give me insights on how I can use questioning more effectively in my own classroom. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity and your responses confidential.

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