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The Power of Discussion on Students' Comprehension

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SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT

THE POWER OF DISCUSSION ON STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION

By

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**A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human
Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Reading**

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Abstract

Through listening to one another we establish “a foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development” (Hyslop, 1988). As teachers we need to establish the need for discussion and encourage the discussion aspect of learning. This needs to be done within the classroom and at home. Parents are the first people that children talk with and learn to discuss issues with. Therefore, it is necessary that discussion be carried on throughout a child’s education.

In the thesis, I will research that by discussing stories with their children, parents will increase the comprehension of their children. Through the use of short stories from three different genre and comprehension quizzes I will test this research to determine if stories were better understood.

This study showed a trend toward improved student comprehension after parental discussions took place.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' comprehension of a particular story increased after they have discussed a reading with their parents.

Need for Study

Families have very busy schedules with little time to all eat dinner together or discuss what is going in life, let alone what a child is reading. When given a reading inventory in a fifth grade classroom, none of the students responded yes to the question of whether or not they discussed books with their parents. It leads one to wonder that if these students did discuss more of the books they have read with their parents, would they retain more information? Would they have better comprehension? Norton (1999) states that discussion in elementary school and library programs helps children organize thoughts and make complex generalizations. Additionally, Kelso (2000) explains:

The give and take of asking a child questions as a way of giving them opportunities to explain their thinking is 'central to maternal practice' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule 1986, p.189) and central to helping

a person to become connected to their voice, their sense of their self, and what they know. (p. 417)

Research has been conducted to find out how well discussion in the classroom impacts students' learning and comprehension (Norton, 1999) but more is needed to determine how well students can comprehend after discussing stories with their parents. Educators cannot argue the rewards children get when parents are part of their lives. Brown (1989) reports that when parents are involved in their children's education self-esteem is enhanced, academic achievement and parent-child relationships are bettered and parents get a positive attitude toward school. Additionally, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) are cited in Kelso (2000) in saying that "parents who enter into a dialogue with their children, who draw out and respect their opinions, are more likely to have children whose intellectual and ethical development proceeds rapidly and surely" (p. 189).

This study tested the impact of discussions with parents on students' comprehension.

Research Question

Does the use of discussion between parent and child increase the child's comprehension of stories he or she has read?

Definitions

Parent: For the purpose of this study, an adult who lives with the student and has aided in the reading of stories and discussions for this research study.

Limitations of the Study

- 1) The sample size is very small (nine students).
- 2) On four occasions, students missed sessions to take comprehension quizzes.
- 3) The testing population of students who participated in this study consisted of two students with Individualized Educational Plan.
- 4) There is no format of what was discussed between students and parents or to what extent discussions were held.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' comprehension of a particular story increased after they have discussed a reading with their parents.

“If a child has frequent opportunities to read aloud to a willing listener-often a parent or grandparent or a sibling-she is more likely to become a fluent reader” (Macfarlane, p.2, 1994).

Parents are quite often children's first teachers. Why then would they not be involved in discussions with their children about books they are reading and ideas they are learning through books? Grasso-Fitzpatrick (1998) mentions one study that found mothers in the United States devote as little as eleven minutes a day having conversations with their children. Fathers were even less. The article stated that they spend as little as eight minutes a day talking with their kids. As our society becomes increasingly busy, our students are missing out on family time and the learning of the art of discussion and listening. Hyslop and Tone (1988) begin their study by stating that, “It (listening) plays a life-long role in the processes of learning and communication essential to productive

participation in life” (p.1). Pearson and Fielding (1983) are cited in Hyslop and Tone (1988) stating that listening and reading make use of similar language comprehension processes. They also go on to say that listening involves the simultaneous orchestration of skills in phonology, syntax, semantics and knowledge of text structure. Through listening to one another we establish “a foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development” (Hyslop, 1988). This includes the ability to carry on a discussion. “Shanklin and Rhodes (1989) suggest that verbal communication actually enhances comprehension” as stated in Stahl and Hayes, p.324 (1997). Aunola, Nurmi, Niemi, Lerkkanen, and Rasku-Puttonen (2002) use information from Kinnunen, Vauras, and Niemi, (1998) to support the claim that comprehension skills benefit from a general knowledge of the world that surrounds a child which helps him/her develop associations and enhance the ability to monitor his/her own comprehension.

Directly and indirectly, their parents, who are the children’s first and foremost agents of socialization, influence children. “Oral language (talking) is the natural way for them (children) to test out new ideas and theories about their world and their learning experiences,” states Janie Hydrick (1996, p.24). Akkok (1999) states that, “Families have a primary responsibility

for their children's development and well-being" (p.1).

Macfarlane (1994) offers that sharing of book conversations, journals, drawing and improvisational drama can increase the amount that a child reads markedly and that there is a dramatic improvement in family communication. Grasso-Fitzpatrick (1998) speaks for the argument that through interaction with their children and using discussion and storytelling, parents are "creating a safe space in our family life for true intimacy that is the heart of a child's healthy growth" (p.3).

