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Using literature circles to improve reading comprehension and student self-perception of reading ability among English language learners (ELLs)

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Using Literature Circles to Improve Reading Comprehension and Student Self-Perception of

Reading Ability Among English Language Learners (ELLs)

By

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A Graduate Field Experience

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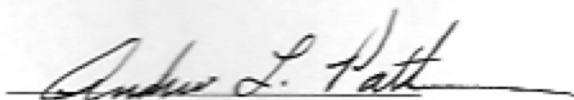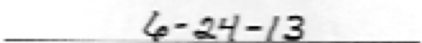Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

This study explores how the implementation of a Literature Circles program for literacy instruction impacts English reading comprehension and student attitudes towards reading among a group of upper elementary, Latino English Language Learners (ELLs). Previous research has shown that ELLs tend to have lower self-esteem related to their academic and behavioral competencies in school, and that Latino students can experience a correlation between academic performance and self-perceptions of "belonging" in school (Leclair, Doll, Osborn, & Johnson, 2009; Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, & Campos, 2003). This unique set of social and emotional concerns can be addressed effectively in the literacy classroom via instructional methods that move away from traditional "Initiate, Response, Feedback" teacher-student discourse patterns (Mehan, 1979) and instead utilize more open-ended activities and instructional conversations that encourage critical thinking (Luk, 2004; Doherty & Hilberg, 2007). In light of existing research, an action research protocol was designed involving the use of a Literature Circles program in a classroom setting--specifically, a leveled English reading group for ELL students in 3rd through 5th grade. Students were divided into groups of two to four students based on their expressed preference for one of five different novels. They spent four weeks reading these novels while engaging in independent, written critical thinking activities and structured discussions with their book groups, while periodically participating in small-group, teacher-led strategy lessons.   At the beginning and end of the study, their reading comprehension was assessed using the Qualitative Reading Inventory, 5th Edition (QRI-5; Leslie & Caldwell, 2011), while their attitudes toward reading were assessed using a survey designed by the researcher. Results from these indicators at the beginning and end of the intervention were compared in order to assess student growth. The researcher also analyzed the independent written activities students did in

their book groups, using a number of quantitative indicators to trace any changes in language

production over time. The findings of the study did not conclusively show that Literature Circles

exerted a systematic, positive impact upon reading comprehension and student attitudes among

the sample population. It is likely, however, that the effectiveness of the intervention was

impeded by methodological shortcomings and missed opportunities to incorporate specific

research-tested principles of best practice for ELL literacy instruction, pointing toward the need

for future research into this subject.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What does effective literacy instruction look like for students acquiring English as a second language? Can these students improve their reading comprehension through a program that emphasizes student-centered learning and open-ended thinking, rather than teacher-led, explicit phonics and strategy instruction? This paper was first conceived as an answer to these questions. It describes an Action Research Project conducted during April and May 2012 regarding the use of Literature Circles as an effective teaching tool for English Language Learners (ELLs). In addition to summarizing the research questions, procedures, and results of the intervention, the paper will also detail the background research that originally motivated the project, and describe how the findings of the present study fit into existing research regarding second-language literacy instruction for ELL students.

This opening chapter will provide context for the investigation, first by detailing the problems designed to be addressed by the Literature Circles intervention, then by making connections to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, and finally by providing a brief overview of the project, the school site where it occurred, and the student sample population.

Describing the Problem

It is undeniable that students learning English as a second language face particular difficulties in the area of English literacy. In the era of "standards-based" language arts instruction and high-stakes testing, all students are expected to master the same curriculum with equal levels of success (McElvain, 2010). While this approach has the advantage of holding all students to high standards, no matter their background, it does run the risk of being insensitive to

the unique needs of particular populations of students, such as ELLs (McElvain, 2010).

Especially in the elementary grades, ELL students are likely to find themselves at different

reading and language proficiency levels, meaning that "one size fits all" methods of literacy

instruction--especially ones relying on leveled basal texts--may not help them acquire language

skills and improve their reading comprehension in English (Avalos, 2003; Gutierrez, 2002).

Perhaps as a reflection of this asymmetry between the pedagogical approaches favored in

many public schools and their educational needs, especially in the area of second language

literacy, ELL students are, by and large, not succeeding in the area of English reading

comprehension at the same levels as their English-dominant peers. According to recent national

assessments of English reading comprehension, only 7% of ELL fourth graders scored at

proficient or above, as compared to 34% of their non-ELL peers. Among eighth graders, only

4% of ELLs scored at or above proficient, as compared to 31% of students not designated as

ELL (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

In addition to these statistics related to poor classroom performance in reading

comprehension, other research indicates that ELL students have a set of unique emotional

difficulties in school that may cause them to have a lower self-concept than non-ELL students,

especially as regards their self-perception of their own reading abilities. One recent study, for

instance, has showed that ELL students are likelier to feel skepticism toward their own abilities

to complete work on time and obtain good grades than their non-ELL peers (Leclair, Doll

Osborn, & Johnson, 2009). The same study found that ELL students were statistically more

inclined than non-ELLs to believe that their peers more often demonstrated on-task behavior and

the ability to comply with directions (Leclair, Doll Osborn, & Johnson, 2009). A separate

investigation conducted among fourth graders at several California elementary schools found

that for fourth grade students, an individual's sense of "belonging" at school can correlate with their level of English language proficiency, meaning that ELL students at the upper elementary level can be especially vulnerable to feeling "left out" in school.

This and related research, which shall be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2, suggests that there is a need for further research into methods of literacy instruction that may be effective for ELL students, both with respect to improving reading comprehension and engendering positive feelings toward school and toward reading.

Literature Circles specifically will be considered for a number of reasons. In the first place, some studies suggest that ELLs benefit especially from instructional strategies that move away from the rigid "Initiate, Response, Feedback" (IRF) pattern of discourse, in which the teacher presents a question or topic, solicits student responses, and then evaluates the "correctness" of those responses (Mehan, 1979). ELLs may instead benefit socially, emotionally, and academically from less formal, "non-institutional" modes of classroom discourse (Luk, 2004), which reflects favorably upon instructional methods, like Literature Circles, that incorporate open-ended classroom talk into the lesson protocol.

Literature Circles also incorporates several other instructional principles shown by certain strands of research to be effective in designing literacy lessons for ELLs, including multiple, decentralized activity centers, critical thinking activities, instructional conversations, and increased levels of student responsibility and independence (Doherty & Hilberg, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). In addition, many of its guiding principles and procedures are in alignment with important components of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. In particular, several standards in the Speaking and Listening strand for Grade 4 are encompassed, including:

- CCSS ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012).

- CCSS ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012).

Given that Literature Circles aligns with a number of principles outlined as best practices, not just for ELL students but for all emergent readers, by both academics and policy-makers, it is worth investigating whether this method could remedy some of the unique challenges ELL students face in learning to read in their second language.

Description of Population and Study Overview

As will be outlined further in Chapter 3 of this paper, the present intervention was conducted at a bilingual public elementary school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. According to the most recent publicly available data, the school served a population that was 99% Latino, 49% ELL, and 94% eligible for free and reduced lunch (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2011). The sample population itself was composed of eight students--five girls and three boys, ranging in age from eight to ten years old--in grades three to five, all selected from the same leveled English reading group. Within this sample population, six of the students were classified as ELL according to the most recent administration of the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English for State to State English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs) test, and seven were available for free and reduced price lunch.

As part of the intervention, students took part in an extended Literature Circles session, lasting approximately four weeks, or 19 school days. After two sessions devoted to diagnostic

testing and student ranking of book choices, the next two weeks (approximately 9-11 sessions) were spent with students divided into book groups, reading one of five pre-selected novels and performing specific independent writing activities to guide their thinking. There were three separate independent writing activities corresponding to three separate roles in each book group: the Discussion Director, whose job it was to formulate open-ended questions to ask his peers about that day's text selection; the Character Specialist, tasked with finding character traits to describe a character in his novel and then supporting those choices with specific examples from the text; and the Literary Luminary, whose role was to find passages that "stood out" in the course of reading, and then justify in a few sentences why he chose that passage. While four of the five book groups discussed and presented their work independently, a fifth group was participating in a targeted, teacher-led reading strategy lesson. The remaining sessions were used for absent students to make up missing work, for the class to complete and present final book projects, and to collect post-intervention data.

Summary

          This chapter offered a basic overview of the Action Research Project; more specifically, it summarized the challenges it was designed to address and introduced Literature Circles as a possible solution to some of those challenges. Chapter 2 will expand upon the research alluded to above in order to provide further justification for the project. It will show that Literature Circles is a literacy program uniquely suited to address the academic, social, and emotional challenges ELLs face in school, mainly because it incorporates a number of research-tested principles of best practice.   Following this, Chapter 3 will present additional information about the student sample population and more comprehensively describe the study procedure, while Chapter 4 will present the results of the intervention. Using both quantitative and qualitative

sources of data, Chapter 4 will weigh the evidence that the intervention did produce positive

effects upon the student sample's attitudes toward reading and overall reading comprehension

against other signs that seemingly indicated that it failed to have an impact. Finally, Chapter 5

will explain and contextualize both the positive and negative results in light of findings from

peer studies. Chapter 5 will show that the intervention was successful to the extent that it

incorporated the principles of best practice emerging from the research studies presented in

Chapter 2, while its failures likely resulted from missed opportunities to incorporate these same

principles.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and classify existing research on second

language acquisition, active learning, and the academic and social experiences of Latino

bilingual students. In doing so, I will argue that it is worth investigating further whether or not

second language acquisition among English Language Learners (ELLs), especially Latino

bilinguals, is particularly enhanced by self-directed methods of literacy instruction in which the

student exercises a greater amount of independence in the completion of academic tasks. The

literature I present here should show that the literature circles model is an appropriate

instructional intervention to use as the subject of teacher research, given the academic and

cultural backgrounds of my students. In the first section of the chapter, I present studies that

illustrate how the social and emotional experience of school is different for ELLs than for

monolingual students and discuss possible implications of these background factors upon

second-language acquisition. In the second section, I summarize research that discusses second

language reading comprehension, highlighting both the areas of language acquisition that are

most important to develop initially and some guidelines for instructional methods that teachers of

ELLs of all ages have found effective. Finally, in the third section of the chapter I describe a

number of past attempts by researchers to assess the effectiveness of more "self-directed" literacy

techniques--that is, methods that step beyond the traditional paradigm of basal programs and the

"Initiate, Respond, Feedback" (IRF; Mehan, 1979) teacher-student relationship--among both

monolingual and bilingual learners.

Social and Emotional Factors Underlying ELL Development of Second-Language Literacy

The studies I outline here show how second-language learners have a unique set of social and emotional concerns that impact their perceptions of school, and as such, may impact their academic performance in such a way that makes certain modes of literacy instruction preferable to others. One study explains the contrast between IRF and "non-institutional" modes of fostering student language development, and suggests that the latter genre of pedagogical techniques may be more helpful to students learning English because they help reduce anxiety and make greater provision for language scaffolding. Another investigation highlights how ELLs tend to have a lower self-concept of their own academic and social competencies than native English speakers. A third study illustrates that the extent to which Latino students, in particular, feel as though they "belong" to a school community correlates with their perceptions of peer relationships and, at younger ages, to English proficiency. Finally, the last study presented in this section outlines some strategies utilized by an effective teacher of young ELLs to foster both this sense of personal and linguistic "belonging" and language acquisition. All of the research presented here lends itself to the notion that second language learners, especially Latino bilinguals, are currently situated to benefit from a literacy program, such as literature circles, that has the power to improve not only linguistic, but also social and emotional competencies.

Luk (2004) conducted a research study that investigated the pedagogical benefits of classroom "small talk" as opposed to more institutional patterns of classroom discourse, like the "Initiate, Response, Feedback" (IRF) model. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine whether or not deviations from the IRF sequence contributed positively to ELL students' self-concept and served as part of an effective teaching strategy in support of ELL students' second language acquisition. In order to answer this question, the researcher engaged in prolonged

observation of an English classroom in Hong Kong for 5 consecutive days, transcribed each of the 35-minute lessons, and extracted discourse patterns that were examples of the IRF framework and non-institutional small talk. She then analyzed both the IRF and small talk examples qualitatively, in order to look for patterns that may have illuminated the pedagogical strengths and weaknesses of each discourse pattern.

The sample population was drawn from an English classroom in Hong Kong. The students were in the first year of secondary school, equivalent to Grade 7 in the North American system. The classroom included 12 girls and 8 boys. The researcher noted that this represented a portion of the entire class, which was split into smaller groups for English instruction because they were deemed to be weaker in their English abilities and more in need of individualized instruction. The teacher under observation came from the United Kingdom, and was a virtually monolingual English speaker who had limited abilities in the students' native language, Cantonese.

The study consisted in five consecutive observations and transcriptions of seven 35-minute English lessons over the course of five school days. The researcher then analyzed the transcripts in order to find examples of IRF triadic sequences--that is, discourse patterns that began with a teacher question, continued with a student response, and ended with teacher feedback designed to evaluate the correctness of that response--and non-institutional small talk. For the purposes of the study, the researcher defined "non-institutional small talk" as a conversational pattern between students and teachers that was *not* explicitly intended for formal pedagogical purposes but still took place within the context of the lesson. The researcher included one example of an IRF triad and one example of non-institutional small talk in the paper. The IRF triad was selected from the middle of a lesson on comparatives, in which the

teacher asked students to share comparative sentences they had written and then orally evaluated

their sentences for grammatical correctness. The non-institutional small talk example was taken

from an earlier moment in the lesson, when students were completing an informal questionnaire

and were seated in a "round-table" arrangement more conducive to social interaction rather than

in rows of desks. The observed conversation took place between the teacher and a group of

female students who had already finished their questionnaire.

The researcher found that non-institutional small talk differed from IRF discourse

patterns in several important ways. First, students, rather than the teacher, tended to initiate non-

institutional small talk, and also tended to initiate their own "turns" in the conversation rather

than waiting to be called upon by the teacher. Additionally, the researcher observed that in the

non-institutional small talk settings, the teacher seemed more willing to respond to and develop

students' utterances as they were, rather than correct them according to pre-planned pedagogical

discourses. Finally, the small talk setting involved a greater use of the students' native language,

in the sense that students themselves were willing to code switch and even dialogue with their

teacher in their native language using simple phrases.

The researcher noted that there were several positive pedagogical consequences of these

trends, even if non-institutional small talk was not explicitly earmarked for a pedagogical

purpose. She noted that students felt more inclined to share their thoughts in class, and to

interact with their classmates in their second language without anxiety. Moreover, it made

students and teacher alike more willing to code switch, a communication strategy that can be

utilized in order to scaffold understanding in a student's second language when the student's

abilities in that language are in an early or limited stage. The researcher inferred that non-

institutional small talk made students feel like their first language was more valued in the context of their English classroom than it would have been in the IRF setting.

In the context of the current investigation, Luk's study is meaningful because it suggests that moving away from IRF towards "non-institutional" or open-ended classroom talk can be beneficial to ELL students, both in an academic and emotional sense. Students can exhibit reduced anxiety and feel less pressure toward second language acquisition, and retain a greater understanding of the value and meaning of their native language to their own academic and personal lives, if lessons include time for talk that is less structured than that which exemplifies the IRF discourse pattern. This suggests that Literature Circles, an academic protocol that makes time for less structured, predominantly student-driven classroom talk, may be especially valuable to use in a classroom setting where the majority of students are learning English.

Another study by Leclair, Doll Osborn, and Johnson (2009) illustrates why it is important to consider pedagogical methods that serve to reduce the anxieties faced by ELL students: precisely because these students are *more* inclined to feelings of anxiety in school. They conducted a research study that compared the attitudes of ELL students and students who did not fit this description toward their respective classroom environments. Specifically, the authors sought to gauge how ELL students, ranging in age from third to fifth grade, viewed their relationships with their teachers and peers, along with their own effectiveness and value as a learner, and compare these feelings toward those expressed by their non-ELL counterparts. The researchers analyzed student responses on the *ClassMaps* Survey (CMS; Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004), an inventory that includes items pertaining to eight aspects of the classroom environment. Since responses to the statements included in the survey were given on a four-point scale, the researchers could quantify and then compare how the two groups of students perceived their

individual roles and community relationships within their classroom. The study hypothesized that these quantitative measures would differ from one another in such a way that showed that ELL students viewed their school environments *negatively,* as a less welcoming and supportive place, than a peer group without this designation.

Study participants included 257 students in grades 3 through 5 attending the same neighborhood school in a midsized Midwestern school district. Thirty-seven of these students, or about 14%, were ELL students and received some kind of services during the day. While the ethnic composition of the participant group was not published in the study for confidentiality reasons, the authors explain that the students attended a school in which 13% of the students were Asian-American, 11% were Latino, and 1% were Native American. Similar restrictions prevented the authors from revealing the linguistic composition of the participant group, but it was revealed that within the school's ELL population as a whole, 50.2% of students spoke Spanish as their first language, 20.3% spoke Vietnamese, 12.9% spoke Arabic, and 7.0% spoke Kurdish. The remaining 9.6% spoke one of 46 other languages. ELL status was determined by referring to data the school had previously collected on the students when assessing them as part of their original referral to the ESL program. All participating ELL students were Lau level 2 or higher English learners.