Dixon describes the maturing responses of young readers as drawing on parts of the imaginary world in their play (and progressively, in drama and writing) and thus trying to explore complex situations and characters from the inside; talking and writing about personal and other familiar experiences that chime in with what's been read, thus approaching them from a new perspective; raising questions about the imaginary world...(Pugh, p.1, 1988).

Pugh (1988) goes on to compare the above statement with poetry. She states, "Sometimes the solitary experience is appropriate, but other times – and this may be most of the time for young readers – the social reading in which they play and active role is the most enriching" (p.2). As people we enjoy conversing and learning from other people. It is imperative that the gift of listening and

speaking and the rewards that can be gleaned from the former are given to children.

Parent involvement and a positive attitude regarding learning and reading can create a significant difference for children. Smith and Sensenbaugh (1992) found that slow readers could succeed with the same frequency as fast readers as long as the parent maintains a positive attitude. Since parents are the first to know how their child talks and the experiences and background a child has, "the parent can prompt thinking or provide insight into the language that may otherwise elude the reader." (Smith & Sensenbaugh, p.2, 1992) Additionally, what children are taught in the home can be carried over into school and vice versa. Stahl and Hayes (1997) applaud Hawaiian families for teaching the value of cooperation with others for the well being of their family. The intrinsic knowledge of cooperation is carried over into the classroom in storylike participation. The students work together to answer the teacher's questions and interpret the story. Shanklin and Rhodes (1989) suggest that "verbal interaction actually enhances comprehension" states Stahl and Hayes, p.324 (1997).

Vasallo (2000) conducted a study to compare the involvement and attitude toward school of parents whose children went to a school of choice to those whose children went to a public

school. He found that those parents who had a choice in their children's school were more involved with homework, with the school itself, are more satisfied with the school and were likely to reenroll their children into the choice school. He also found that once parents were "empowered to assume the full measure of their responsibility to support their children's education, they will become partners with educators in creating a maintaining the schools their children need" (p.14). When parents are involved to the fullest extent and feel empowered to help their children, they have a better attitude toward school and on helping the children. Akkok (p.4) reinforces the benefit of parental involvement by mentioning a study performed by Fehrmann, Keith Reimers (1987). "They investigated that parental involvement does have an important direct effect on grades, and parents might help their children achieve higher grades through monitoring the children's daily activities by keeping track of how they are doing in school."

The belief system parents hold has a strong effect on their attitude toward education and the development of a positive learning environment for their children. The beliefs that parents put into practice are directly and indirectly identified by their children and carried over to the next generation. It is of utmost importance that parents realize how great their effect is on their

child and the desire for learning that is carried on. Aunola, Nurmi, Niemi, Lerkkanen, and Rasku-Puttonen identify studies from Galper, Wigfield, and Seefeldt, 1997; Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried, 1994; Hess, Holloway, Dickson, and Price, 1984; Murphey, 1992; Phillips, 1987; and Seginer, 1983. The former found that “parents’ positive beliefs and high expectations about their offsprings’ competencies and school abilities have been shown to be associated with the children’s high achievement at school”(p.3). Entwisle and Baker, 1983; Frome and Eccles, 1998; Galper et al., 1997; Gottfried, 1985, 1990; Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala, 1982; Phillips, 1987; Stevenson and Newman, 1986; and Wigfiels and Asher, 1984 are further mentioned in Aunola, et al., 2002 stating that “parental beliefs have been found to be associated with children’s intrinsic motivations to learn, self-perceptions of ability, and expectations of success”(p.3). Kim conducted a study to identify the correlation between parental involvement in Korean families and their children’s academic achievement. The study concluded:

Since Koreans also deem education to have intrinsic worth, as well as serving as an indicator of social status, parents rarely leave educational success to chance; they generally subject their children to intense parental pressure to study hard and to succeed in the educational system (Kim, p.2, 2002).

Kim, (2002) goes on to hypothesize that “Korean American families have distinctive or characteristic sets of beliefs, attitudes, and behavior with respect towards education in general and parental involvement in particular, that results in high levels of educational achievement” (p.2).

In the study conducted by Aunola, Nurmi, Niemi, Lerkkanen, and Rasku-Puttonen (2002) parental beliefs were compared to academic achievement of their children. Within the study, the researchers also looked at the differences in involvement of mothers compared to that of fathers. They found that “the children whose father participated in the study showed a lower level of task-avoidant behaviors than children whose father did not participate” (p.5). There was no selection effect when it came to mothers. The findings show that is also imperative that not only are mothers responsible for the reading to and with a child to develop the basis a child needs for education achievement.

Parental involvement should not end when a child leaves elementary school or even high school. Fass and Tubman, (2002) found that college students who maintained a strong relationship with their parents and peers were more successful through school

and more likely to carry this success out into the working world.

They concluded:

Therefore, joint weak attachment to parents and peers is not a single omnibus predictor of poor academic outcomes or other deficiencies in competence. Yet, the findings from this study are congruent with previous literature that has shown that moderate to strong attachment to parents and peers enhances an individual's sense of self and promotes higher self-esteem, internal locus of control, greater likelihood to be androgynous, and more optimism (p.569-570).

Educators need to encourage the discussion aspect of learning and help parents develop this as part of family life. We have all seen the benefit of parents being involved with their child's education and being conscious of what the child is learning. As educators, we cannot argue the rewards children get when their parents are part of their lives. Brown (1989) reports that when parents are involved in children's schooling and education the self-esteem is enhanced, academic achievement improves, the relationship between parent and child is enhanced, and parents get a positive attitude toward school. To help parents become more involved and start them on the road to discussion of stories teachers can send home questions to discuss and the children can bring them back to discuss in class. These questions can be about books students have read aloud to their parents or vice versa. In

Baumann Kelso (2000), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) are cited in saying that “parents who enter into a dialogue with their children, who draw out and respect their opinions, are more likely to have children whose intellectual and ethical development proceeds rapidly and surely” (p.189). Norton explains that, “Discussion should be a vital part of elementary school and library programs because it helps children organize ideas and make complex generalizations” (p.12). If educators are able to offer the discussions to enhance the thought processes children have and then the children carry that to home, what a benefit to the whole family. Children would be the facilitators of home discussions and the parents can learn through their child how to use discussion to learn. “Arranging for students to engage in social interactions is essential. While some students learn effectively on their own, many need the support of peers and talk to learn and achieve” (Cole, p.335). By developing the skill of discussion with peers, teachers and parents, children can use the talk time to learn, hopefully, with less frustration and more confidence. Cole discusses Piaget (1971) and Vygotsky (1978) and their view of social constructivism, stating that learning needs active construction of meaning in a supportive social context.

Brown (1989) gives suggestions that teachers can use to help educate parents in the role of the discussion leader and homework helper. She is of the opinion that the lifestyles and cultural backgrounds of families need to be thought of when planning activities. One example of this is the use of television. In many instances, children and adults do not watch television together. Brown recommends that teachers suggest appropriate programs and send home questions for the families to discuss. The educator can then carry over the conversations into class. She also recommends using grocery shopping and other daily activities such as preparing dinner for discussion time. The children can use some of these times to read aloud to their parent and in turn the parent asks questions that they create or that the teacher has provided.

In addition to educators respecting the cultural background of students, Patthey-Chavez and Clare (1989) recommend using these backgrounds for the classroom. They state, "When the child's 'funds of knowledge,' which may include knowledge of another language or other genres, are taken as an instructional resource rather than a barrier to mutual understanding and joint productive activity, schooled language socialization is significantly enhanced and expanded" (p.2). This leads one to wonder if we

were somehow to use the “funds of knowledge” would parents’ beliefs improve?

Aram and Levin (2002) quote IRA and NAEYAC, (1998) to argue that, “the single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children” (p.198). “It is the talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story and their own lives” (p.199). Parents are the first link to learning that a child has. Using books and discussion enable and provide a child to develop language and comprehension skills that are very important to success in school.

“Parental mediation, through which children are introduced to the written system and the written language in their home environment, constitutes a central factor in the development of early literacy” (Hiebert & Adams, 1987; Rogoff, 1990 as cited in Aram & Levin, p.202, 2002).

Developing comprehension and literacy do not have to be arduous tasks for parents. Parents can take opportunities all around them to develop dialogue. They can have fun with nursery rhymes; they can use the back of cereal boxes, or a trip to the grocery store. Parents can use whatever is of interest to both them and the child (Macfarlane, 1994). Book experiences in different

aspects of a child's life can enable children to use language to discover the world, identify and name actions and objects, and gain more complex speech (Norton, 1999).

There are many ways in which a parent can use literature to enhance higher level thinking and develop the much-needed communication with their children. Norton offers Oxbury's baby board books for very young children. Another of Norton's recommendations is oral summarizing. This can occur in any of a child's environments. After reading a book or story for fun, the reader can retell the story, retell his/her favorite part of a story, discuss the most important thing that he/she learned, describe the most amusing part and describe the actions of the character he/she admire the most or the least.

Macfarlane also offers up many ideas for parents and educators alike to use when talking about a book with a child. One book that she suggests is "A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading" by Nancy Larrick (5th edition, 1982, Bantam Books). She also suggests discussing with small children anything of interest to them while they are playing. Nursery rhymes are another to have dialogue with a young child. For any child, Macfarlane suggests using signs and logos, items at the grocery store to discuss what he/she sees and observes.

In “Children’s Literature in a Time of National Tragedy”

Mei-Yu Lu provides advice and information on literature for parents to use during times of national disaster. The National Association of School Psychologists (2001), the National Education Association (2001) and the National Mental Health Association (2001) provides the following recommendations:

- Spend time with your children and stay close to them, especially the younger children.
- Resume daily routine as soon as possible. Routines give children a sense of security and help them to regain order in their life.