Researchers gave survey participants the CMS in their general education classrooms. Students completed the surveys anonymously, and were only required to give their grade level and gender. Students were asked to think of their general education teacher, rather than any of their pullout teachers, when answering the sections of the test that had to do with the teacher-student relationship, and of their general education classroom when assessing class culture. The survey was read aloud to students, and its administration was monitored by several graduate

assistants who circled the room. ELL students in each classroom were seated together in order to

help the additional proctors monitor student responses and to make sure each of the ELL students

was surrounded by other kids who would finish the test at a similar pace. The test itself has to do

with 8 separate areas, or "subscales," 3 of which assess a student's view of his/her self-regulation

and 5 of which assess classroom relationships. The former set of subscales includes self-

assessments of academic performance, self-determination, and self-control. In the second set of

subscales, students evaluated teacher-student relationships, home-school relationships,

friendships, conflicts, and their own worries about bullying. Students would listen to an

affirmative statement (e.g. "I can do as well on most assignments in this class") and then assess

their agreement with the statement on a scale of 0 (Never) to 3 (Almost Always), which gave

researchers a mean score for each subscale ranging from 0 to 3.

When survey results were calculated, researchers found that the ELL group only scored

significantly lower than the non-ELL group on 2 of the 8 subscales. In the first place, the ELL

group scored significantly *lower* than the non-ELL group for the subscale "Believing in Me,"

which had to do with their opinions of themselves as students. Generally speaking, ELL students

expressed more skepticism than their non-ELL peers about their own abilities to complete work

correctly and obtain good grades--the mean rating for this category was 2.07, compared to 2.25

for the non-ELL group. Secondly, ELL students rated their peers higher in the module

"Following Class Rules." In this category, a higher rating meant that ELL students believed,

with greater frequency than their non-ELL peers, that their classroom was an orderly place and

that their peers worked well and followed directions, even when the teacher wasn't directly

supervising them. No significant differences were found in student perceptions of the other

categories--namely, self-motivation, teacher-student relations, home-school relations, friendships, peer conflict, and bullying.

The results of the study do seem to demonstrate that ELL students have a lower-level of self-belief and self-esteem in school than their non-ELL counterparts. Since, the study explains, ELL students often achieve at lower levels than English-dominant students, it is possible that the study gives credence to the notion that ELL students are aware of, and acutely sensitive to, these discrepancies even at a young age. Additionally, it was speculated that struggles with mastery of the English language could have also contributed to these students' relative frustration. The researchers were somewhat surprised with the second significant finding, which showed that ELL students were more likely to view their peers as "orderly" in comparison to themselves. They hypothesized that ELL students' tendency to be well-behaved themselves, along with their relative newness to the structure and format of the American educational environment, could have been the source of this discrepancy, and wished to explore this notion further by exploring how student attitudes may evolve as the students themselves get older and become acclimated to U.S. schools.

Perhaps more importantly, the researchers found *no* statistically significant differences between the relative attitudes of ELL and non-ELL students of their relationships with teachers, family, and classroom peers. They expressed optimistically that this could have been a result of teachers beginning to incorporate classroom strategies that foster a sense of belonging among ELL students in the classroom, or because there already existed a large ELL population in the school, and promised to explore this question in future studies.

While this study was, in many ways, preliminary and limited in scope--being, after all, confined to *one* ELL program in a single elementary school and within a narrow age group of

children--it did highlight how ELL students do run the risk of feeling "left out" in school, to the detriment of their academic achievement and self-image, if teachers do not take care to make them feel welcome and included. It would seem that certain modes of pedagogy, such as active learning, can double as one such strategy designed to foster a sense of belonging, provided they connect to students' home and cultural experiences.

Whereas the preceding study looked more generally at whether or not ELL students had a quantitatively lower self-perception in school than non-ELLs, Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, and Campos (2003) conducted a more targeted investigation into the possible qualitative factors influencing the views of specifically Latino students toward their place in school. In a longitudinal study implemented over three years, they researched the factors correlating with Latino students' sense of school belonging, and sought to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the students' English language proficiency and this same sense of school belonging. They answered these questions by administering the *Self-Description Questionnaire*, or SDQ (Marsh, Smith, and Barnes, 1984) to students in order to gauge their own readings of their academic and social skills, giving a selection of items from the *Teacher-Child Rating Scale (*Hightower, 1986) and *Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale* (Epstein & Sharma, 1998) to teachers in order to gauge how they perceived the student's behavioral tendencies and role within school, and the *Psychological Sense of School Membership* (Goodenow, 1993) to the students in order to assess self-perception of school belonging. Following this, the researchers analyzed the data by using an ANOVA test to assess the interaction between language proficiency and school belonging and a multiple regression in order to determine which of the factors--as measured by the ratings students received from themselves and their teachers--correlated with school belonging.

The study participants were selected from three elementary schools in Southern California, all of which had a substantial population of Latino students (46%, 52%, and 95% of the school population, respectively) and were in the process of transitioning from offering bilingual instruction to English immersion, presumably in response to California's Proposition 227. While 81 students participated in the initial phase of the study as fourth graders, longitudinal data was only available for 57, as some participating students moved out of the district before the end of sixth grade. The final sample was 48% male and 52% female. Forty-six percent were classified as being English Language Learners and 44% were designated as being English Proficient.

The study was conducted by administering a number of separate questionnaires to students and their teachers in order to determine the students' academic and peer self-concept, behavior and attitudes as determined by adults, and sense of school belonging at four points during the course of the study: fourth grade fall, fourth grade spring, sixth grade fall, and sixth grade spring. Academic and peer self-concept was determined using the SDQ, which included declarative phrases relating to academic and social skills that the students responded to on a scale of 1 (totally false) to 5 (true). Teacher behavior ratings were coded using selections from the TCRS and BERS assessments. Teachers were given a set of statements relating to a student's propensity for misbehavior (the "Acting Out " factor) and another set of statements relating to that student's capacity to perform the tasks that are expected of him in school (the "School Functioning" factor). Teachers would give students a "0" or a "1" for each of the 5 statements assigned to each of the 2 factors, depending on whether or not the student exhibited the characteristics outlined in each statement. Finally, school belonging was assessed using the PSSM, an 18-item questionnaire that included statements pertaining to the student's perceptions

of his own role in his school community, to which he would indicate agreement or disagreement

on a scale from 1 to 5.

Researchers found that at the fourth grade level, there was a significant interaction

between language proficiency and *change* in school belonging from fall to spring. Students

designated as ELL experienced a statistically significant drop in school belonging across the year

when compared to their English Proficient counterparts. At the sixth grade level, the researchers

did not observe a statistically significant interaction between the two variables.

When researchers ran regressions in order to trace the factors correlating with school

belonging, they observed distinct trends among fourth and sixth grade students. For fourth

graders, English Proficiency was a statistically significant predictor of school belonging at Step 1

of the regression analysis, but dropped out once the self and teacher ratings were added in the

next step. Researchers attributed this change to the fact that English Proficiency indicators could

have been embedded within the teacher assessments of academic competence, because in the

final regression, one of the statistically significant factors that remained was the teacher

assessment of the "School Functioning" factor. The other was students' perceptions of their own

peer relations and social skills. Sixth grade offered a different picture, one in which the *only*

statistically significant predictor of school belonging in the spring was the student's perceptions

of his relationships with peers. It is worth noting that language proficiency status did *not*

correlate, and neither did either segment of the teacher evaluation.

The study has a number of implications for my investigation. Namely, it suggests that a

student's sense of self-worth and belonging in school is strongly influenced by peer relationships

across the fourth to sixth grades, lending strength to the notion that instructional and other

activities in the classroom should work to explicitly develop students' social capacities.

Furthermore, at the fourth grade level, students' belonging is positively correlated with English

Proficiency and teacher perceptions of behavior, indicating how vulnerable young ELLs can be

to feelings of anomie in school if their language backgrounds are not respected in the classroom

setting.

Gillanders (2007) conducted a case study that highlights one example of how

teachers, even those who do not share the cultural backgrounds of their students, can

respect the language backgrounds of their ELL students and foster their sense of belonging

even if they do not share the same cultural heritage. The study was designed to investigate

strategies used by a monolingual, English-speaking pre-K to make young English Language

Learning (ELL) students a greater part of the classroom community, and facilitate their

language acquisition. Her investigation involved three formal interviews with the teacher,

sustained observation of the teacher's classroom, and the administration of vocabulary

tests in English and Spanish to the four ELL students in the class in order to assess their

academic progress during the year. Following this, Gillanders organized and coded her

notes based on patterns that emerged out of her observations, and used the qualitative and

quantitative data in order to explain aspects of the teacher's practice that seemed effective

with respect to the academic achievement and emotional well-being of the ELL students.

The sample population was drawn from an urban school in North Carolina whose

student body was approximately 4% Latino. The pre-K teacher who was the specific

subject of the case study, assigned the pseudonym "Sarah," was a white woman in her early

fifties with several years of teaching experience at the school site, but no formal training in

teaching ELL students. She taught in a Title I classroom containing 16 four-year-olds, four

of whom--given the pseudonyms "Alex," "Wayne," "Yazmin," and "Juan"--were Latino, bilingual ELLs.

The study procedure involved 51 class visits to Sarah's classroom from April 2003 to May 2004. The researcher tended to observe during periods involving extensive teacher-student and student-student interaction, such as story time and centers time, sometimes choosing to tape record the sessions. In addition to this, she formally interviewed Sarah three times. The researcher incorporated comments from both these formal interviews and informal conversations during the course of observations regarding her practice and her children's development. Along with qualitative observational data, the researcher also collected progress monitoring data from Alex, Wayne, Yazmin, and Juan, both in English and in Spanish. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT; Dunn & Dunn, 1998) was used to gauge language acquisition in English, while the Test de Vocabulario en Imágenes Peabody (TVIP; Dunn, Padilla, Lugo & Dunn, 1986) was used to monitor Spanish-language acquisition. At the conclusion of the case study, the researcher used the notes from her observations and the quantitative results of the PPVT and TVIP to inform her discussion of important themes and patterns in Sarah's teaching practice and classroom culture that may have contributed to student academic performance.

The researcher found that three of the four students grew on the PPVT and three out of four also saw their scores grow on the TVIP. All students saw their scores grow in either English or Spanish, meaning that all four students experienced increased language acquisition in either Spanish or English. Gillanders noted that in addition to these quantitative gains, all four students improved in social or emotional measures during the duration of the study. The four ELL students began the study largely socializing with one

another or remaining quiet during group work time or playtime, but as the year continued,

they associated with the English-speaking students in the classroom with far greater

frequency. The researcher observed increased willingness to socialize on the part of the

ELL students even in cases where they struggled to produce communication in English.

Alex, for instance, played more frequently with some of the English-speaking girls as the

year went on by acting as the baby during housekeeping games--thereby involving himself

in play without the added pressure of constant communication in his second language

before he felt ready.

Gillanders hypothesized that these positive changes in student language acquisition

and student behavior had much to do with efforts on the part of Sarah, their teacher, to

build a relationship with her students that transcended language barriers. The researcher

highlighted that Sarah used many nonlinguistic methods of expressing care and affection

for her ELL students, including hand-holding and hugs. She also tended to redirect them

when they were off-task by putting them in her lap, rather than reprimanding them in front

of their classmates. In addition, she took the initiative to enroll at Spanish classes in a local

high school and, when appropriate, shared new words and songs that she learned with the

class. Gillanders noted that this approach seemed to raise the status of the Spanish

language within Sarah's classroom--not just among the ELL students themselves, but

among *all* students. Seeing the teacher struggle to learn a new language made the four ELL

students trust her more--and made the rest of the students excited to share in what their

teacher was learning by consulting their Spanish-speaking classmates. Gillanders

attributed the positive changes that took place for the ELL students in Sarah's classroom

during the year to their teachers conscientious effort at relationship-building through a variety of separate, but related strategies.

Gillanders' case study is relevant to the present investigation because it reveals how critical teacher-student and student-student relationships are to the academic and emotional development of ELL students. Her research reflects favorably upon pedagogical methods that foster a collaborative relationship between students and their teacher, and between students and their peers. If teachers pursue teaching strategies that make them a more accessible figure to students, and encourage them to collaborate with one another, it seems likelier that their language development will accelerate more quickly than it would have otherwise. It is worth investigating whether methods such as Literature Circles could serve the purpose of fostering a collaborative and relationship-driven classroom among older students.

The studies presented in this section present convincing evidence for the idea that non-IRF modes of teaching literacy are compatible with the social and emotional underpinnings of ELL students' experiences in a school environment. Luk (2004) showed that ELL students experienced less anxiety and were better equipped to learn English in a scaffolded manner under "non-institutional" pedagogical methods than under IRF. Next, the research of Leclair, Doll, Osborn, & Johnson (2009) illustrated how they were observed to have a lower conception of themselves as academic learners as compared to non-ELLs. Following this, Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, and Campos (2003) explained how Latino elementary students' self-perceptions of "belonging" in school are connected with language proficiency at the fourth grade level and correlate with the strength of peer relationships at the fourth through sixth grade levels. Finally, Gillanders (2007) illustrated one example of how teachers can use relationship-building

strategies to foster a better sense of belonging and improved peer relationships for ELL students in their classroom. Each of these developments supports the argument that literature circles can be useful in a classroom that is predominantly ELL and Latino, since they are designed to foster collaborative and open-ended talk that builds social as well as language skills.

The Cultivation of Second Language (L2) Reading Comprehension

In this section, I describe a group of studies that trace the development of ELLs' English reading comprehension, highlighting both the aspects of L2 acquisition that are deemed most correlative with it and principles of instruction that have been deemed most effective in strengthening those aspects. The first study develops a broad framework or equation for L2 reading comprehension, highlighting how aspects of oral language--specifically listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge--correlate with it the strongest. The second, meanwhile, illustrates how the enhancement of vocabulary knowledge is predicated on teaching it through tasks that are more rigorous and involve more self-direction on the part of the student. The third study is a complimentary analysis outlining how ELL student outcomes can be helped by classroom adherence to a set of pedagogical principles advocating the use of instructional conversations,, language and literacy development across the curriculum, contextualization of instruction in students' prior knowledge and home lives, and an organizational structure built around simultaneous, multiple activity bases. The final study shows how students highly susceptible to academic and demographic risk factors may see the negative outcomes that generally correlate with this risk factors mitigated in a classroom that utilizes instructional and emotional supports--some of which include, again, the pedagogical use of instructional conversations, release of responsibility to students, and emotionally responsive teaching. Since many of the principles outlined as effective strategies for facilitating academic achievement

among ELLs are relatively well-aligned with the methodology of the literature circle, I argue that research shows that the latter is a model for literacy instruction that can increase the overall reading comprehension of ELL students.

Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) conducted a research study that sought to derive the framework of an "equation" for the reading comprehension of English Language Learners (ELLs) in L2 by investigating the statistical correlation between a number of oral language and decoding skills, such as vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, alphabetic knowledge, and fluency, upon L2 reading comprehension. Their goal was to determine which skills would be predictive of overall reading comprehension. The authors designed a model equation by administering the Computer-Based Academic Assessment System (Sinatra & Royer, 1993), intended to measure the decoding skills, and Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery (WLPB; Woodcock, 1991), an instrument for measuring oral language skills and reading comprehension, to 135 bilingual fourth graders on an individual basis and then analyzing the data using linear regression.

Study participants included 135 Spanish-English bilingual, Latino fourth grade students from three separate inner-city elementary schools in Boston, Chicago, and El Paso. Sixty-nine percent of these students had first experienced literacy instruction in Spanish. With the exception of 3 students whose initial literacy experiences were not known, the rest were first instructed in English. The students at the Chicago and El Paso schools were predominantly Mexican, whereas the Boston students were mostly of Dominican or Puerto Rican origin. All three participating school sites had a student population that was majority Latino and majority free/reduced lunch, and also had a substantial portion of its student body designated as limited English proficient (LEP). They also all used the same reading curriculum as the basis of literacy

instruction, Success For All (SFA; (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996), a relatively structured basal program available in both English and Spanish. The researchers specifically selected the schools due to this commonality, which served as a control.

The study consisted in the administration of the Computer-Based Academic Assessment System and the WLPB. The first of these two instruments was designed to assess students' alphabetic recognition and fluency. In the first phase of the test, students were asked to pronounce 40 nonsense words displayed one at a time on the computer, which were three, four, five, and six letters long.   Researchers calculated the percentage of nonsense words that were pronounced correctly.   The second phases of the test measured the speed and accuracy with which students could pronounce words in English in order to gauge English fluency.   Students were again asked to pronounce 40 words of either three, four, five, or six letters in length. Researchers would measure the students' response times and mark their answers as correct or incorrect. Because they observed that response time tended to correlate with correctness of response, they opted to use response time as the sole measure of fluency for the purposes of the regression.