Lu (2001) explains that children’s literature offers an avenue to help children develop understanding of people of different backgrounds. Dowd (1992) is mentioned in Lu (2001) stressing the values of literature in helping children develop an accurate understanding of people from other cultures and she argues that “from reading, hearing and using culturally diverse materials, young people learn that ... all people experience universal feelings of love, sadness, self-worth, justice and kindness” (p. 220).

Akkok (1999) also provides ways to involve parents, especially those who need help and education themselves on how to help their children. He suggests conducting parenting skills

seminars, providing curriculum discussions, educating the parents on how to help students with home studies and activities and providing opportunities for parents and students to learn together. Appendix A contains an article written by Christopher de Vinck and reprinted in Regie Routman's Conversations, 2000. This letter encourages parents to read aloud and spend time developing the love of reading with their children.

Research points to the positive connection between extensive reading and improved reading comprehension. Providing opportunities for children to discuss what they have read – to become active participants in making meaning from written text – has also been proven to help students' reading skills to grow. This second approach also has positive effects on the first since students who are provided with time and opportunity to share their thoughts about reading tend to read more (Routman, p.85, 1996).

The power and art of discussion have a place in comprehension. When children are able to discuss what they are reading, they have a chance to explore their thoughts as well as others'. Through this exploration children can learn new ideas and develop a comprehension for the text that may not have been present previously. Regie Routman (1991) states, "With discussion taking place while students are reading, confusion can be cleared up. If discussion takes place only after a book is completed, memory of comprehension – rather than

comprehension as it is occurring or just occurred – tends to be the focus” (p.126). This argument is further supported later in the same article by Routman when third grade teacher Peg Gerhart notes, “I can tell when students are confused, and I can see the confusion clear up. As discussion continues, a light bulb goes on” (p.129).

Discussion or dialogue not only fosters comprehension but listening skills are sharpened and an appreciation for other people’s views is created. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) share the opinion that when people are in conversation with one another, they intensely tune into one another looking for specific responses.

Educators also need to discern between discussion and questioning. We need to teach students how to discuss and open up to their thoughts instead of just questioning students. Allington and Cunningham state:

Discussion is not questioning. Questioning is an activity teachers do to “make sure children read it and got it right.” If after children read, teachers usually ask a lot of questions, children focus their attention on remembering. If after children read, teachers usually engage them in discussion, children focus their attention on understanding and deciding what they think. Questioning fosters remembering. Discussion fosters comprehension. (p.233)

Through the use of discussion and learning the art of discussion, parents can make a significant impact on their

children's learning. "The frequency and manner of responding to children's questions is therefore an important parental influence in early reading ability," (Teale, 1978 as cited in Snow, Burns and Griffin, p.139, 1998). Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) are of the opinion that once parents are taught how to discuss books and become responsive during conversations, then their children will have gains in reading skills.

As children develop they repeat and mimic what they have learned from their first teachers, that is, their parents. It is clear that the habits and attitudes toward reading are reflected in how well their children read and understand what they read. Routman (2000) found that boys in the United States typically score lower on standardized tests than girls. Because of the lower scores many of them are referred to special help in disproportionately larger numbers than girls. The reason Routman states is that most fathers simply read the newspaper where the mothers are the ones who read to their children. Thus children develop the idea that girls are better readers and boys (fathers) read the newspaper. Routman believes that fathers need to be motivated to read aloud to their children, as well as be examples of reading and discussing books in front of their children.

The importance of discussion is restated in Routman's quote above. Merely reading together is not going to develop the comprehension base students need. Discussion of what is read and discussion with children so that they learn how to communicate effectively creates a strong basis for reading comprehension.

CHAPTER III

Design of Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' comprehension of a particular story increased after they have discussed a reading with their parents.

Research Question

Does the use of discussion between parent and child increase the child's comprehension of stories he or she has read?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects consisted of nine students from a rural/suburban elementary school in Western New York. Six of the students came from a fifth grade labeled blended classroom and three were in a fifth grade labeled inclusion classroom.

Materials

The materials for this procedure were:

- Two stories written by Chris VanAllsburg (The Garden of Abdul Gasazi and The Wreck of the Zephyr)
- Two stories out of Time for Kids
- Two fantasy stories from a basal series
- Comprehension quizzes created by this researcher

Procedures

A letter (See Appendix B) was sent to parents to get volunteers from the researcher's classroom and another fifth grade classroom. Once the volunteers for the study were established, each parent was contacted to go over individual questions and a more exact explanation of how the process would work.

Each Friday of the study, students received reprints of one story a week for six weeks. The first, third, and fifth stories (the control stories) were only read by the student and not discussed with his or her parents. The second, fourth, and sixth stories (the variables) were read by each student and his or her parent. When they read the story, they would not be reading it aloud to one another. It was read on an individual basis and then discussed once the parent and child had finished the story. This was to

ensure that the students were gaining their own knowledge of the content before they had the discussion. On each Monday following the readings, the students would take a comprehension quiz (See Appendix C) made by the researcher to test their comprehension. The questions were made following information found in Six Way Paragraphs by Walter Pauk regarding questioning techniques and comprehension.

It was recommended that the students involved take time during the weekend to read the story as opposed to during the week so that they were all reading the stories during the same time period and so that the readings were somewhat fresh in their minds.

The stories were given in the following order: First the Time for Kids articles were handed out on consecutive Mondays, secondly the Chris VanAllsburg books were given and thirdly, they received the fantasy stories from a basal series. This is a randomly chosen order. Chris VanAllsburg and Time for Kids were chosen because of the interest that was shown by students for that particular author and that particular magazine.

Analysis of Data

This was a quantitative study. After the scores had been calculated from the discussion based quizzes and the non-discussion based quizzes, a t score was used to determine if in fact discussion with parents made a difference in comprehension.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' comprehension of a particular story increased after they have discussed a reading with their parents.

Methodology

The students in the study read six stories. There were three genres covered in this study. The first and second stories were from Time for Kids, a nonfiction magazine. The third and fourth stories were picture books by Chris VanAllsburg. The fifth and sixth stories were fables. After reading the first, third and fifth stories, they took a quiz to test their comprehension. These stories were not discussed with a parent. However, the second, fourth and sixth stories were discussed with a parent during or after the student read them. The parents were also encouraged to read the story. A quiz was also taken after each of the even numbered stories.

The power of discussion and how comprehension is affected by discussion was tested through the six quizzes that the

students took. The control story quizzes were compared to the variable story quizzes three times. The scores for the comparisons were taken from the number of correct answers each student had. The raw scores can be found in Appendix D. A t -chart is used to compare the results.

Results

Table one presents the results of quiz one compared to quiz two. Statistically speaking, there is no statically significant difference between the scores of the two quizzes. The one gain is that there is a slightly higher mean score for quiz two, the quiz that was taken after a story was discussed.

Table I – Comparative Score of Quiz 1 and Quiz 2.

	QUIZ #1	QUIZ #2
Mean	3.11	4.00
Variance	1.11	2.25
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.40	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	-1.84	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.10	
t Critical two-tail	2.31	

When comparing quiz three with quiz four, a larger deviation has occurred between the two quizzes. One possible factor was that two students were eliminated from this segment

because they did not take quiz four. However, for those students who did take these two quizzes, there is a significant difference between their performances. Table two gives the results.

Table II – Comparative Score of Quiz 3 and Quiz 4

	QUIZ #3	QUIZ #4
Mean	1.57	3.43
Variance	1.29	1.62
Observations	7	7
Pearson Correlation	0.38	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	6	
t Stat	-3.65	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.01	
t Critical two-tail	2.45	

Quizzes five and six had no statistically significant improvement. This proves to be a factor in the results. Only two students performed better on quiz six than on quiz five. Additionally, student nine was eliminated from the results because they did not take quiz six. Table three displays the results.

Table III – Comparative Score of Quiz 5 and Quiz 6

	QUIZ #5	QUIZ #6
Mean	3.75	3.25
Variance	1.64	2.50
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.39	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	7	
t Stat	0.88	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.41	
t Critical two-tail	2.36	

Conclusions

When the scores have been examined, there is a trend in the direction of improved comprehension. Looking at the statistics, there is a relationship between discussion and comprehension, Students noticed an improvement in how prepared they felt before each quiz. Many students also indicated that they shared opinions about what they read with their parents and vice versa. Also, many discussions centered on understanding unfamiliar words.

The students were asked if ongoing discussions from the time they were talking would help with comprehension. Seven of the nine students indicated that it indeed would. They commented that it might encourage kids to read more and enable them to see another side to a story.

One student stated that perhaps the child involved in the discussion would not listen to their parent's opinion or thoughts. This leads to the question of whether or not the discussions proved worthwhile for this particular student or if indeed the discussions took place.

The gradual increases of the means (averages) show a trend that discussion was worthwhile. The students in the study formed

an understanding of how important talking with others (in this case a parent) and sharing ideas during reading can be.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' comprehension of a particular story increased after they have discussed a reading with their parents.

Through the statistics in this study, one can see a trend in the direction of improved comprehension. The students had an opportunity to talk with their parents about books on a level that they usually do not experience. Through the students comments it was also apparent that they felt children would benefit from discussions with their parents in regards to comprehension.

Once this study was completed, I took a look back to see how my theory, that discussion increases comprehension, can further be tested. The first thing that came to mind was to provide sample questions for the parents to look over in order to give them a guideline to follow when they were conducting the discussions. The parents were given a short informational piece on how to

discuss stories in the beginning, but it did not provide enough concrete questions to be helpful.

The second addend would be a form for the parents to fill out after each discussion so that I could know the extent of the discussion and what specific items were talked about. I could also fill out this form if I were to call them after each variable story. This would not ensure that the stories were indeed discussed, but I would be able to glean a better understanding the process a variety of parents use to talk to their children about stories.

Thirdly, I would include more students. A broader span of students would provide a larger socio-economic base to study.