The WLPB was designed to measure indicators of oral language proficiency and overall reading comprehension. In one section, students independently read passages, which gradually increased in their levels of difficulty, and gave oral responses to unfinished questions. Examiners collected data of a student's overall reading comprehension both as a raw score and as a grade level equivalent. Another component of the WLPB assessed students' listening comprehension in a similar fashion, asking students to listen to selected English recordings of increasing difficulty and to orally answer comprehension questions. The final component of the test that researchers used assessed English vocabulary knowledge. Examiners showed the

students pictures of common and uncommon objects and asked students to name them.   Just as was the case with reading comprehension, for the Listening and Vocabulary components of the assessment, researchers collected data both as a raw score and as a grade level equivalent.

After performing a linear regression with the collected data, researchers were able to determine the relative strengths of the correlations between reading comprehension and the decoding and oral language variables. What they found was that alphabetic knowledge, listening comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge had positive correlations with reading comprehension and that fluency, measured as response time, had a relatively weak, *negative* correlation with reading comprehension, meaning that faster word readers had better comprehension. The strongest correlations that existed were the ones occurring between the *oral* language components--vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension--and reading comprehension. Listening comprehension was strongest by a large margin. The findings suggest that an emphasis upon the development of students' oral language skills, together with sufficient instruction in decoding skills, can improve reading comprehension performance for ELLs. The study supports, therefore, the notion that instructional methods that develop students' oral language skills--especially in listening comprehension and vocabulary knowledge--can improve their overall English reading comprehension.

In the literature review of the preceding study, Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) alluded to another segment of research involving L2 reading comprehension, one which involves the instructional principles and methods that in fact help develop the elements of language acquisition the preceding study names as being constitutive of comprehension as a whole. Drawing on Laufer's (2001) investigations into word acquisition among adolescent and adult ELLs, they noted that L2 learners learn new words more effectively if they expend more

cognitive effort in the tasks they undertake to understand the word. This theory is what drives

the research of Walters and Bozkurt (2009), who conducted a research study that determined the

extent to which vocabulary notebooks could serve as an effective aid for English vocabulary

acquisition among Turkish young adults studying English at a one-year preparatory academy.

The researchers divided the students into an experimental group, which received the intervention,

and two control groups, which didn't, and assessed each group's progress on a pair of vocabulary

tests, one of which was receptive and the other of which was productive. The receptive test was

modeled on Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (1990), and consisted of test items that asked

students to match given words to a set of definitions. Meanwhile, the productive vocabulary test

was modeled on Laufer and Nation's Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (1999), and assessed

students' ability to use the target vocabulary when given sentence-level context and, in some

cases, the first letters of the word. The vocabulary tests assessed knowledge of *both* target words,

which would be included in the notebooks, and non-target words. They were given as both

pretests, three weeks before the vocabulary notebook intervention was imposed, and as a posttest

immediately following the implementation. Additionally, students in each of the two groups

were assigned a "free-write" composition at the conclusion of each week, in which researchers

assessed the frequency with which they were correctly using the target vocabulary words for that

week.

The study participants were 60 students in a low-intermediate English class Zongdulak

Karaelmas University English Language Preparatory School in Turkey. Students at the

university are required to develop a minimum level English proficiency in order to graduate, and

are assigned into either an intermediate or low-intermediate class based on the results of a

placement test. The treatment group was based on which teacher was willing to expose his class

to the intervention, while the control groups were assembled randomly among the remaining students. Of the 60 study participants, 35 were male and 25 were female.

The vocabulary notebooks were implemented in the classroom over a period of four weeks. The researchers selected 80 target words from among the 50-60 "key words" per unit the curriculum selected as being worthy of study. The words were deliberately selected for their relative lack of frequency in English so that researchers could feel relatively secure in the fact that the students did not know them beforehand. Each week, the teacher would present 20 of these words, have students write them down in their notebooks, and introduce various facets of word knowledge for some of the first few words, such as parts of speech, word etymology, first-language translations, and second language synonyms and antonyms. Students would then complete the same information for the remainder of the words. Aside from this, the notebooks would be periodically incorporated into classroom activities--students would occasionally write sentences with the vocabulary words in their notebooks, quiz each other on the words or corresponding word knowledge, and engage in other forms of practice. At the end of each week, students in both the control and experimental groups wrote compositions in their notebooks on a topic consistent with the themes they had been studying in class that week. They were not explicitly given instructions for vocabulary use, nor were they told that they were to be assessed.

Researchers administered the posttest in the week following the month-long intervention, and conducted an ANOVA test to compare how much the three groups improved between pretest and posttest.   The results showed that the treatment groups experienced significantly more pretest to posttest growth on both the receptive and productive components of the vocabulary test for *target words only*. Test results on both of the two assessments pertaining to non-targeted words showed no significant differences between the control and experimental groups.

Meanwhile, the analysis of the written responses showed a similar benefit for the treatment group as compared to the control groups in that the treatment group showed a much greater propensity to use the target words correctly in their writing as the program progressed. To begin with, only one student from the control groups managed to use target words in their written compositions at all during the 4 weeks. Among the treatment group, meanwhile, the number of students using target words increased dramatically from week 1 to week 4, from 2 to 11 students.

The results of this study indicate that vocabulary acquisition among students learning English can be enhanced greatly when students are empowered to take an active role in monitoring their learning, and when the tasks they are expected to perform are more intellectually complex than simply copying down words and definitions. This lends itself to the notion that student learning in other aspects of second language literacy can also be enhanced via active learning methods and self-monitoring, both of which are characteristics of an effectively-implemented literature circles model.

A complimentary analysis relating to the importance of active learning methods to student achievement comes from Doherty and Hilberg (2007), who conducted an investigation into the relationship between pedagogical techniques, classroom organization, and student outcome gains at two public elementary schools composed mainly of low-income, Latino English Language Learners (ELLs). The researchers sought to determine whether or not the Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Learning (Tharp et al., 2000), and the corresponding decentralized model of classroom organization corresponding to it, correlated with appreciable improvements in student achievement. The Five Standards model consisted in the following: joint productive activity shared by students and teachers, language and literacy development across the curriculum,

contextualization of instruction in students' prior knowledge and home lives, incorporation of intellectually challenging activities, and content delivery through the use of instructional conversation. Doherty and Hilberg noted that the classroom organizational style generally accepted as complementing the pedagogical tenets of the Five Standards is one in which the classroom is organized into multiple, simultaneous activity settings throughout the lesson, rather than relying solely on whole group instruction. In order to answer their research questions, they first observed teachers and evaluated them according to a Standards Performance Continuum rubric (SPC; Doherty, Hilberg, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2002) measuring their use of the Five Standards. Following this, they ran analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA) tests, controlling for student and school-based variables, to gauge the relationship between changes in SPC scores and changes in student performance on the Standard Achievement Test (SAT-9; Harcourt Brace, 1997).

The sample population was taken from two public, rural elementary schools in California, one of which, the primary site, already had informally incorporated the Five Standards into its professional development, and the other of which, the control site, had no experience with the standards. The schools were chosen because of their relative similarity in a variety of demographic and academic factors; they were found to serve student populations that were approximately similar in their ethnic, socioeconomic, and parent educational backgrounds, and were approximately equivalent to each other in previous academic performance, as measured by their most recent performance data on the SAT-9 and California Standards Test of English Language Arts (CSTELA; California Department of Education, 2002) standardized assessments. The study included 23

teachers from both schools, ranging in experience level from 2 to 18 years, as well as 394

students. There were 113 third grade students, 138 fourth graders, and 143 fifth graders.

These students were split into 12 bilingual classrooms (7 at the primary site and 5 at the

control site), 5 English-only classrooms (4 at the primary site and 1 at the control site), 4

structured English instruction classrooms (3 at the primary site and 1 at the control site),

and 2 combined English-only/structured English instruction classrooms (only at the

control site). Between the two sites, 244 students were considered limited English

proficient (63% of which attended the primary site), 91 were considered either

redesignated or fully English proficient, and 66 students self-identified as English speakers.

The study methodology consisted first in four 45-minute observations of each

participating teacher during language arts instruction by an observer trained in evaluation

according to the SPC rubric. Evaluations of the same teacher were spread out by at least

four weeks. The rubric assesses teachers' adherence to all five standards on a scale of zero

to four, with a four only being awarded only if a particular standard is integrated with at

least two others in a single activity. After doing this, the observers classified each teacher's

approach to classroom organization, and the extent to which each teacher utilized

instructional approaches characterized by multiple, simultaneous activities, by assigning a

value of 0 or 1 to classroom organization based on whether or not such a structure was

observed during the course of the lesson. After all four observations, these values were

averaged in order to determine a percentage of instructional sessions, between 0 and 1,

devoted to multiple, simultaneous activity settings. Following this, the researchers

classified the observed teachers into a four-level taxonomy, based on their scores on the

SPC rubric and classroom organization measurement. Those teachers who scored better

than 12 out of 20 on the SPC and had a percentage of .5 or greater of instructional activities

utilizing multiple, simultaneous settings were placed into the highest classification, the one

adhering most closely to the Five Standards and associated modes of classroom

organization.

After gathering data from the teacher observations, the researchers used a series of

statistical analyses to assess the contribution to teacher scores on the SPC rubric to the

prediction of student achievement. Using a hierarchical regression, Doherty and Hilberg

found that SPC scores correlated with higher scores on the comprehension, reading, and

vocabulary sections on the SAT-9--a relationship relatively small in magnitude, but

statistically significant (with p ranging between .03 and .04). There was no statistically

significant relationship between scores on the SPC rubric and SAT-9 results on the

language and spelling sections of the SAT-9.

Meanwhile, the researchers used ANCOVA and MANOVA tests to determine the

amount of variance in SAT-9 scores that interacted with not only SPC scores, but also

classroom organization measurements. They found that the teachers in the group

classified as being in the highest quadrant with respect to SPC scores *and* the percentage of

instruction devoted to multiple, simultaneous activities also saw their students perform

highest on the SAT-9, as compared to teachers with lower scores on both indicators. This

distinction was most pronounced with respect to Limited English Proficient students, who

scored higher on a statistically significant basis when their teachers scored highly on SPC

and organizational measures than they did when their teachers scored lower on one or

both of the two indicators. In other words, student performance correlated positively with

teachers whose pedagogical practice conformed to the Five Standards and who organized

their classrooms around instructional activities taking place in multiple, simultaneous

settings.

Doherty and Hilberg's study is meaningful because it makes clear that students,

including and especially ELLs, can benefit from an instructional methodology that values

and prioritizes collaborative talk, critical thinking activities, and home-school connection,

and ensures that learning takes place in a decentralized, diversified academic environment.

Literature Circles is a model of literacy instruction that adheres to this standard because in

such a protocol, learning takes place in both whole group and small group settings, and via

teacher-centered, student-centered, and collaborative instructional activities. If the Five

Standards model correlates with higher levels of student achievement, as Doherty and

Hilberg argued then Literature Circles, an instructional protocol that shares certain

characteristics with the Five Standards, can perhaps also enhance student literacy

outcomes, including in environments heavily populated with ELL students.

A different, but related aspect of pedagogical strategies that could enable language and

literacy development in ELL students is outlined by Hamre and Pianta (2005) who conducted

a research study investigating whether instructional and emotional support can serve to

moderate the risks to academic achievement and classroom demeanor posed by functional

and demographic factors. To answer this question, the researchers used a randomly-

selected sample of children from the National Institute of Child Health and Development

Study of Early Child Care (NICHD ECCRN, 1993) classified them into subgroups based on

demographic risk factors, and conducted classroom observations to determine the level of

instructional and emotional supports available in their first grade classrooms. In order to

establish a measurement for both a student's academic performance and classroom

behavior, researchers collected, respectively, results from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery Revised (WJ-R; Woodcock & Johnson, 1989), and the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001), in which teachers self-assessed their perceptions of conflict existing between themselves and students. After this, they used an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) analysis to determine the interactions that took place between students' risk factors, academic and behavioral performance, and the level of instructional and emotional supports in the classroom.

The sample population was a random sample of 1,364 children from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care, only 910 of whom had complete data and were actually included in the study. The students were drawn from 827 separate classrooms from all over the country--to be specific, 747 separate schools, from 295 districts in 32 different states. The vast majority of students were white (723 out of 910), with a smaller proportion of African-Americans (96), Latinos (50), and members of other ethnic groups (39). The mean level of maternal education--one of the chief demographic risk factors--was 14.45 years, with a range from 7 to 21 years. While students were followed from birth as part of their participation in the NICHD study, for the purposes of this particular investigation, only academic and behavioral data from age 54 months, kindergarten, and first grade were considered. The student participants were classified into low and high risk groups according to both functional and demographic factors. *Functional risk* factors included a short attention span, a history of behavioral problems, poor social skills, and documented academic difficulties. Students who possessed zero or one of the functional risk factors were placed into the low risk group, while students deemed susceptible to two or more of the risk factors were placed into the high risk group. For functional risk factors, the low-

risk group included 881 students, while the high risk group included 99 students. The only demographic risk factor considered was level of maternal education. Students were placed into the high risk group for this factor if their mother possessed less education than a four-year college degree, which included 27% of the sample, or 249 children. This left 661 students in the low-risk group for demographic factors.

Study procedure consisted first in the observation of every classroom that hosted a student involved in the study. Each classroom was observed once for every student participating in the study that it contained. Each observation was three hours long, and occurred in the morning from the start of school. Observers rated the teacher on a 7-point scale according to a variety of factors pertaining to instructional and emotional support. Instructional support factors included explicit literacy instruction, evaluative feedback, the presence of instructional conversations, and the encouragement of child responsibility, whereas emotional support factors included teacher sensitivity, classroom management, and the establishment of a strong classroom culture, among others. Classrooms were classified as providing low, moderate, and high levels of academic and emotional support according to the ratings received on the corresponding indicators. Classrooms scoring in the top 33% on instructional and emotional support indicators were classified as "high," those scoring in the middle 33% were classified as "moderate," and those scoring in the bottom 33% were classified as providing "low" amounts of instructional and emotional support. Following this, the researchers used an ANCOVA test in order to assess the interaction of the different categories established in the study: risk factors with academic and behavioral performance, as well as risk factors with academic and behavioral performance *and* levels of academic and emotional support.

The researchers found, first of all, that higher levels of both functional and demographic risk correlated with lower academic performance, according to the WJ-R, and a higher incidence of teacher-student conflict, as measured by the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale. However, increased levels of both instructional and emotional supports in the classroom played a role in moderating this relationship. The researchers showed that within their sample, students with high incidences of functional risks in classrooms featuring high levels of emotional support scored comparably to their low-risk peers in both academic and relational competencies, whereas the same high-risk children placed in classrooms with low and moderate levels of emotional support scored well below their low-risk peers academically, and also experienced higher levels of conflict with their teachers. Meanwhile, students with high demographic risk (that is, students whose mothers had lower levels of education) also performed comparably on the WJ-R to low-risk students when placed in classrooms with high levels of instructional support, while students with high demographic risk in classrooms with low and moderate levels of instructional support performed lower than their low-risk peers on the WR-J. The researchers concluded that higher levels of instructional and emotional supports-- characterized by factors such as explicit instruction of literacy strategies, use of instructional conversations, willingness to yield academic responsibilities to students, and emotionally responsive and attentive teaching, among others--correlated with both higher levels of student achievement and lower levels of teacher-student conflict.

The results of this study are important in light of the current investigation because they highlight the paramount importance of certain supports, both academic and social/emotional, for student progress, both academic and emotional. These supports may

be especially critical for students from an "at-risk" background--a profile that fits many ELL

students. In a classroom environment heavily populated by at-risk students, it is of

paramount importance that pedagogical techniques help to provide these supports.

This section served to highlight how existing research on the foundations of L2 reading

comprehension is compatible with the skills honed under a literature circles program. Proctor,

Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) showed how oral language factors, especially listening

comprehension and vocabulary development, correlate strongest with L2 reading comprehension

than any of the other aspects of language acquisition outlined in the study. Furthermore, Walters

and Bozkurt (2009), and later Doherty and Hilberg (2007) showed how these skills are best

developed using methods that promote active student engagement with the material and

significant self-direction to learning. Finally, Hamre and Pianta (2005) illustrated that the

academic and emotional development of "at-risk" students is often correlated with whether they

are in a classroom that provides appropriate levels of specific instructional and emotional

support. Literature Circles, implemented correctly, can share many of the characteristics

promoted by the preceding studies as examples of best practice. By relying on teacher-student

and student-student talk, along with self-driven written activities, in order to run smoothly, this

method not only promotes the foundational skills necessary for reading comprehension growth,

but also utilizes a learning method driven by the motivations and interests of the fully engaged

student.

Self-Directed Instructional Protocols

This third and final section of the literature review consists of research into efforts that

have already taken place to transcend current paradigms of reading instruction, such as

standardized basal curricula and an IRF framework for questioning and answering. In the study

by Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva and Dorn (2011), such an effort consisted in the incorporation of

a new content literacy program that merged the instruction of literacy skills with geography

instruction. In an additional study by Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and Ellis (2010), researchers

observed the effects of active learning methods on teacher-student and student-student talk in

early childhood classrooms. In a third investigation by Echevarria (1995), researchers assessed

whether literacy instruction via Instructional Conversations (IC) impacted the discursive

behaviors and overall reading comprehension of ELL students with learning disabilities. Finally,

a fourth study by McElvain (2010) incorporated a model for Transactional Literature Circles

(TLC) into a special pullout literacy program for at-risk, ELL upper elementary students, and

observed the program's effects upon reading comprehension as compared to a control group.