With a broader base of students and a longer period of study, the effect of one or two students not attending a quiz session from time to time would not skew the scores as much as it did with this study. Using only three comparative samples, it is difficult to get as thorough of results.

Within the classroom, teachers could use information from this study when assigning home activities and using discussion with their students. The idea of concentrating on the cultures of families and their lifestyles when giving homework, would allow teachers to provide activities that would encourage discussion at home of any type of media. When conducting classroom

discussions, teachers can make a point of being more aware of discussions being held between students and what they entail.

Being aware of the benefits of discussion, a teacher could use it as an assessment tool after a reading piece or as a way for children to teach their parents how to discuss books or other types of media at home.

Discussions provide students with opportunities to learn and share new ideas and to express them freely. As indicated earlier, the students of this study found the discussions beneficial because they could learn what words meant, share opinions and gather information about concepts from their parents. Hopefully, parents will begin not only to read earlier with their children but also to share in the power of discussion.

Appendix A

"Communicating with Parents" by Christopher De Vinck

BY CHRISTOPHER DE VINCK

Most nights I read aloud to my children before they sleep: "Mr. Popper's Penguins," "My Father's Dragon," "Treasure Island" and "James and the Giant Peach" have been some of their favorites over the ears. I have been doing this since my eldest son was small, and my reasons are many.

Oh, I believe the psychologist Jean Piaget when he speaks about assimilation, children picking up information that fits in with what they already know. My children have heard thousands of different sentence patterns over and over again as they sat beside me during those many nights.

To be sure, my children have picked up new words along the way. When my oldest son, David, was four years old, he walked around the house stating he felt soporific after he heard about the soporific effects lettuce had on Beatrix Potter's slothful rabbits. Karen learned what a bungalow was as she listened to how Uncle Wiggily crawled out from his home at the beginning of each new adventure.

Of course, it is true that a rich reading background adds to a child's intellectual baggage. I have been an English teacher for the past 16 years and I have had, for the most part, two types of students: those who have rich personal background and those who have this personal experience and a wide reading experience.

All children come to schools with a wide diversity of personal experiences. I would say only 10% also come with a wide reading background. The child with the widest personal and reading background seems to carry the most intellectual baggage into my class-

room year after year. This is the child, who, eventually, scores the highest on the verbal section of the SATs, who is able to make sudden and clear connections between books and life, who has the strongest sense of what it means to live a life of reflection, who is the strongest writer. The SAT is a very biased test. It is biased against those who do not read.

Thinking is looking at experiences and making conclusions. Writing is the physical evidence of our thinking. The more we experience, the more information we have inside our minds and our



hearts. The more information we have, the better conclusions we can make about our own lives.

But I read aloud to my children each night for reasons that go beyond Piaget, vocabulary, writing and information retrieval.

I want eight-year-old Michael to taste the chocolate as Willie Wonka guides the children on a grand tour of his factory. I want Karen to smell the flowers Francie Nolan's father bought for her in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn." I want my children to feel the hunger Richard Wright endured in "Black Boy." I want my son David to smack his hand, someday, against Boo Radley's house in "To Kill a Mockingbird." I want my daughter to feel the moonlight against her bare breasts as did Annie in Jamaica Kinkaid's glorious little book "Annie John."

I read aloud to my children be-

cause I want them to feel the hand of Ivan Illyich against their cheek just before he dies. I want my children to someday receive the blessing of Father Zosima in "Brothers Karamazov." I want my children to believe that it can, indeed, rain flowers as it did in "One Hundred Years of Solitude." I want my children to watch Sydney Carton Walk up the steps to the guillotine. I want them to carry Addie's coffin along with Faulkner in "As I Lay Dying." I want my children to listen to Reb Saunders in "The Chosen." I want the water from the pump in "The Miracle Worker" to run against the small hands of David, Karen and Michael.

"Mrs. Keller! Annie Sullivan screams out with joy to Helen's mother. "Mrs. Keller! Mrs. Keller! She knows!" Helen Keller finally learned that these funny little symbols—"A," "B," "C," "D"—mean words, sentences, language, life, freedom. "She knows!"

Reading makes possible the connection between our minds and the near magical notions drawn up from our impossible hearts. I also read to my children because I like the feel of their warmth against my arms and the sound of their quiet breaths as they listen to my voice circling around them night after night.

Reading aloud to children every day gives them the widest entry to that place we call freedom. Reading aloud to children begins the slow process of education that ends in parents and teachers celebrating: "They know! They know! Their hearts and minds have made the connections. Our children are free. They know!"

Mr. de Vinck is the author of "Augusta and Teab" a children's novel just published by Four Winds.

Appendix B



March 4, 2002

Dear Parent ~

I would like to thank you so very much for participating in this study. Your time and efforts have been very much appreciated and I cannot thank you enough for sharing this time with your child. It has been a pleasure to work with your child and to share in this experience. My hope is that it was not only an enjoyable adventure for you to experience with your child, but that you also found the benefit of discussion.