The studies revealed mixed to positive results, enough to justify further study and investigation

of effective methods of literacy instruction, perhaps incorporating elements of the ones outlined

here, that are not rooted in IRF.

Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva, and Dorn (2011) conducted a research study that

investigated whether embedding geography content instruction into the literacy block advanced

reading comprehension for English Language Learners (ELLs) in grades 3-8. Specifically, the

authors wanted to see if the implementation of a specific social studies curriculum, *GeoLiteracy*

for ELLs (Arizona Geographic Alliance (AZGA), 2009)*,* had any effect on reading

comprehension scores for students sampled from classrooms in Arizona, Indiana, and Oklahoma

containing a significant population of ELL students. In order to measure this, the researchers

compared pre-and post-test scores on a reading comprehension test (NOT a social studies content

exam) that was aligned to the skills emphasized in the GeoLiteracy curriculum and similar in

format to state standardized tests. Participating students were divided into two groups--one of

which had GeoLiteracy lessons incorporated periodically into reading instruction over the period

covered by the study (anywhere from 3 to 5 months, depending on the state) and the other of

which simply followed their normal reading program. Afterward, researchers ran an ANOVA

test in order to see if there were any interactions between exposure to the curricular intervention,

ELL status, and pre- to post-test growth.

The sample consisted of 1,431 students who were enrolled in 23 schools in Arizona,

Oklahoma, and Indiana. Twenty-two of these schools received federal Title I funds, indicating

that they served a population that was at least 33% composed of recipients of free or reduced

lunch. The students themselves were from classrooms in grades 3 to 5, 7, and 8 (grade 6 was

omitted due to a lack of teacher volunteers). The grade levels ranged in ELL composition from

28 to 39 percent, and as a whole, the sample was 32% ELL. ELL and non-ELL students were

mixed between the intervention and control groups, so that each of the two groups was populated

by students from each group.

The academic intervention consisted in the implementation of GeoLiteracy lessons within

the reading curriculum over a course of 3 to 5 months. Teachers were asked to teach 3 to 5

lessons over the course of the study, which they tended to do by teaching a lesson once every

other week. Teachers were given flexibility in terms of the content they were allowed to teach,

since all GeoLiteracy lessons included as a part of the study revolved around the same core of

literacy skills--cause and effect, summarizing, main idea, sequencing, drawing conclusions,

making inferences, and using text features--regardless of content focus. Teachers also were

allowed to be flexible in terms of instructional methodology, though the lessons included within

the modified *GeoLiteracy for ELLs* collection generally followed the Sheltered Instruction and

Observation Protocol (SIOP), which incorporates content and language objectives, emphasizes

key vocabulary, and includes a variety of mechanisms for language scaffolding in order to reach ELLs at a wide swath of levels of English proficiency.

The study showed a significant relationship between instruction in GeoLiteracy and growth on the GeoLiteracy reading skills post-test for all students (ELL *and* non-ELL) in grades 5 and 8. While there was pre- to post-test growth for students in the other grades, and a higher rise in such scores for ELLs than non-ELLs, none of these results represented a significant difference at the *p<.05* level.   Meanwhile, there was a statistically significant growth in test scores for the 8th grade ELL students in the GeoLiteracy group. The ANOVA results showed that eighth grade ELLs achieved *more* growth when exposed to the GeoLiteracy curriculum than eighth grade ELLs in the control group, who were instructed using the regular literacy curriculum.

The researchers were able to conclude that the incorporation of *GeoLiteracy for ELLs* into the reading curriculum either improved students' performance significantly in reading or did not cause their performance to decline. They argued that this showed that the inclusion of social studies content during the school day, which is all too often being pushed out at the expense of increased time spent on reading and math, does not hurt student performance on standardized reading tests. The fact that this was true even in high-poverty schools is important because social studies is being pushed out of curriculum precisely the most within these schools. For the purposes of my investigation, the study is important because it shows the potential for creating successful literacy instruction for ELLs by stepping outside the bounds of the standardized literacy curriculum, which has become the way many inner-city schools are now choosing to teach literacy. The authors offer some hope that literacy programs that also inject knowledge of civics, history, and geography--skills that students who are to become effective leaders and

successful people *need* to have, but all too often aren't provided at an early age--can be

successful in spite of standardized testing demands.

In other studies, the academic intervention was predicated not only upon the utilization of

different materials, but also upon the implementation of entirely different instructional methods

designed to prompt academic learning through quality talk. Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and Ellis

(2010) conducted a research study on how the incorporation of active learning techniques into

certain early childhood classrooms in Scotland impacted the development of quality child-to-

teacher and child-to-child talk, and sought to compare the results between students of different

socioeconomic backgrounds. The researchers answered this question by observing 6 separate

primary classrooms on 4 separate occasions during the school year. Observations were

conducted for a period of 2 minutes every 10 minutes during the school day, during which time

the observers would classify teacher and student behaviors according to a predetermined list.

Additionally, 6 children in each classroom were observed for 10-minute blocks every hour, their

actions categorized according to the same protocol. To get a broader perspective on the

quantitative data, researchers also conducted interviews with teachers and with approximately

30% of the parents of student participants (drawn from 5 of the 6 schools) and asked them

whether or not they believed the active learning program was in fact resulting in greater

incidence of student talk about academic topics, both in school and at home.

The sample consisted of 150 students and 6 primary classroom teachers from Scotland,

selected from 6 separate schools.   While the study did not include an indication of the exact

percentage of sample participants who came from high and middle-income backgrounds versus

those who came from low-income backgrounds, it did specify that three of the classrooms were

selected from schools where the percentage of students receiving Free School Meals (FSM) was

well below the national average--1.5%, 1.5%, and 4.2%, respectively, as compared to 16.9%

percent of students in Scotland as a whole--and three of the classrooms came from schools where

the percentage of FSM students was significantly above it. The "high FSM" classes were drawn

from schools that had FSM populations of 34.9%, 53.6%, and 31.2%, respectively.

The active learning programs that formed the basis of the intervention, with the exception

of one program, generally consisted of structured whole-group time in literacy and math,

followed by an extended block of play-based activities that extended across content areas. In

these five classrooms, one of the rotations involved direct support from the teacher and the others

were collaborative or independent. In the other classroom, the structure of the class was similar

to High/Scope, in that students had the capacity to choose exactly when they wanted to do each

of the activities on offer for the week. For all 6 classrooms, observers followed the protocol

outlined above, in which they would conduct 2-minute "pop-ins" every 10 minutes to observe

student and teacher behavior, and extended 10-minute observations of 6 specific students. They

assessed what teachers were doing according to three possibilities: managing behavior or

transitions, leading a discussion according to their *own*, content-specific agenda, or responding to

a discussion topic initiated by students and their needs. For the students, researchers assessed

whether or not they were engaging in one of the following five behaviors: passively "behaving"

or transitioning between activities, responding to teaching instructions or questions, talking to the

teacher about their own academic activity, talking to other children about their own academic

activity, or individual/group off-task behavior.

The results of the study showed that, compared to whole group time, teacher talk oriented

towards specific student needs and questions went up during active learning time, from 19.5% of

the time observed to 42.4% of the time observed in low-FSM classrooms and from 21.6% to

34.4% in high-FSM classrooms. Correspondingly, teacher talk oriented towards *teacher-driven* motivations and objectives decreased, from 37.5% to 24.1% in low-FSM classrooms and from 49.4% to 40.3% in high-FSM classrooms. Child-to-child talk also increased dramatically from whole-group to active learning time, from 4.5% to 56.0% in low-FSM classrooms and from 3.3% to 39.4% in high-FSM classrooms. On the other hand, the amount of time students spent conversing with their teacher actually went *down* in the active learning groups, from 13.7% to 2.4% in low-FSM classrooms and from 16.5% to 7.7% in high-FSM classrooms.

The researchers drew several conclusions and expressed several concerns with these results. In the first place, they worried about the relative dearth of child-to-teacher talk going on in active learning groups that was truly child-driven and stemming from the students' own activities. In response to this, they recommended that teachers intentionally design lessons so as to include tasks that promote language scaffolding and mutual learning *through student interaction* in order to cover some of the ground that is not being covered by direct teacher-student engagement. Additionally, they noted that students from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds engaged in child-to-child talk with greater frequency than the low-income students. They speculated that this could be due to fewer opportunities for language-building activities at home among lower-income families, and recommended that teachers in these communities recognize and account for these linguistic disparities in order to ensure that low-income students can close the gaps. For these students, additional teacher-driven modeling or language scaffolding may be necessary.

On the other hand, both teachers and parents responded by and large in a positive way towards the impact of active learning upon student's academic engagement and language development. Anecdotal evidence from teachers pointed out that students working in small

groups more frequently asked each other questions and read to each other, and that certain

quieter students who hesitated to talk in whole group felt more inclined to participate and speak

to their peers in small group. Additionally, the researchers noted that the term "talk" was a

frequently-used reference during teacher interviews, especially for the high-FSM teachers, where

it was used, respectively, 13, 7, and 7 times during a 30-minute interview. They speculated that

this frequency may be an indicator of the degree to which those teachers were becoming

emergently aware of the vital role classroom talk plays in their students' academic and social

development. Finally, the researchers reported that parents responded in a by and large positive

way to the active learning lessons and the impacts they were seeing in the home. Most parents

said that they felt their children were progressing well in school, were enjoying themselves in

school, and were talking more about what they were learning.

In summary, the study appears to show that young children can benefit, both in school

and at home, from active learning methods that are more open-ended than what is traditionally

accessible to them during whole-group instruction. However, these methods must be carefully

designed in order to promote interactional learning and may need to incorporate additional

modeling and language scaffolding on the part of the teacher in order to fully benefit lower-

income students.

Another example of a study that sought to determine the impact of an alternative

instructional approach upon the quality of student talk was conducted by Echevarría (1995), who

also studied the impact of an interactive method known as instructional conversations (IC) in

order to examine its impact upon textual and conceptual understanding. Researchers taught 10

reading lessons in Spanish to 5 Latino students with learning disabilities in a small group

setting, half of which were IC lessons and half of which were traditional basal lessons. They

used a basal reader that was unfamiliar to the students. Sessions were ordered irregularly so as to provide random presentation of the type of instruction. During each lesson, researchers evaluated students according to a Student Outcome Measure (SOM) that gauged the extent to which students engaged in "quality" reading and responding behaviors on a 0 to 3 point scale. They also kept track of the number of student utterances during each lesson and classified those utterances according to whether they were self-initiated or teacher prompted, scripted or nonscripted, or unrelated to the lesson content entirely. After each lesson, the researchers conducted a "follow-up" session with each student in which they had students retell the story they had just read, and scored their responses on a 1 to 7 scale based on the story structure guidelines of Peterson and McCabe (1983), in which higher scores were assigned to students who managed to connect the characters, setting, and plot developments in meaningful, relational ways. They also broke students' retellings into discrete propositions and counted the number of propositions that they contained. Furthermore, they took stock of whether or not student retellings cited the central thematic concept or concepts elucidated by the story. Finally, they asked students five comprehension questions from the basal reader in order to assess literal recall and assigned students a score from 1 to 5. Following this, researchers conducted a *t*-test in which they compared student results from the IC lessons to the same students' performances during and after basal lessons to see if they were statistically significant.

The sample consisted of 5 Latino students at an elementary school in the Greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. The school had a population that was 93% Latino and 88% Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students. The students themselves were designated as learning disabled--according to their IEP summaries, these disabilities tended to pertain to auditory processing and memory--and all placed in a self-contained special education classroom. They

ranged in age from 7 years 5 months to 9 years 11 months at the beginning of the study. Although all 5 students participated in the post-lesson "follow-up" component of the study, only 3 randomly-selected participants had their contributions to each lesson videotaped and analyzed by researchers for the purposes of completing the SOM and utterance components.

The instructional conversations lessons that formed the basis of the intervention were still based on the texts contained in the basal readers but designed according to the tenets of the IC protocol. The IC protocol is rooted in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978), which is the space between a student's actual academic capacities, defined as what they are capable of doing independently, and their *potential ones*, defined as that which can be nurtured and developed through the use of language, both while being guided by adults and collaborating with peers. Such lessons are oriented around a central theme or topic of the teacher's choosing, generally connected to the text that will be taught. While teachers will likely still engage in some explicit modeling of skills or concepts, the bulk of instruction takes place in the form of guided discussion supervised by the teacher. A hallmark of this instructional protocol is teachers' use of language in such a way that promotes open-ended thinking and extended student responses--the teacher will ask questions that have more than one known answer, or perhaps no known answer at all. He or she will also constantly prompt students to refer to the text as the basis for their responses. The "open-endedness" of an IC lesson also refers to its design and structure; while the teacher sketches out a broad plan and direction for the discussion, he or she also tries to move the lesson forward mainly by being responsive to student comments.

In contrast, the basal lessons taught as part of the study largely followed the outline set out in the teachers' guide. Teachers activated background knowledge and asked relevant questions about the story largely as directed by the teacher's guide.

The results of the study showed a significant difference between the amount and quality of student discourse exhibited during the IC lessons than during the basal lessons. The three randomly selected students scored significantly higher on the SOM during the IC lessons than during the basal lessons. They also gave a significantly higher number of overall utterances and a significantly higher of *self-initiated* utterances, both scripted and non-scripted, during IC lessons. On the other hand, the use of IC lessons did not appear to have much of an impact upon story recall and the ability to answer comprehension questions after a lesson. Researchers observed no statistically significant difference between student scores for story structure or reading comprehension, or the number of propositions given during retelling, after the IC and basal lessons. They did, however, note a statistically significant difference between the percentage of student retellings that included reference to the central theme or concept of the story occurring after an IC lesson than that which occurred after a basal lesson.

The results of this study illustrate how more open-ended, interactive models of literacy instruction can contribute to increased student willingness to discuss and engage with text, improve the quality of their oral contributions, and increase awareness of the central concept or themes in literature. While researchers did not observe that IC lessons improved literal comprehension and recall of texts as compared to the basal lessons, neither did they observe that IC made such results worse. The incorporation of IC literacy lessons was able to nurture students' higher-order thinking skills without damaging their capacity to perform lower-order tasks.

A separate investigation by McElvain (2010) bears out a similar conclusion, but with an important qualifier: that instructional means of fostering student conversations about books are even more effective if they involve culturally relevant literature and compel students to extend

their conversations into family and community life. He conducted a research study on how

adapting Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) in the literacy instruction of fourth to sixth grade

English Language Learners (ELLs) at two separate Northern California schools would affect the

students' English reading comprehension, as compared to a control group of a similar population

of students elsewhere in the district. The researchers sought to answer this question by

comparing the respective performances of the treatment and control groups on state standardized

tests given to all California students--namely, the CST-ELA, CAT-6 reading test, and the

CELDT writing test (California Department of Education, 2004). Additionally, the researchers

sought to determine how much the participants in the TLC program progressed absolutely in

reading comprehension during the course of 7 months, as measured by the Qualitative Reading

Inventory, 3rd Edition (QRI-3; Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The researchers also assessed how the

TLC program was perceived by its participants and how it impacted students' attitudes toward

reading generally, which researchers determined via a questionnaire that was given to all

participating teachers and students.

The sample consisted of 75 fourth to sixth grade (25 in each of the 3 grades) ELL

students at two low-income elementary schools in Northern California. These particular schools

were picked because of their low state test scores within the ELL subgroup, which made them

vulnerable to possible future state sanctions and thus compelled them to mandate all intermediate

grade teachers to implement TLC reading instruction. The students were selected from 13

different classrooms at the two schools on the basis of their being "at risk" for retention based on

low standardized test scores in reading in previous years. All were fluent in their native

languages, had been attending US schools for at least 2 years, and were not receiving Special

Education services. The control group was composed of 75 ELL students from 7 other schools,

only two of which were considered low-income.   The control group met all of the same

academic criteria as the treatment group and also included 25 students from each of the fourth,

fifth, and sixth grades.

The Transactional Literature Circles protocol investigated in the study involved constant

dialogue between the student, his peers, the teacher, and the text. The lesson model implemented

in the study included a 15 minute whole group component, during which the teacher modeled a

specific reading or writing skill with a mentor text or reviewed procedures for the group work

component.   Following this, students broke into their book groups, which could be either self-

selected (after the teacher taught students how to pick books at their independent reading level)

or formed by the teacher. In their book groups, students worked on written responses to the text

and read silently. The text choices offered by the teacher were typically intentionally selected,

so as to connect to relevant themes often tied to science or social studies. Students wrote and

reflected upon these themes in their response logs, and typically also practiced specific reading

comprehension or vocabulary-building skills.

As students are working on this, the teacher met with one of the small groups. He or she

modeled specific reading strategies and then facilitated a conversation with students in which

they practiced constructing meaning from the text by using those strategies. In the program

depicted in the study, teachers met once a week with each book group. Finally, at the conclusion

of the thirty-minute reading-response block, groups conducted a 15-minute sharing session, in

which their task was share out their reading response logs or work on a collaborative book

project. This sharing time was also the venue for the home-school component of the TLC

model--the "question of the week." At the start of each week, students were posed a broad

thematic question connecting to their texts, which they were expected to think about and discuss

at home with their parents. Periodically, during sharing time, they discussed their family's

responses with their peers. The purpose of this exercise was not only to maintain parent

involvement in their child's literacy instruction, but also to validate each child's cultural values

and experiences by offering the opportunity to connect them to in-class learning.

The researchers found no statistically significant difference in pre-test to post-test growth

between the treatment and control groups on the CST-ELA test.   In fact, a higher percentage of

control group students (5%) than treatment group students (1%) scored proficient on the test. On

the other tests, however, the data revealed that the treatment group tended to outperform the

control group in terms of growth between 2003 and 2004. On the CAT-6 reading test, the

treatment group grew an average of 4.16 points, compared to 0.06 for the control group. On the

CELDT, meanwhile, there was no significant difference in performance between the two groups

on the Listening and Speaking section, but the treatment group did grow more on the reading and

writing sections.   In reading, the treatment group increased about 34 points to the control group's

23, while in writing, the treatment group's scores increased by 30 to the control group's 12. Both

results were statistically significant.

In terms of the second research question, the study found that on average, the students

grew a year on the QRI-3 informal reading inventory during the 7-month period covered by the

study, from a beginning third-grade level to a beginning fourth-grade level.

The researchers also found that, by and large, the TLC program positively impacted

students' attitudes towards reading, from the perspective of both teachers and students. Seventy-

seven percent of teachers indicated that they observed some kind of psychosocial benefit in their

students after implementing TLC, such as increased motivation, confidence, or enjoyment of

reading. Seventy-four percent of teachers felt that TLC represented an effective means of

differentiating instruction and reaching all readers, especially struggling ones. Meanwhile, 77

percent of *students* used words like "fun," "enjoyed," or "liked" in response to a question about

how they felt towards the program.

The study appears to show that self-directed models of literacy instruction, ones that

move away from more traditional "Initiate, Respond, Evaluate" modes of teacher talk, can

improve both ELL students' reading performance in their second language and their

psychological and emotional outlook towards reading.

The preceding studies show the degrees to which nontraditional methods of literacy

instruction, such as content-based literacy (Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva & Dorn, 2011), active

learning techniques in the early childhood classroom (Martlew, Ellis, Stephen & Ellis, 2010),

instructional conversations in the special education setting (Echevarría, 1995), and Transactional

Literature Circles (McElvain, 2010) can both improve patterns of student discourse and

correspondingly maintain or improve student performance on more traditional comprehension

assessments. All of the studies indicated that the interventions in question attainted some degree

of success in meeting these aims, meriting further consideration and research into how they can

be improved upon and tailored to the classroom environment that is the setting of my own

research.

Conclusion

The preceding literature review was designed to show how existing research lends

support to the idea of literature circles serving as an appropriate instructional intervention for

ELL students. The first section described a number of studies that seemingly lent credence to the

notion that literature circles could be compatible with the social and emotional dynamic faced by

ELL students, and especially Latinos, in school, and in fact may help contribute to a bettering of

these conditions. Each of the studies examined in this section implied that to some extent, ELL

students' perceptions of their school experience and self-worth were influenced by their own

language proficiency (Leclair, Doll Osborn, & Johnson, 2009; Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, &

Campos, 2003). The IRF model is perhaps inferior to "non-institutional" conversation-based

pedagogical strategies in combating language anxiety and building ELL students' self-worth

(Luk, 2004). Peer relationships also played a major role in fostering a sense of "belonging" in

school--as such, a model of instruction fostering not only language skills but also interactional

skills, and student-student and teacher-student relationships, instinctively seems like it could be

doubly beneficial (Gillanders, 2007).

The second section outlined a number of studies that described the formative elements of

reading comprehension and language development of ELLs in an effort to show that these, too,

were compatible with the aims and methodology of a literature circles protocol. The study by

Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) sketched out an "equation" for reading comprehension

which explained how the strongest factors correlating with its development had to do with oral

language--skills which are well-developed in the literature circle. Furthermore, I highlighted

another study by Walters and Bozkurt (2009) that linked the rigor of vocabulary activities and

student self-direction with that same student's skill in learning new vocabulary words in order to

show how the relative autonomy afforded to students in a literature circle can in fact be helpful

to their acquisition of language. Similarly, Doherty and Hilberg (2007) linked ELL student

achievement to teacher adoption of a series of pedagogical standards encouraging instructional

conversations, student autonomy, intellectual complexity, and a decentralized classroom.

Finally, Hamre and Pianta (2005) studied how students from at-risk backgrounds could be helped

both academically and socially in classrooms that provided them with specific instructional and

emotional supports. Literature Circles is an instructional protocol compatible with many of the

pedagogies and principles highlighted in these studies, suggesting that it can be an effective

means toward language and literacy development among ELL students.

Finally, the third section summarized existing research involving "nontraditional"

methods of literacy instruction in order to show how going beyond the content or methodology

of the traditional paradigm of literacy instruction can result in various types of successes for ELL

students. These successes were not unambiguous ones--for instance, *GeoLiteracy* only improved

reading scores in 5th and 8th grades (Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva & Dorn, 2011), whereas

Transactional Literature Circles did not result in higher reading scores for the treatment group on

every single measure included in the study (McElvain, 2010). Nevertheless, they were

substantial enough to lend credibility to the idea that literature circles merit further consideration

as an appropriate intervention in the ELL classroom.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

This chapter will provide all relevant background information for the intervention, which was designed in order to gauge how a lesson protocol structured around Literature Circles could impact students' reading proficiency in English, along with their general attitudes toward reading. Section one describes the sample population that participated in the study--including personal, demographic, and academic information. The second section details the procedures that were used at all phases of the intervention from beginning to end, including pre- and post-assessment procedures and a description of the lesson protocol.. The third section contains the sources of data, both quantitative and qualitative, that the study used in order to answer the research questions posed at the outset. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a transition to the results and analysis of data, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Description of Sample Population

The sample population consisted of eight students--five girls and three boys. At the time the intervention was conducted, participants ranged in age from eight to ten years old, with the mean age being 9.25 years old. All students--four third graders and four fourth graders--attended the same public, bilingual elementary school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that also served as the site of the study. According to the most recent information available from Milwaukee Public Schools, the school site served a population that was 99% Latino and 63% English Language Learners (ELLs). Additionally, 96% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2012). Within the sample population itself, all eight of the students were Latino, seven of them were eligible for free and reduced price lunch, and six of them were classified as ELLs, according to the most recent (2012) administration of

the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English for State to State English

Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs; World Class Instructional Design and Assessment,

2012) test, in which students are scored on a scale from 1 to 6 based on their linguistic

competencies in English, with any score below 6 indicating that the student remains eligible for

English as a Second Language (ESL) services. The two students not classified as ELLs were

excused from taking ACCESS for ELLs altogether, since they primarily spoke English in their

home environments.

The intervention took place during the students' daily, sixty-minute English reading

block. As part of the school site's developmental bilingual model, all students received a

substantial amount of reading instruction in both Spanish and English, even in the upper

elementary grades, past the stage where a majority of students have been deemed ready for

literacy and content instruction in English (or "transitioned" to English), on the basis of both

their Spanish reading proficiency and ACCESS scores. Unlike the Spanish reading block, which

was delivered in students' homerooms, English reading instruction occurred in leveled groups,

often featuring students from multiple grade levels, assigned on the basis of students' current

English reading levels. All English reading groups were flexible, in the sense that students could

move to higher or lower level groupings on the basis of both periodic standardized tests and

ongoing formative assessment. All students participating in the study were members of the same

reading group, which at the time of the intervention was leveled at approximately the second

semester of third grade.

Although the entirety of the sample population attended a reading group leveled toward

the end of third grade, there was significant variability in their reading levels and English

proficiency, according to several standardized instruments. According to the Winter 2012

administration of the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP; Northwest Evaluation Association, 2012) computerized reading exam--the test results most immediately prior to the study--student Rasch Unit (RIT) scores in English Reading ranged from 176 (roughly equivalent to the mean score expected at the start of Grade 2) to 194 (approximately the mean score expected midway through Grade 3), with a mean RIT of 186.37.

Description of Procedures

The intervention was conducted for sixty minutes daily over the course of four weeks, beginning on April 23, 2012 and concluding on May 18, 2012, excepting one day--May 16--in which the English reading block was cancelled due to an all-day school field trip for all grade level. The period of the study therefore consisted of 19 school days and 19 instructional hours. The first two of these sessions were devoted to diagnostic assessment, student ranking of book choices, and the formation of book groups. The subsequent 9 to 11 sessions were then spent with students reading and discussing their texts, using a specific independent writing activity as a guide and prompt. The remaining classes were devoted to make-up work (if necessary) and towards the completion and presentation of a final book project.

The diagnostic and preparatory sessions involved the administration of several initial assessments designed to give the researcher a general sense of participants' attitudes toward reading, along with their English reading levels, at the beginning of the study. In order to gauge the former, the researcher administered a survey, six questions long, that asked participants to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5, their level of agreement with statements relating to the frequency of their reading, love of reading, and their belief in their own reading abilities (see Appendix A). Assessing students' English reading levels involved a modified administration of the QRI-5 reading inventory (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). In most cases, this exam is given in an

individualized setting, with the student reading aloud and the test administrator assessing fluency

mistakes and then orally asking comprehension questions immediately afterward. However, due

to time constraints, the researcher administered the exam in a whole group format. All students

were assigned the same Level 3 fiction passage, which they read silently. Afterward, they

answered 8 written comprehension questions, half of which were "explicit," involving direct

recall of textual events or details, and the other half of which were "implicit," requiring the

reader to make some kind of inference in order to answer the question correctly. Readers who

scored higher than 6 out of 8 were considered to be "instructional" at level 3, with 8 out of 8

being considered "independent." Using this baseline data, the researcher gained a sense of which

readers needed to "grow" by performing better on the Level 3 test, and those whose growth could

properly be assessed at the next level up. A copy of the reading survey, along with a fuller

description of QRI-5 reading levels and sample texts used by students during pre- and post-

testing, is included in Appendix A and Appendices E-G.

       After using the reading survey and QRI-5 to collect baseline data, the study proceeded to

the "book talk" phase, in which students were exposed briefly to each of the five novels available

for selection and were formed into reading groups based on their preferences. The five books

were selected on the basis of their availability at the school site, along with their length and

difficulty level, both of which were suited to the duration of the study and the reading levels of

the students. Page length of the selected novels ranged from 80 to 192, while Lexile Rating

ranged from 460 to 700, roughly straddling the band of texts appropriate for third grade readers

(Lexile, 2013). The books included: *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (Sachar, 1985),

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes (Coerr, 1977), *A to Z Mysteries: The School Skeleton*

(Roy, 2003), *Bunnicula: A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery* (Howe & Howe, 2006), and *Because of Winn-*

Dixie (DiCamillo, 2001). In order to help students select books, the researcher began by dividing

the class in half based on their most recent MAP scores, and then dividing each group again so

that kids were reading in small groups of three or four. Higher level readers began by reading

either *Sadako, Winn-Dixie,* or *Bunnicula*, all of which had higher Lexile levels, while lower level

readers read *A to Z, Sideways Stories,* and *Sadako* (which was in the middle of the five books

arranged according to difficulty level). Students would read small segments (3-5 pages) of each

text, use a graphic organizer to write down elements of what they had read that they liked and

didn't like, then discussed their responses with their peers before switching to the next book.

After students had read bits of all three books, they ranked them in order of their preferences,

and submitted this list to the researcher. The researcher then formed book groups from among

the fourteen students based partially upon these preferences, but also upon the need to balance

certain personal factors. The researcher made sure each group--four groups of three students and

a group of two students--was a mix of outgoing and more introverted personalities, in the hopes

that shier students would be encouraged to participate in group discussions as a result of the

enthusiasm of their peers.

The Literature Circles protocol involved a daily, four-stage lesson framework. This

framework consisted of a 15-minute whole group mini-lesson, 25 minutes of independent book

work in which students read a daily assigned section of text and performed their assigned group

role, a 15-minute group share session in which students discussed the work they did on their

own, and a 5-minute whole group share time in which students contributed their favorite parts of

their novel or their group work for that day.

The whole group component typically assumed one of three different forms: a

review of the procedures and expectations of specific roles in the literature circle, a review

of a reading strategy or comprehension skill that students were expected to be

emphasizing when performing their roles for that week, or a discussion of a particular

theme designed to orient how students would be thinking about their texts for that week.

When teaching group roles or reading strategies, the researcher utilized a leveled basal

text. The researcher briefly modeled the specific role or strategy, using a short selection of

text, guided students through written and verbal practice, then let them practice the role or

strategy on their own. Reading strategies emphasized during the whole group lessons

were chosen in response to observed student needs, based upon trends noticed by the

researcher during independent work sessions, in hopes that they would be incorporated

into future independent work sessions. Whole group lessons devoted to teaching a

particular theme occurred approximately once per week, and also periodically involved

both modeling and guided practice from a basal text so as to teach students how to

recognize important themes. However, for these lessons, independent practice involved

individual and then small group student reflection upon thematic elements of their own

novels. Using a graphic organizer, students wrote down themes they noticed in their own

reading, then marked down evidence that was helpful in noticing those themes.

　　　After the whole group component, students spent approximately 25 minutes

reading their novels and performing their assigned group roles. Given that most groups

were composed of three students, there were three roles available for students to perform:

Discussion Director, whose job it was to formulate open-ended questions that came to

mind during the course of that day's reading; Character Specialist, who analyzed a single

character by naming certain traits that could be assigned to him or her, along with

particular occurrences in the novel that served as evidence for those traits; and the Literary

Luminary, who chronicled particular passages during that day's reading that struck him or her as interesting or worthy of discussion, and explained why they were selected. Students rotated between these jobs day by day, such that each student performed each role an approximately equal number of times, barring prolonged absences from school or other disruptions.

At the same time that the majority of book groups worked independently, the researcher conducted a small group strategy lesson with one of the small groups, typically reinforcing a skill or strategy already touched upon during the whole group session and covering text that the students already read independently. These lessons sometimes, but not always, utilized separate graphic organizers. They did always involve a teacher read-aloud and modeling of a particular strategy, followed by a choral read and guided practice of that strategy, and independent practice.

After the 25-minute independent work portion of the protocol had ended, students proceeded to share their work in their small book groups. Each student took approximately 3 minutes to share his or her analyses, then another 1-2 minutes to respond to questions or comments from his or her peers. During this time, the researcher circulated from group to group, periodically intervening in the discussion by asking relevant questions himself, but it was expected that this portion of the lesson would be largely student-driven.

At the close of the lesson, the researcher brought the whole class together to discuss the progress all groups had achieved on that day. Students were invited to share particular successes or moments of excitement that occurred in their groups on that day, along with

highs and lows occurring during group work. Positive comments directed at a peer's effort

or work quality were encouraged during this time.

Depending on the length of the book students were reading, they spent a minimum

of 9 and a maximum of 11 class sessions working through the Literature Circles protocol

outlined in the study. Remaining sessions were devoted to makeup work, for students who

had been absent for one or more previous class days, and towards the drafting and

completion of a summary project devoted to their books. Typically, projects involved some

combination of expository writing and artwork. Examples included making a "book jacket"

for their novel, complete with an alternative rendering of the cover, a brief plot summary,

and mock quotations from hypothetical "critics;" writing a book review that included a

discussion of the novel's major themes and the student's opinion of the work; and a mobile

project in which students drew important characters, scenes, and themes from the novel on

index cards, described their significance on the reverse side, then attached the cards to a

coat hanger using string in order to create a display. The penultimate day of the study was

devoted to students sharing and discussing their projects in their small groups, followed by

a whole group share, for anyone interested in presenting their work to the whole class.

The final day of the study involved the re-administration of both the reading survey

and QRI-5 reading inventory. As explained above, students were given a test at the same

level--Level 3--at which they were tested at the beginning of the study, unless they initially

achieved an "instructional" or "independent" score at Level 3, in which case they were

given a Level 4 test in order to assess whether or not they advanced a level.

Description of Data Collection Methods

The nature of the data that was collected was threefold. As explained above, the

researcher sought to gauge improvement in student attitudes toward reading, along with their

own general academic capacities, via the administration of a self-assessment at the beginning and

end of the intervention. The survey included some items requiring students to rate their level of

agreement with certain statements relating to their love of reading, reading frequency, and

reading abilities on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 indicating the highest level of agreement). The survey

also included 3 open-ended questions at the end, with the third item--asking students their

favorite and least favorite aspects of Literature Circles--only applicable at the end of the survey

(see Appendix A). The survey was thus engineered to get a quantitative and qualitative picture

of the impact that a Literature Circles model had upon students' feelings and self-conceptions.