As I finalize the comparisons between discussion and non-discussion stories I will let you know of the results. So far my research has shown that those students who do discuss reading passages with parents do better than they would without discussion in terms of comprehension.

May the remainder of your fifth grade year and your child's be memorable and fun. Have a wonderful spring and a fun summer.

Thanks again!

Best regards,

Jennifer Brock

Appendix C

Quiz 1 – Thesis Study

“The Right to Learn” – Time for Kids

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1.	Mark the <i>main idea</i>.	<u>M</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too broad</i>.	<u>B</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too narrow</i>.	<u>N</u>

- a. Poor families don't have enough money to send their kids to school. ___
- b. Poverty is the main reason why many girls are not in school in Ghana. ___
- c. Since boys are much more likely to get work when they are older, they are the ones who get to go to school. ___
2. This article is mostly about
 ___ a. Organizations that help poor students.
 ___ b. Countries that cannot send their children to school.
 ___ c. Sending girls to school.
 ___ d. Letting boys go to school before girls.
3. CamFed is a program designed to
 ___ a. aid all children going to school
 ___ b. allow high school students to help elementary students
 ___ c. help poor families send their daughters to school
 ___ d. build new schools
4. It could be concluded from this article that
 ___ a. Only boys go to school in Ghana.
 ___ b. Many parents in Peru do not know how to read.
 ___ c. Children in the poorer countries do not want to go to school.
 ___ d. Parents of children in poor countries do not like school.
5. Why does the author compare Yakubu to other girls in Ghana?
 ___ a. She is denied the right to an education.
 ___ b. They look alike.
 ___ c. The other girls also went to live with their brothers.
 ___ d. She is 14 and in the fourth grade.
6. In this article the word illiterate means
 ___ a. being unable to work
 ___ b. someone who cannot talk
 ___ c. being unable to read
 ___ d. not allowed to go to school

Quiz 2 – Thesis Study

“A City at Sea” – Time for Kids

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1.	Mark the <i>main idea</i> .	<u>M</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too broad</i> .	<u>B</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too narrow</i> .	<u>N</u>

- a. The U.S.S. *Theodore Roosevelt* is a ship from the United States. ___
- b. The U.S.S. *Theodore Roosevelt* is like a city on water for those who sail on it. ___
- c. The U.S.S. *Theodore Roosevelt* helps to fight wars. ___
2. This article is mostly about
 ___ a. A major ship in the fight against terrorism.
 ___ b. Life aboard the U.S.S. *Theodore Roosevelt*.
 ___ c. How many women are on the ship.
 ___ d. What jobs people have aboard the ship.
3. The U.S.S. *Theodore Roosevelt* is located
 ___ a. in the Mediterranean Sea
 ___ b. near the United States
 ___ c. in Afghanistan
 ___ d. in the Arabian Sea
4. It could be concluded from this article that
 ___ a. only men have important jobs aboard the ship.
 ___ b. the sailors are anxious to come home.
 ___ c. they get a lot of free time aboard the ship.
 ___ d. everyone aboard the ship works long hours.
5. The writer develops the main idea of this passage mainly by
 ___ a. describing what the ship looks like.
 ___ b. telling what life is like daily for the sailors.
 ___ c. explaining how to get on the ship.
 ___ d. proving a point.
6. In this article the word mission means
 ___ a. a statement of what they believe in
 ___ b. a job that they are required to carry out by the government
 ___ c. to help others
 ___ d. having to work long hours

Quiz 3 – Thesis Study

“The Wreck of the Zephyr” by Chris VanAllsburg

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1.	Mark the <i>main idea</i> .	<u>M</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too broad</i> .	<u>B</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too narrow</i> .	<u>N</u>

- a. The Zephyr can fly. ___
- b. When the Zephyr has the proper sail and is kept above water it can fly. ___
- c. Some sailboats can fly. ___
2. Another good title for this story would be
 ___ a. The Boy Who Couldn't Sail.
 ___ b. A Special Sail.
 ___ c. The Search for the Magical Island.
 ___ d. A Lonely Man's Tale.
3. The item that made the boats fly was the
 ___ a. wind
 ___ b. water
 ___ c. special sail
 ___ d. the night air
4. It could be concluded from the man's story that
 ___ a. he was the boy in the story
 ___ b. the reef was not dangerous.
 ___ c. the man cannot sail anymore.
 ___ d. the Zephyr was a magical boat.
5. What clue does the song provide that the sailor sang about sailing the boat over land?
 ___ a. Boats cannot sail on land.
 ___ b. The boats cannot fly over land.
 ___ c. The boy cannot sail on land.
 ___ d. Only with the special sails can the boat fly over land.
6. In this article the word ominous means
 ___ a. cheerful
 ___ b. clear
 ___ c. threatening
 ___ d. cloudy

Quiz 4 – Thesis Study

“The Garden of Abdul Gasazi” by Chris VanAllsburg

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1.	Mark the <i>main idea</i> .	<u>M</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too broad</i> .	<u>B</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too narrow</i> .	<u>N</u>