The second source of data involved the administration of the QRI-5 reading inventory. As

detailed above, all students were given the Level 3 test in a whole group setting at the beginning

of the intervention. Students who received a score corresponding to "Frustration" at Level 3

(anywhere from 0-5 questions correct) were again given the Level 3 exam, in order to see

primarily whether or not their score had increased, and secondarily whether or not they managed

to achieve a score of "Instructional" or "Independent" at that level. Students who received a

score corresponding to "Instructional" or "Independent" at Level 3 were instead given a Level 4

test at the end of the intervention, in order to assess whether or not their reading had advanced a

level as a result of the intervention.

Finally, students' capacity to think about texts in an open-ended way--and the manner in

which this capacity grew over the course of the study--was assessed informally, by applying

several different measurements to students' written contribution to literature circles, and seeing

how these numerical measurements changed during the duration of the intervention. The manner

in which the researcher quantified students' written analyses differed from role to role. For the Discussion Director, the researcher counted the number of questions the student was able to come up with that were "open-ended"--that is, that had more than one possible answer or no real "correct" answer. For the Character Specialist, the researcher counted the number of well-supported traits ("well-supported" denoting a trait that is bolstered by evidence from the text) that students managed to write down about one or more characters. For the Literary Luminary, the researcher counted the number of passages students selected, along with the number of words per passage that they used in their descriptions. The researcher was able to analyze how these numerical indicators changed over the course of the study--whether, for instance, the number of words used or traits described increased, stayed the same, or decreased--in addition to closely analyzing the qualitative character of these responses in order to see whether or not they changed.

Conclusion

The preceding chapter outlined all relevant background information necessary for understanding how the Literature Circles intervention was conducted. This included, first, a summary of some basic background characteristics--both personal and academic--of the sample population. Next, the chapter detailed the procedures that were used throughout the intervention, both with respect to the collection of data and to the lesson protocol. The final section of the chapter described the sources of both quantitative and qualitative data that were used to help answer the research question. The next chapter, Chapter 4, will transition into a description of the results of the intervention, including an analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative sources of data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter will present the results of the Literature Circles intervention. The first section of the paper describes quantitative and qualitative sources of data that were collected over the duration of the study. These sources included the pre- and post-assessment administrations of the reading survey and Quantitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5), along with the written activities students performed while reading their respective texts. The second section interprets and analyzes the data in order to summarize the results of the intervention, based on observable quantitative and qualitative evidence. The third and concluding section will transition to the final chapter of the paper, which evaluates and explains the results in light of existing research already presented in Chapter 2, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Quantitative and Qualitative Representations of Data

As explained in Chapter 3, sources of data collected during the intervention were threefold: the student reading survey, the QRI-5 assessment, and the written worksheets students filled out as they read selections from the text.

A. Student Reading Survey

At the beginning and ending of the study, all students in the sample population were administered a reading survey (see Appendix A). The pre- and post-assessment surveys were identical except for an additional open-ended question that was asked of students in the post-test version. The reading survey yielded both quantitative and qualitative data, in the sense that students answered items both numerically--by rating their level of agreement with a set of statements on a scale of 1 to 5--and in an open-ended way, by answering several free response

questions. In order to analyze the quantitative items on the reading survey, student responses to

each question were entered into a table of values and then averaged. In this way, it was possible

to compare the average numerical response to each question on the pre- and post-test versions of

the reading survey and assess whether or not there was a statistically significant, positive growth

in students' level of agreement with the survey statements. It was also possible to compare

whether the average numerical response an *individual student* would issue in response to all

questions increased from the beginning of the intervention to the end. Both analytical goals were

accomplished using repeated paired (because the data was collected by administering the same

test to the same sample population twice), one-tailed (because the goal of the analysis was to

determine whether or not the post-test data showed an *increase* in average student attitudes) t-

tests, first for data sets corresponding to each survey question, and next for data sets

corresponding to each individual student.

      Tables 1 and 2 summarize student responses to the quantitative items on the reading

survey, both before and after the Literature Circles intervention. Students were identified on all

work and data charts only by a number between 1 and 14 (for the 14 students in the leveled

English reading group; those students whose families did not fill out consent forms were

excluded from the data collection component of the intervention, though they participated in all

academic activities) that was randomly assigned to them at the start of the intervention.

Table 1: *Pre-Assessment Reading Survey Data*

Question	Student 2	Student 3	Student 5	Student 7	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11	Student 12	AVERAGE
1. I am a good student.	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.875
2. I am a good reader.	5	4	4	5	3	2	4	2	3.625
3. I enjoy reading and think it makes me smarter.	5	4	5	5	4	3	3	4	4.125

4. I read many different kinds of books.	5	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	4.5
5. I read a lot at home.	4	4	3	5	2	3	5	2	3.5
6. It is easy for me to talk about the books I read.	5	4	3	5	5	2	3	1	3.5
Average of all responses	4.83	4.166667	4	5	3.66667	3.16667	4.16667	3.166667	

Table 2: *Post-Assessment Reading Survey Data*

Question	Student 2	Student 3	Student 5	Student 7	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11	Student 12	AVERAGE *(net change)*	p-value
1. I am a good student.	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4.5 *(-.375)*	**0.039801**
2. I am a good reader.	3	4	4	5	3	3	3	3	3.5 *(-.125)*	0.365894
3. I enjoy reading and think it makes me smarter.	5	4	5	5	5	5	2	5	4.5 *(.375)*	0.142466
4. I read many different kinds of books.	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4.375 *(-.125)*	0.299166
5. I read a lot at home.	4	4	3	5	2	3	4	2	3.375 *(-.125)*	0.175308
6. It is easy for me to talk about the books I read.	5	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	4.125 *(.625)*	0.108419
AVERAGE *(net change)*	4.5 *(-.33)*	4 *(-.167)*	4.167 *(.167)*	5 *(no change)*	3.833 *(.167)*	4 *(.833)*	3.333 *(-.833)*	3.667 *(.5)*		
p-value	0.18161	0.18161	0.18161	N/A	0.305441	**0.046258**	**0.00205**	0.22801		

The data above shows that for the majority of students--six out of the eight--there was no statistically significant change in the average numerical response students gave across all questions from the pre-assessment reading survey to the post-assessment reading survey. Three of these students reported an increase in the average response they gave to the six questions, which would generally correspond to an overall increase in their dispositions toward reading,

including their confidence in their own reading and thinking abilities and their excitement towards reading on their own. Two of these students instead reported a decrease in their average numerical response, which would correspond to an overall *decrease* in those same dispositions toward reading. However, the p-value in all five of these cases exceeded .05, meaning that these changes could not be deemed statistically significant. The researcher was unable to conclude that the Literature Circles intervention influenced these five students' attitudes toward reading for better or for worse. A sixth student reported exactly no change in the average numerical response between the pre- and post-assessment editions of the survey, corresponding to no underlying changes in the student's dispositions toward reading across the duration of the intervention.

For two of the students participating in the intervention, there was a statistically significant change from the pre-assessment to post-assessment reading surveys in the average numerical response they gave to all questions. In the case of Student 10, this change was a *positive* one--from an average of 3.167 on the pre-assessment survey to an average of 4 on the post-assessment survey--indicating a positive shift in the student's attitudes toward reading generally and toward herself as a reader. This was a substantial shift, corresponding approximately toward the student viewing her reading abilities and excitement toward reading as "average" at the beginning of the study and "positively" at the end. The p-value of .0462 showed that this change was a statistically significant one, because it indicated that the probability of a "false positive," or the chance that this positive change was due to chance alone, was below the threshold *p<.05* generally accepted as the marker of statistical significance.

Student 11, by contrast, experienced a *negative* change in the average numerical response given to all survey questions from the pre-assessment survey to the post-assessment survey. On

the pre-assessment survey, the student gave an average response of 4.167, generally

corresponding to a "positive" conception of reading and towards her own reading abilities. By

the post-assessment survey, Student 11's average response had dipped to 3.33, closer to an

"average" or "middling" conception of reading and her own reading abilities. The p-value of

.0025 associated with this change means that it was statistically significant, clearing not only the

p<.05 but also the even more reliable *p<.01* threshold. It was therefore possible to say that the

Literature Circles intervention correlated with a statistically significant positive shift in reading

attitudes for one student and a statistically significant negative shift in reading attitudes for

another.

A separate statistical analysis involved calculating the average response all students gave

to individual questions on the survey, in an effort to determine which aspects of students'

attitudes, if any, were impacted positively by the Literature Circles intervention. Ultimately,

however, only one of the questions saw its class-wide average response change in a statistically

significant way--*negatively,* in fact. As the chart above shows, the only one of the six survey

questions that saw the average numerical response registered by the entire class change from the

pre-assessment to the post-assessment in a manner that was statistically significant at the *p<.05*

level was Question 1, "I am a good student." On the pre-assessment, the class rated themselves

at 4.875 out of 5, indicating a "very positive" response to this statement, while on the post-

assessment, the average class-wide response to the same question fell to 4.5. This represented

only a slight downward shift, but the p-value of 0.0398 indicated that the decrease was a

statistically significant one, and that the duration of the Literature Circles intervention

corresponded to a slight decrease in class-wide attitudes toward their own academic abilities.

With respect to the other five questions, as the chart shows, the p-values ranged from about .1 to

.36, meaning that while class-wide average responses increased for some questions and

decreased for others during the course of the intervention, none of these relationships were

statistically significant. It was not possible, therefore, to state with certitude whether or not the

Literature Circles intervention exerted a meaningful effect upon class-wide attitudes with respect

to the other five questions composing the reading survey.

The reading survey also had, as mentioned earlier, a *qualitative* aspect. In addition to the

six items that students were expected to "rate" on a scale of 1 to 5, there were also open-ended

items--two on the pre-assessment survey and three on the post-assessment survey--that invited

students to expound at greater length on their feelings toward reading and towards themselves as

readers and students. Tables 3 and 4 summarize how students responded to these open-ended

items, both before and after the Literature Circles intervention. Student spelling and grammar

was corrected, when necessary, for the sake of clarity, as the subject of analysis was the content

of what students were saying about themselves, not how they chose to express it.

Table 3: *Open-Ended Responses--Pre-Assessment*

Question	Student 2	Student 3	Student 5	Student 7	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11	Student 12
1. What are your strengths? What are you good at?	"I am good at reading mystery books"	"I am good at helping."	"I am good at reading because I read a lot of books."	"I'm very good at reading fast."	"Math and writing."	"Reading in my brain"	"Reading funny books."	"I am good at other stuff but mostly reading sometimes not because I like other stuff"
2. What are your weaknesses? What do you need to improve at?	"Understand more English than Spanish."	"I need to get better at reading books."	"I need to improve math because sometimes I don't get it."	"Reading, writing"	"I need to read more and read chapter books."	"Reading out loud and thinking of what I read"	"I need to get good at math."	"Reading, explaining other stuff"

Table 4: *Open-Ended Responses--Post-Assessment*

Question	Student 2	Student 3	Student 5	Student 7	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11	Student 12
1. What are your strengths? What are you good at?	"I am strong at doing my homework."	"I am good at technology."	"I am good at reading and playing video games."	"I am good at knowing all the states."	"I am good at writing and math."	"Reading in my head pronouncing words in my head"	"I am good at writing"	"Different stuff like math."
2. What are your weaknesses? What do you need to improve at?	"I have weaknesses at reading English and sounding the words"	"I am weakest at doing my homework."	"My weakness is doing homework. I have to do it."	"My weaknesses are tests."	"Read chapter books.	"To read out loud"	"Work on reading"	"Writing"
3. What was your favorite part of Literature Circles? Your least favorite part?	"My favorite part was when they found the skeleton (in the book). The worst part was when the skeleton was lost."	"My favorite part was learning a lot in English words. My least favorite part was doing a lot of them."	"My favorite is Literary Luminary. My least favorite is Discussion Director."	"I was sad when India's friend died (in the book)."	"Favorite: Literary Luminary. Least: Discussion Director."	"When we needed to tell how Sadako is, and my least is when we have to stop at a certain page."	"I did not like it."	"My favorite part is reading a little, my least favorite part is doing a little bit of the sheets."

Several qualitative differences between the pre-assessment and post-assessment reading

survey data demonstrated how the Literature Circles intervention impacted student attitudes.

The most powerful examples came from the addition of the third question, which asked students

to reflect on their experiences in Literature Circles and name what they liked and did not like.

Three of the students--Student 2, Student 7, and Student 10--explicitly named plot elements of

their respective books as among their most noteworthy moments of the Literature Circles

sessions. Student 10 even noted that her least favorite moment was having to stop reading at a

specifically designated page. This suggested that for some students at least, the intervention

allowed for the development of a meaningful personal connection between readers and their

books. Two additional students took the time to name specific group roles as their favorite and

least favorite parts of the intervention, which also indicated to a certain extent that students

enjoyed the open-ended critical thinking activities they were expected to complete as part of the

intervention. A sixth student, Student 3, neither mentioned the novel s/he read nor cited a

specific role as being a favorite or least favorite part of the intervention, but did note that s/he

especially liked how the Literature Circles experience helped him her "[learn] a lot of English

words." For this student, at least, the experience of reading, discussing, and writing about a

novel in depth helped with vocabulary development.

   Another set of indicators that could be analyzed qualitatively in order to assess the

intervention's impact upon student attitudes was the questions pertaining to a student's strengths

and weaknesses. Comparing how students responded to these questions before the intervention

to how they answered them afterward--specifically, looking at the extent to which ideas having

to do with reading were incorporated on the pre-assessment and post-assessment surveys--

represented another way of analyzing how participating in Literature Circles influenced the way

the students viewed reading and themselves as readers. In this respect, the results were rather

mixed. On the positive side, three students--Student 3, Student 7, and Student 12--mentioned

that reading was a weakness in the pre-assessment survey, but did not name it as a weakness in

the post-assessment version. Student 10 said at the beginning of the study that "thinking about

what I read" was an academic weakness; s/he did not name this as a weakness on the closing

survey. On the other hand, four students--Student 2, Student 7, Student 11, and Student 12--

named reading or some aspect of reading as one of their strengths at the start of the study, then

omitted it when asked the same question on the post-assessment survey. There were signs, in

other words, that the Literature Circles intervention made students more confident about

themselves as readers, but other reader comments seemed to suggest that some students'

conceptions of themselves as readers remained largely unchanged, or even slightly worsened. So

while the qualitative data from the reading survey was not as inconclusive as the quantitative

component--at least offering some evidence that the intervention impacted the mindset of more

than a single student in a positive way--nor did it present an overwhelming case for believing

that participating in Literature Circles made all or even a majority of the students uniformly feel

better about reading and about themselves as readers.

B. Qualitative Reading Inventory 5 (QRI-5) Results

The second source of student data collected from the intervention involved the

administration and analysis of the QRI-5 reading inventory. At the start of the intervention, all

students were administered the Level 3 version of the test (the story "The Trip to the Zoo,"

included in Appendix E) which corresponded to a third grade reading level (Leslie & Caldwell,

2011, p. 229). Each student read the text silently, then answered the eight comprehension

questions that followed it--four of which were "explicit" and involved the direct recall of plot

information and four of which were "implicit," requiring the student to make an inference. The

tests were graded according to the number of correct answers, with half credit given when the

student was judged to have given a partially correct answer.[1] At the end of the test, student

performance at Level 3 was rated either "Frustration" (below level), for scores between 0 and 5

questions correct, "Instructional" (at level), for scores greater than 6 but lower than 8, or

"Independent" (above level) for perfect scores of 8 questions correct.

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[1] Leslie and Caldwell (2011) discourage administrators from giving half points because it
"tends to be unreliable," in their view, which led them to pilot the administration of the test
without giving partial credit. I chose not to follow this advice because I felt with so few
questions on the test, the capacity to give half credit would help comparisons between the
pre-and post assessments be more truly discriminating--in other words, with more
possible gradients in student scores, it would be easier to "see" change (p. 75).

The post-assessment administration of the QRI-5 involved an identical procedure to what was used at the beginning of the intervention. Students who scored at the "Frustration" level on the pre-assessment version of the test were given another Level 3 text, "The Friend" (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011, p. 232), in order to gauge whether or not student performance at that level improved during the duration of the study. Meanwhile, students who scored at the "Instructional" or "Independent" levels on the pre-assessment version of the test at Level 3 were given a Level 4 text, "Early Railroads," in order to assess how well they performed at the next reading level after being exposed to the Literature Circles module over the course of the intervention. Attention was paid to whether or not students came close to or met the threshold for "Instructional," in order to see if the intervention could have helped them comprehend higher-level text.

Table 5 describes pre-assessment and post-assessment student performance on the QRI-5.

Table 5: *Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5) Results*

Student Number	Pre-test QRI level	Score: Explicit	Score: Implicit	Score: Total	Result	Post-test QRI Level	Score: Explicit	Score: Implicit	Score: Total	Result
2	Level 3	2	1	3	Frustration	Level 3	2	0	2	Frustration
3	Level 3	4	3	7	Instructional	Level 4	4	2	6	Instructional
5	Level 3	4	2	6	Instructional	Level 4	1	1	2	Frustration
7	Level 3	4	3	7	Instructional	post-test data unavailable				
9	Level 3	3	0.5	3.5	Frustration	post-test data unavailable				
10	Level 3	4	3.5	7.5	Instructional	Level 4	0	1.5	1.5	Frustration
11	Level 3	4	3	7	Instructional	post-test data unavailable				
12	Level 3	4	3	7	Instructional	Level 4	4	1	5	Frustration

The table showed that of the 8 students participating in the intervention, five had a complete data set relating to their performance on the QRI-5.[2] Of the five, four of the students achieved a score in the "Instructional" range on the pre-assessment administration of the test, while the fifth student scored in the "Frustration" range.