- a. Fritz was a dog with a mean personality. ___
- b. Some dogs can be very nice while others are very mean. ___
- c. Miss Hester’s dog needs to be entertained to stay out of trouble and be well behaved. ___
2. The story is mostly about
 ___ a. what Abdul Gasazi’s garden looks like.
 ___ b. how to entertain a bad dog.
 ___ c. not believing everything you see.
 ___ d. dogs turning into ducks.
3. Why did Abdul Gasazi play a trick on Alan Mitz?
 ___ a. To make sure he never came in his garden again.
 ___ b. He is a magician.
 ___ c. He knew that Alan had Miss Hester’s dog.
 ___ d. He wanted to get rid of the ducks.
4. We can conclude that Fritz never was a duck because
 ___ a. he found his way home.
 ___ b. Alan did not get his hat back.
 ___ c. Miss Hester found him in the front yard.
 ___ d. magicians only use a trick and cannot really perform magic.
5. The author gives us a good understanding of how big Abdul’s house is by using
 ___ a. metaphor.
 ___ b. description.
 ___ c. comparison.
 ___ d. examples.
6. In this story the word parlor means
 ___ a. a closet
 ___ b. a kitchen
 ___ c. a game room
 ___ d. a living room

Quiz 5 – Thesis Study

“Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind” Retold by Mary Pope Osborne

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Mark the *main idea*. M

Mark the statement that is *too broad*. B

Mark the statement that is *too narrow*. N

- a. Sally Ann was the kind of woman that Davy Crockett was looking for. ___
- b. Sally Ann could wrestle any man or beast. ___
- c. Davy Crockett was looking for a wife. ___
2. The story is mostly about
 ___ a. how Davy Crockett found out about Sally Ann and fell in love with her.
 ___ b. Sally Ann’s life.
 ___ c. Davy Crockett getting stuck in the tree.
 ___ d. Sally Ann dancing with a bear.
3. The story mentions
 ___ a. why Sally Ann doesn’t like combs.
 ___ b. how Sally Ann got her name.
 ___ c. that Sally Ann had a reputation for being funny.
 ___ d. what type of animal Davy owned.
4. We can conclude that Davy loved Sally because
 ___ a. he heard stories about her.
 ___ b. he asked a lot of people about her.
 ___ c. she was tall.
 ___ d. she wore a beehive hat.
5. The author helps us get to know Sally Ann by using
 ___ a. metaphors.
 ___ b. descriptive stories.
 ___ c. comparisons to other characters.
 ___ d. contrasting her life with Davy’s.
6. In this story the phrase “the whole steamboat” means
 ___ a. the person is large
 ___ b. the other person is lovely
 ___ c. that the other person is something great
 ___ d. a large ship

Quiz 6 -- Thesis Study

Name _____

"John Henry Races the Steam Drill" Retold by Paul Robert Walker

For question 1, follow the directions in the box. For questions 2 through 6, put a check next to the appropriate answer.

1.	Mark the <i>main idea</i> .	<u>M</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too broad</i> .	<u>B</u>
	Mark the statement that is <i>too narrow</i> .	<u>N</u>

- a. Things they have to race against can wear out men. ___
- b. John Henry was worn out. ___
- c. John Henry beat the steam drill but the steam drill won't die. ___
2. The best alternate title for this passage would be
 ___ a. The Life of John Henry.
 ___ b. How to Beat a Steam Drill.
 ___ c. Man Against Machine.
 ___ d. The Steam Drill and John Henry.
3. According to the passage
 ___ a. Little Bill was a tall man.
 ___ b. the demolition boys filled the holes quickly.
 ___ c. Little Bill pulled the drill out of the hole when it was done.
 ___ d. John Henry had a break in the sunshine.
4. The phrase "a man ain't nothin' but a man" John Henry is saying that
 ___ a. a man is meaningless.
 ___ b. men are men.
 ___ c. a man can be beaten.
 ___ d. a man is weak.
5. "He brought that hammer down like a crash of thunder" means
 ___ a. he hit the drill lightly.
 ___ b. he yelled when he hit the drill.
 ___ c. he saw lightening when he hit the drill.
 ___ d. he hit the drill really hard.
6. In this story the word maul means
 ___ a. to smother.
 ___ b. to pound something.
 ___ c. a hammer.
 ___ d. a weight to be lifted.

Appendix D

Raw Scores

The numbers shown are the questions each student answered correctly out of six problems.

STUDENT	QZ1	QZ2	QZ3	QZ4	QZ5	QZ6
01	4	4	2	6	4	2
02	3	5	3	3	5	4
03	4	4	3		5	3
04	3	6	3	4	4	2
05	1	1	2		3	2
06	4	3	1	2	1	2
07	4	5	1	3	4	6
08	2	5	1	3	4	5
09	3	3	0	3	2	
MEAN	3.11	4.00	1.78	3.43	3.56	3.25
STDEV	1.05	1.50	1.09	1.27	1.33	1.58
MEDIAN	3	4	2	3	4	2.5
RANGE	4	6	4	5	5	5

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