The four students scoring in the "Instructional" range before the intervention achieved mixed results at the end of the intervention, when they were expected to take a Level 4 test, which corresponded to a 4th grade reading level. Two of the students were relatively successful at the more advanced reading level, suggesting that the Literature Circles intervention could have had a positive impact upon their reading comprehension. Student 3, a fourth grader, scored in the "Instructional" range, with six questions answered correctly out of eight, meaning that he could successfully comprehend texts a full grade level higher than was possible before the intervention. Student 12, a third grader, scored in the "Frustration" range, but at the high end, with five out of eight questions answered correctly. On the basis of this figure, it could not be proven that Student 12 was comprehending texts a full grade level higher than he was before the intervention, but it would be reasonable to assume that his reading comprehension abilities had advanced by some intermediate degree.

Two other students, on the other hand, did not make quantifiable progress on the Level 4 text on the post-assessment administration of the QRI-5. Student 5 only answered two questions out of eight correctly, while Student 10 attained a score of one and a half. Both of these scores rated in the "Frustration" range, meaning that it was not possible to say that the Literature Circles

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[2] The three students missing post-test information were missing on the last day of the intervention, which also happened to be the last day of English reading classes at the school site hosting the intervention. Efforts to reschedule the post-test were unsuccessful.

intervention had positively impacted these students' reading comprehension abilities. These

students, both fourth graders, had not attained the ability to comprehend texts at the fourth grade

level as a result of the intervention.

Student 2, who scored in the "Frustration" range on the pre-assessment administration of

the QRI-5, did not see any growth on the post-assessment administration of the test, which was

also conducted using a Level 3 text. At the end of the intervention, Student 2 answered only two

out of 8 questions right, which was less than she answered correctly previously. This suggests

that the Literature Circles intervention did not have an identifiable positive effect on this

student's reading comprehension at the same reading level. This student, a fourth grader, began

the intervention reading below the third grade level and ended it still reading below the third

grade level, according to the QRI-5.

In summary, the data from the QRI-5 showed that the Literature Circles intervention had

a mixed effect upon the reading comprehension abilities of the students in the sample population.

One of the five students successfully comprehended texts at Level 4 at the end of the intervention

after proving capable of comprehending Level 3 texts at the start, meaning that there was cause

for believing that the Literature Circles method could have helped this student comprehend more

advanced texts. Another student, a third grader, came within one correct answer of matching this

level of success, answering five out of eight questions correct at Level 4, a score which, though

lying within the "Frustration" range, indicated that the student had made some degree of progress

in reading comprehension over the course of the study. For the other three students, however,

the results failed to indicate that the intervention had enabled their reading comprehension

abilities to significantly grow. Two students who scored "Instructional" on Level 3 text at the

outset scored extremely low on the Level 4 text at the end of the intervention, meaning that it

was not possible to reasonably infer that their reading comprehension abilities grew, at least according to the QRI-5. Similarly, the student who scored in the "Frustration" range on Level 3 on the pre-assessment administration saw no movement in her test score at the end of the intervention, even though it involved another Level 3 text.

C. Literature Circles Worksheet Analysis

The third and final source of student data analyzed in order to assess the effectiveness of the Literature Circles intervention was the worksheets that students filled out as part of their written contribution to their group work. As mentioned in Chapter 3, there were three different worksheets, each corresponding to a different role students performed in their groups. The Discussion Director had the job of writing open-ended questions--that is, questions with multiple correct answers or no clear correct answer--using any of eleven sentence starters provided on the worksheet. The Character Specialist worksheet asked students to brainstorm traits that described a particular character in their novel, along with evidence from the text corresponding to each trait. Finally, the Literary Luminary worksheet provided space for students to mark down the page and paragraph numbers of passages in their respective texts that they found interesting or memorable, and required them to briefly describe the significance of each passage selected.

These worksheets were then subjected to different measurements, each of which was designed to determine whether or not students' capacity to make open-ended judgments had changed during the duration of the intervention. For the discussion director, the researcher counted the number of "open-ended" questions that the student wrote. For the character specialist, the researcher measured the number of "well-supported" traits--"well-supported" in the sense that they clearly referenced concrete evidence from the texts--students named in reference to a particular character. Finally, for the literary luminary, the researcher counted the

number of passages the student denoted as meaningful during a particular session, as well as the

number of *total words* that the student used in order to discuss the passages' meanings.

The researcher arranged the worksheets in chronological order and paid attention to

whether or not the numerical indicators corresponding to each role increased over the course of

the intervention, which would suggest that the Literature Circles protocol had a positive effect

upon students' capacity to write about texts in a critical and open-ended way. This quantitative

analysis was supplemented by a qualitative one, in the sense that the researcher used discretion to

determine whether or not any changes in word count actually reflected meaningful changes in the

students' thinking. In other words, the researcher was mindful of the possibility for a student to

use more words but in fact "say" the same, or even less--and of the reverse case, in which a

student could express the same or a richer set of ideas more concisely--and therefore took care

not to base any conclusions on the basis of changes in word count alone.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 describe the changes in students' worksheets over time for each of their

three roles. Table 6 depicts the number of open-ended questions students asked as Discussion

Director, Table 7 shows the number of well-supported traits students formulated as Character

Specialist, and Table 8 highlights the number of passages cited by students as Literary Luminary,

along with the number of total words used to describe the passages' significance.

Table 6: *Discussion Director Results*

Student Number	Discussion Director 1 (# questions)	Discussion Director 2 (# questions)	Discussion Director 3 (# questions)
2	1	1	0
3	1	4	4
5	4	1	2
7	4	5	
9	2	5	
10	1	7	8
11	1	2	2
12	1	2	

Table 7: *Character Specialist Results*

Student Number	# Character Traits--1	# Character Traits--2	# Character Traits--3	# Character Traits--4
2	1	0	2	4
3	0	4	4	
5	4	2	2	1
7	2	0		
9	6	3		
10	5	6	5	
11	0			
12	2	3	2	

Table 8: *Literary Luminary Results*

Student Number	Literary Luminary 1 (# passages/# words)	Literary Luminary 2 (# passages/# words)	Literary Luminary 3 (# passages/# words)	Literary Luminary 4 (# passages/words)
2	1, 10	1, 22	1, 12	0
3	3, 30	2, 20	3, 28	3, 30
5	1, 10	4, 30		
7	0, 0	1, 5	1, 8	2, 15
9	2, 18	1, 9	2, 19	
10	3, 23	4, 35	4, 24	
11	1, 10	1, 8	2,22	1, 12
12	2, 21	1, 11	2, 23	

These tables illustrated a somewhat mixed set of results with respect to how the three numerical indicators changed over time. Discussion Director offered the clearest picture, and it by and large tended to be a positive one. Six of the eight students were able to formulate more open-ended questions in their final worksheet than they did on their first one, while Student 2 and Student 5 saw decreases in the number of questions asked over time. Some of these positive changes were significant; Student 3, Student 9, and Student 10 wrote three, three and seven more questions at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. This suggested that for a majority

of the sample population, the Literature Circles intervention correlated positively with the ability to formulate open-ended questions.

The intervention offered a less positive picture when it came to the Character Specialist role. Only two of the eight students--Student 2 and Student 3--named more well-supported character traits at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. The other six saw this figure decrease or remain stagnant over the course of the intervention. Therefore, for the majority of students in the sample population, there was no meaningful, positive correlation between exposure to the Literature Circles protocol and the ability to generate character traits. More time spent analyzing texts within the Literature Circles framework did not necessarily contribute to a greater capacity for describing characters.

Finally, the Literary Luminary role was also at most marginally affected by the Literature Circles intervention. Only three of the eight students--Student 5, Student 7, and Student 10--saw increases in *both* the number of "meaningful passages" that caught their attention and the number of words that they used to unpack their meanings. Four other students saw very slight, insignificant (1-2 word) increases in the number of words they used to write about their passages, and a fifth saw no change at all by the end of the intervention. It seemed, consequently, as though the intervention did not make a majority of students in the sample population more likely to both notice more passages that intrigued them and write at greater length about them. From a quantitative standpoint, at least, there was only a very limited body of evidence for believing that the Literature Circles method made students more inclined to note passages that especially appealed to them for personal or emotional reasons. Nor was there an overwhelming indication that the intervention made the sample population feel more compelled to write at greater length about their favorite passages.

A qualitative analysis of students' responses revealed many of the same conclusions as the quantitative one--the Literature Circles Intervention certainly impacted some students' ability to think critically and in an open-ended manner about their reading, but did not have a uniformly positive effect upon all students in the sample population. For the most part, the qualitative character of student responses mirrored the quantitative trends; that is, students who wrote more characters, traits, or passage descriptions over time tended to do so without a noticeable diminution in quality, whereas students who wrote the same or less during the course of the intervention did not see the quality of their responses increase. There were several exceptions to this trend worth describing in greater detail, because they provide greater context for the qualitative numbers discussed above in relation to several individual students.

In some cases, analyzing the qualitative character of a student's responses made the quantitative increases in the production of written work over the course of the intervention seem less meaningful. For instance, Student 3 saw increases in both the number of open-ended discussion questions and well-supported character traits formulated from the beginning of the intervention to the end. However, the increased production of written work did not necessarily correlate with an increase in critical and creative thinking; the new traits this student named to describe a character in the story at the end of the intervention included "weird" (because "his face is weird") and "nice" (because "he is nice" to the other characters), and not anything referencing specific events in the story. This same student's questions remained fairly general throughout the story, referencing the same events that occurred at the beginning of the story, rather than serving as a representation of the student's critically responding to textual occurrence and themes as they occurred to him throughout the text.

A closer look at the qualitative character of student responses also yielded some positive conclusions in cases where the quantitative data was inconclusive. For instance, Student 10 did not experience a quantitative increase in the number of well-supported traits named from the beginning of the intervention to the end, but did clearly give higher *quality* responses later in the intervention than she did at the beginning. In the first worksheet, the student described a main character of her novel as "friendly" (because "she is nice") and "excited" (because "they are going to have fun"), among other descriptions. Both of these traits lacked reference to particular events in the novel, and seemed excessively general. As the student progressed through the novel, however, she clearly corrected this problem, and characterized the same character in a far more vivid way, even though she did not name a higher number of traits than she did before. In later work sessions, she called the main character "polite" (because "she did not throw a tantrum when she stayed in the hospital"), "nervous," (because "she thinks she has a disease and is going to die), and "weak" (because "she cannot run anymore like before). Here, Student 10 moved from broad, general, and not very illuminating characterizations to a description that makes reference to specific events in the text and emotions felt by the main character. Even though her descriptions did not get any lengthier over time, as measured by the *number* of well-supported traits named at different points during the intervention, there are grounds for believing that participating in Literature Circles did improve Student 10's capacity for thinking about characters critically, as the *quality* of the descriptions given clearly improved over time.

Summary of Results

Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative results of the study offered a mixed picture of how the Literature Circles intervention impacted both students' attitudes toward reading and their English reading proficiency.

At the class-wide level, it could not be inferred, at least on the basis of statistical evidence, that the intervention had a clear, positive effect upon student attitudes toward reading. When differentiating the reading survey results by question, it was found that there was only one statistically significant change between pre- and post-assessment survey data--in the *negative* direction. Meanwhile, when the data was sorted by student, only one member of the student sample population gave, on average, higher responses to the questions to enough of an extent that the change was significant at the *p<.05* level. Another student actually registered a statistically significant change in average response in the *negative* direction, suggesting an overall *decrease* in attitudes toward reading. For the other six students, there was no statistically significant change in their reading survey data from beginning to end, meaning that it was not possible to discern, at least quantitatively, any underlying changes in their attitudes toward reading.

The outlook that could be formed on the basis of qualitative data was slightly more positive. Six out of eight student participants explicitly cited parts of their book or the group roles that they played while analyzing their reading as their favorite parts of class over the duration of the intervention, and four out of eight students who thought that reading was a personal weakness at the beginning of the intervention did not name it as a weakness at the end. These developments suggested some positive changes in student attitudes toward reading that were not registered on the quantitative aspect of the survey.

Data from the QRI-5 illustrated that only one student, out of the five who had complete pre- and post-assessment data, saw appreciable gains in English reading level as measured by the test. That student, Student 3, scored "Instructional" on Level 3 text at the start of the intervention, and "Instructional" at Level 4 at the end of the intervention, suggesting that

Literature Circles contributed to this student's ability to comprehend texts at a higher level by the time the intervention had ended. The other four students did not see an improved performance on the QRI-5 by the end of the intervention, either because they scored in the "Instructional" range on Level 3 at the beginning of the intervention and then failed to do the same on Level 4 at the end, or because they initially scored in the "Frustration" range on Level 3 and then failed to increase that performance at the end of the intervention. These results do not indicate that exposure to Literature Circles had a systematic or class-wide effect upon the English reading proficiency of the students in the sample population.

Finally, results from an analysis of student work completed during the course of the intervention revealed that some, but not all, students in the sample population saw an increase in the amount of written work produced while engaging in critical thinking activities in their book groups. Many students were able to formulate more open-ended discussion questions at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. Smaller quantities of students consistently produced more well-supported character traits and responded more extensively to specific passages in the text that appealed to them at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. Examining the qualitative character of student responses revealed that in some cases, students may have produced more written work without a comparable increase in the quality of their responses, while in other instances, students may not have increased the amount they wrote while at the same time writing more insightfully.

Overall, the data points to some evidence that exposure to Literature Circles has a positive impact on students' reading performance and attitudes toward reading, mainly on the individual, rather than class-wide level. Several students saw marked improvements on most of the qualitative and quantitative indicators from the beginning to the end of the study, most

especially Student 10 and Student 3. However, there lacked compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence for believing that the intervention had the same positive effect upon all student participants. Most of the other students saw only isolated gains in one or two of the many indicators used to measure student performance during the intervention. One student, Student 2, saw virtually no gains at all in any category, while another, Student 11, experienced *decreases* in certain categories, especially with respect to her own attitudes toward reading. It seemed reasonable to infer that Literature Circles is a method of teaching reading that especially appealed to certain students, but was disliked by others.

Conclusion

This chapter presented and analyzed the results of the Literature Circles intervention in order to assess whether or not it influenced student attitudes toward reading, along with their general English reading proficiency. After using data tables and other charts to summarize both the quantitative and qualitative sources of data, the chapter outlined the various inferences that could be made on the basis of that data with respect to student attitudes and student performance. While it was possible to conclude that the Literature Circles intervention did positively impact some students' attitudes toward reading and some students' proficiency in English reading and analysis of texts, there lacked compelling evidence for concluding that the intervention had a systematic positive impact upon the entire student sample population. The next chapter will assess and evaluate these results in light of methodological strengths and weaknesses, and compare the findings of the present study to the existing body of research already outlined in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and contextualize the results of the Literature Circles investigation. This effort will connect the quantitative and qualitative data outlined in Chapter 4 to the body of related literature presented in Chapter 2.   The chapter will begin with a brief summary and recapitulation of the results from Chapter 4, synthesizing the data in order to explain what it says about the overall effectiveness of the Literature Circles protocol used in the present investigation. Following this, the chapter will utilize both the existing body of academic knowledge and an analysis of the methodological strengths and limitations of the study in order to explain how and why these results were obtained. Finally, the chapter, and the paper as a whole, will conclude with suggestions for how the research conducted here could be improved upon and expanded in the future.

Explanation of Results

A synthesis of the various sources of data presented in Chapter 4 reveals that the grounds for arguing that the Literature Circles protocol used contributed positively to the student sample population's attitudes toward reading and overall English reading comprehension are limited at best. This conclusion can be reached after analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. Consequently, the intervention yields only limited evidence for believing that using Literature Circles in the classroom markedly improves the attitudes and second-language reading comprehension of ELL students.

In the first place, the student reading survey showed that only one student saw a statistically significant increase in her overall attitudes toward reading, as measured by her responses to the six quantitative questions on the pre- and post-assessment administrations of the

survey. Another student saw a statistically significant *decrease* in this measure over the course

of the intervention. When analyzing survey responses according to question, it was observed

that no question saw a statistically significant, class-wide increase from the beginning to the end

of the intervention. Qualitative data, collected from the three open-ended questions on the

survey, yielded a slightly more positive picture, but still seemed to indicate that the intervention's

success was relatively limited in scope. Five of the eight students highlighted either a part of

their novel or an aspect of their group roles as their favorite parts of the intervention as a whole,

suggesting that the structure and content of the protocol was engaging for a majority of students.

Three students who named reading as a personal weakness at the beginning of the study did not

name it as a weakness at the end, but four others who named reading as a strength at the

beginning did not cite it at the end.

The intervention also yielded little success with respect to how it affected the students'

English reading comprehension, as measured by the administration of the Qualitative Reading

Inventory, 5th edition (QRI-5) at the beginning and end of the intervention. As highlighted in

Chapter 4, of the five students with complete data for before and after the intervention, only one

student saw results that could be unambiguously reported as successful, moving from an

"Instructional" score at Level 3 at the beginning of the intervention to an "Instructional" score at

Level 4 at the end. Two students scored "Frustration" at Level 3 at both the beginning and end

of the intervention, while two others scored "Instructional" at Level 3 at the beginning, but

"Frustration" at Level 4 at the end. These results indicate that the intervention correlated with

unambiguous reading comprehension growth for only a single student, and inconclusive results

or no growth for the other four.

The data did reflect more positively upon the correlation between Literature Circles and the ability to think and reflect open-endedly upon text, as measured by the students' written activities performed as part of their group roles during the intervention. Six of the eight students asked more open-ended questions as Discussion Director at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. Two of the eight students grew with respect to the number of well-supported character traits they asked over time as the Character Specialist, while three out of eight saw increases in the number of passages cited and the number of words used to describe those passages as the Literary Luminary.   The ability to produce language while engaged in inferential, critical thought is certainly an important, higher-level aspect of reading comprehension, and the intervention did correlate to some extent with student improvements in this capacity. Again, however, the successes in this regard did not appear to be systematic across the student population, given that in two of the three measures, they were only experienced by a small fraction of the students participating in the study.

Overall, therefore, the data reveals that the Literature Circles protocol utilized in this intervention was far from a complete success. It encountered only limited success in raising the reading attitudes and English reading comprehension of the ELL students forming the sample population. The next two sections of the chapter will explain how and why these results may have been obtained, drawing upon both the body of research analyzed in Chapter 2 and further reflections into the strengths and weaknesses of the study as a whole.

Connecting Prior Research to Current Results

Chapter 2 presented three sections of existing literature devoted to the literacy development of ELLs and the effectiveness of self-directed methods of literacy instruction. The first part of the chapter dealt with research into the unique social and emotional concerns of

English Language Learners (ELLs), and how those concerns may be better suited to instructional

protocols that diverge from "Initiate, Response, Feedback" (IRF) discourse patterns. The second

section outlined a group of studies that traced the roots of English reading comprehension in

ELLs. These investigations explored both the aspects of second language acquisition most

conducive to reading comprehension in English as well as certain instructional principals and

specific strategies most conducive to developing those aspects. Finally, the third section of the

chapter detailed several studies that attempted to adopt and put into practice some of the

aforementioned principles of effective English literacy instruction for ELLs, and in doing so

moved beyond the traditional IRF discourse paradigm.

The structure of this section of Chapter 5 will mirror that of Chapter 2, using the existing

research to contextualize some of the results attained in the present study. It will first highlight

how certain aspects of the study procedure were designed to take into account the specific social

and emotional concerns of ELL students relevant to their academic experiences, and how these

concerns may have ultimately been borne out in the final qualitative and quantitative results of

the present study. Following this, it will explore how some of the principles of effective literacy

instruction for ELLs were, or were not, embodied in the procedures of the Literature Circles

intervention, comparing the present effort to some of those explored in the final section of

Chapter 2 in order to explain some of the results.

The Literature Circles intervention was aligned, in many ways, with existing research

into social and emotional factors specific to ELLs and their academic experiences that may make

certain instructional strategies in English literacy preferable to others. For instance, Luk (2004)

highlighted how the self-perceptions of ELL students, as well as their capacity for English

language acquisition, could be positively influenced by instructional methods emphasizing "non-

institutional" modes of discourse over IRF patterns. While the Literature Circles model adopted

during the present study did not explicitly incorporate the kind of "small talk" investigated in

Luk's research, which was often non-academic in nature, it was by its very design intended to

promote "non-institutional" patterns of teacher-student and student-student talk. Even though

talking about personal or unrelated topics--the type of talk that was monitored as a part of Luk's

research--was not a part of student expectations for participating in Literature Circles, the format

was conducive to talking about texts in an informal way. Students were not expected to give

formulaic answers or to achieve "correctness" in their responses to questions. Moreover, aside

from giving each of their peers a chance to present their written work and observing norms of

basic conversational courtesy and politeness, students were not instructed to wait for particular

cues before making a contribution to the discussion.   The lesson protocol was formatted

precisely so that students could speak their minds about their texts, when they felt compelled to

do so, since it was oriented towards the same goal "non-institutional small talk" achieved in

Luk's observations; namely, reducing student anxiety toward second language acquisition.

        In this way, the Literature Circles model employed in the present study was mindful not

only of Luk's conclusions but also of the research of Leclair, Doll, Osborn, and Johnson (2009),

who found that ELL students are *more likely* to experience lower levels of self-belief and self-

esteem with respect to their academic abilities than their non-ELL counterparts. While the

student sample population in this investigation could not be divided into ELL and non-ELL

subgroups (simply because there were no students conforming to the latter description) so as to

make a valid comparison to the conclusions of Leclair and her colleagues, it is worth noting that,

on average, the students in this study rated themselves less confidently as *readers* specifically

than they did as "students" generally, both before and after the Literature Circles intervention.

Questions 2 and 6 on the reading survey--"I am a good reader" and "It is easy for me to talk about the books I read," respectively--were, on average, the two lowest-rated questions on the pre-assessment administration, and Question 2 was the second-lowest rated question on the post-assessment administration (only Question 5, "I read a lot at home," was lower; see Table 2). This data, while certainly not a perfect instrument for drawing conclusions about the sample population, does at least suggest that the students involved in the present study experienced some personal anxieties relative to their own English reading proficiency. As such, it was important that the procedure for the Literature Circles intervention was designed to promote learning in a less formal, more flexible setting than would be expected under IRF. The fact that the intervention promoted learning in a social, small group setting was also important, bearing in mind Morrison, Cosden, O'Farrell, and Campos (2003), who noted that an ELL elementary student's sense of self-worth and "belonging" in school can correlate not only with English proficiency, but also with that student's social competencies.   Literature Circles, whose pedagogical roots lie in productive teacher-student and student-student talk, is a protocol intended to not only benefit students' capacities in written and oral language, but also to develop students' social skills. By moving away from an IRF discourse pattern and towards classroom talk that was more informally structured, the present intervention created space for the same kind of collaboration between teacher and students, and between students themselves, that can foster relationships that can accelerate student language acquisition, as was the case in Gillanders' (2007) case study.

The Literature Circles intervention also dovetailed relatively well with current research into the principles of best practice for fostering second language literacy in ELL students, even though there were several areas in which it could have done more. For instance, it relied heavily

on instructional conversations as a pedagogical technique, given that both teacher-lead lessons

and independent student group work both significantly involved the development of reading

strategies and literacy skills through the use of oral language, which is a principle of effective

instruction for ELLs promoted alike by Doherty and Hilberg (2007) and Hamre and Pianta

(2005). Additionally, it provided some of the instructional and emotional supports Hamre and

Pianta (2005) outlined as being potentially boosting of academic and social performance for kids

susceptible to various risk factors. In particular, the present study expected students to assume a

high level of responsibility for academic tasks--an important example of instructional support

from the Hamre and Pianta study--and, by delineating clear procedures and assigning students

specific roles, established a management structure that could also be said to conform to those

researchers' conception of an emotional support. It is possible that these supports were partially

responsible for some of the intervention's successes with respect to student attitudes and reading

achievement. Perhaps this elevation of student responsibility and adherence to a clear procedural

structure in the classroom benefited the students who saw either their attitudes toward reading or

performance on the QRI-5 grow over the course of the study. It at the very least seems possible

to infer that these instructional and emotional supports played a role in some of the positive

qualitative results of the intervention. A majority of students noted on the post-assessment

reading survey that their favorite part of the intervention was either something having to do with

their novel or a particular role they played in the Literature Circle, suggesting that the structures

established in the intervention facilitated students' efforts to meaningfully and independently

engage with a text.

On the other hand, there were aspects of research regarding principles of effective

instruction in second language literacy for ELLs that were absent or underemphasized during the

present investigation. For instance, Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005), in managing to

derive an "equation" for English reading comprehension among ELL students, noted that one of

the strongest correlations they found in their study existed between reading comprehension and

the development of *listening comprehension.* The Literature Circles model adapted for use in the

present study provided students with little opportunity to practice this dimension of literacy.

While there were some teacher read-alouds during the brief whole group component of the

lesson protocol and during the weekly teacher-led small group lessons, these were the only

opportunities students had during the intervention to engage in listening comprehension

activities. The intervention as presently constructed also lacked a vocabulary development

component, which both Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) and Walters and Bozkurt

(2009) noted as another crucial piece of the development of second language literacy skills. The

research of the latter showed how second-language vocabulary development could be positively

affected when students engage in high-rigor vocabulary activities involving a great deal of

cognitive effort. While it is debatable whether or not the vocabulary notebooks utilized by

Walters and Bozkurt in their study could have been incorporated effectively into the Literature

Circles protocol, given the disparity in ages between the sample population of that study and the

current one, it is true that the present study lacked a dimension in which students could access

opportunities to expand their English language vocabularies by engaging with unknown words

from their novels. Perhaps future studies might incorporate a fourth student role involving

vocabulary in order to remedy this shortcoming.

Another worthwhile exercise involves comparing the present research to other efforts,

also explored in Chapter 2, to incorporate the principles and "best practices" of effective literacy

instruction for ELLs into classroom instruction in a systematic way. Such a comparison here

yields mixed results, in the sense that the present study incorporated certain elements of demonstrably successful studies, but failed to incorporate others.

One of the areas in which the Literature Circles intervention did not measure up to certain peer studies involved the incorporation of content from social studies and science into literacy instruction. Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva, and Dorn (2011) showed how a program utilized in Arizona, *GeoLiteracy for ELLs* (Arizona Geographic Alliance (AZGA), 2009)*,* improved reading comprehension results for certain groups of middle school students, including ELLs. The program utilized in this study taught certain core literacy skills--cause and effect, summarizing, main idea, sequencing, drawing conclusions, making inferences, and using text features--through lessons in geography and earth science. While a similar format would not have been easily replicable in the context of the Literature Circles protocol used in the present study, there were certain opportunities where students could have benefited from the opportunity to make cross-curricular connections. Namely, some students in the sample population read works of realistic or historical fiction--namely, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. Students in both these groups were inquisitive about the historical and geographical settings of their novels, and their engagement with their respective texts may have been increased even further with the incorporation of grade-level appropriate mini-lessons related to the eras and locations in which their novels took place. In other words, teaching students more explicitly about the culture, geography, and history of the Southern United States, or about the end of World War II in Japan may have led to higher levels of student investment and improved reading performance, as measured by the indicators of the study. Incorporating content instruction into the fiction or fantasy book groups would have been difficult, but not impossible--

a mini-lesson about the mythology of vampires for readers of *Bunnicula* might have been

appreciated, for example.

Another area in which the present intervention failed to emulate certain practices shown

to be successful in other studies involved the cultivation of a home-school connection. The

Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) program studied by McElvain (2010) differed principally

from the current protocol in the sense that it explicitly compelled students to bring home and

discuss the work they did in reading class with their parents and families. Specifically, the

classroom involved in McElvain's investigation posed a "Question of the Week" to students, a

broad, thematic question connected to their respective texts which they were expected to think

about individually as well as share with their parents. Periodically, student discussion in their

book groups would be structured around student and family responses to the "Question of the

Week." The present study included no such feature, largely due to time constraints, which

invites speculation that student investment and engagement with the Literature Circles program--

along with, perhaps, their English reading comprehension--may have been improved were it to

have been incorporated. As noted in Chapter 4, only one student experienced an aggregate,

statistically significant positive shift in attitudes toward reading from the beginning to the end of

the study, as measured by the reading survey; additionally, no single question saw a statistically

significant increase in student response during the same period. Perhaps these indicators, in

particular, may have been improved had the lesson protocol used in the present study more

closely resembled the TLC model studied by McElvain.

On the other hand, the Literature Circles protocol utilized in this investigation shared

some important qualities with other models from peer studies that achieved some success in

raising the reading performance of ELL students. In promoting *student interactions* as a vehicle

for language and skill development, as well as a shared understanding of the text, the present

study aligns with many of the conclusions and implications of the Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and

Ellis (2010) study on active learning. While Literature Circles, as construed in this investigation,

did not constitute "active learning" in the same sense as the play activities incorporated as part of

that study, the protocol does provide an answer to the primary concern Martlew, Ellis, Stephen,

and Ellis raise at the end of their investigation: that even hands-on, seemingly student-directed

learning techniques can fail to stimulate truly *student-driven* talk. The Literature Circles model

used in the current study adopts a structure of roles and activities designed to facilitate and

scaffold this kind of classroom talk that is initiated by students themselves, rather than "fed" to

them by a teacher. The three roles--Discussion Director, Character Specialist, and Literary

Luminary--offered students a starting point for sharing their thoughts, but were not designed to

be overly restrictive. Mindful of the contention of Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and Ellis that ELL

and low-income students often come to school with certain language deficits that may impede

their ability or willingness to think and talk critically about texts, the current lesson protocol

offered students clear and simple templates for participating in both independent and guided

discussion about their novels.

In addition to fostering the kind of social interaction among students that can lead to

improvements in reading performance and language development, especially among ELLs, the

present study also cultivated student learning at the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,

1978). The teacher's role in the Literature Circles protocol adopted for this investigation was

strikingly similar to that of the teachers in the Instructional Conversations (IC) lessons forming

the basis of Echevarria's study (1978). Acting as both the primary facilitator of the teacher-led

strategy lessons and as a monitor of the student sharing sessions and group discussion, the

teacher's job was to ask pertinent guiding questions and talk to students in such ways that would compel them to ask and answer open-ended inquiries while constantly relying on the text as the basis of their dialogue. In doing so, the teacher sought to engage the space between the student's existing academic capacities and their potential ones, which hopefully would be reached through the use of language in a structured yet open-ended and collaborative setting. The Literature Circles intervention therefore established a role for the supervising teacher that was very similar to that which was performed in Echevarria's study. In doing so, it aspired to increase both students' willingness to engage with and respond to a text, as well as their ability to comprehend texts in a second language, in much the same way that Echevarria found that the IC lesson protocol did. It is possible that some of the successes the present intervention achieved in that regard--including the five students who explicitly stated on the post-assessment reading survey that they especially engaged with their novels or Student 10's improving self-assessment of her ability to talk about what she read--could have been attributable to this similarity.

In summary, contextualizing the present investigation in terms of the existing literature related to second-language literacy and examples of lesson protocols that employ pedagogical strategies other than IRF serves to both justify elements of the intervention procedure and offer preliminary insight into its results. The next section will delve more specifically into the strengths and weaknesses of the study, and also explore in greater depth how these strengths and weaknesses could have contributed to the results.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This section will show how several methodological strengths may have contributed to the positive impacts of the Literature Circles intervention upon the students in the sample population--impacts which were, as was seen in Chapter 4, limited in a quantitative sense but

slightly more far-reaching in a qualitative one. Following this, the present section will elaborate

upon the limitations of this investigation, and upon how those limitations may have prevented

the qualitative effect of the intervention from being more far-reaching in scope.

One particular pedagogical strength of the intervention was the extent to which its

procedures, as highlighted earlier in the chapter, expressly took into account research relating to

the academic and emotional development of ELLs. Mindful of the fact that students learning

English tend to experience feelings of anxiety and isolation in school with greater frequency

(LeClair, Doll, Osborn, and Johnson, 2009), the intervention procedure was explicitly designed

to provide opportunities for students to talk about texts in a less structured and formalized

setting. The group discussion format, while not entirely unstructured, did give students space to

express their feelings about events, characters, and themes of their novels in ways that felt

comfortable to them. The teacher served less as an evaluator of student talk--that is, of the

"correctness" or "incorrectness" of what participants were discussing--than as a facilitator intent

upon helping students develop a willingness to critically think about texts and want to respond

on their own. Student book groups collaborated to use language in order to construct meaning

for themselves out of what they were reading, rather than simply accepting what the text meant

as told to them by someone else. In this way, the Literature Circles intervention interacted

sensibly with the research of Luk (2004), Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and Ellis (2010), and

Echevarría (1995), all of whom found that ELL students benefitted especially from pedagogical

techniques or instructional protocols encouraging the production of language in less-structured,

open-ended settings that encouraged independence without imposing a great deal of pressure.

Furthermore, the structure of the intervention conformed to several important

instructional and emotional supports outlined by Hamre and Pianta (2005) as being integral to

the success of students in "at-risk" settings--namely, the encouragement of student independence coupled with the establishment of specific student roles that provided structure and stability to daily lessons. It is worth remembering that the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts endorse lesson protocols similar to Literature Circles as a useful pedagogical tool for teaching literacy to all students, not just those learning English. Several standards in the Speaking and Listening strand for Grade 4 encompass this principle, expecting proficient readers to be able to "engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly" (Common Core State Standards for ELA SL 4.1, 2012) and to "follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles" (Common Core State Standards for ELA SL. 4.1b, 2012). Pedagogical techniques aligned to the standards in this way, however, prove to be especially useful to the development of ELL students, as the establishment of a discussion protocol involving clearly elaborated group roles provides a level of language scaffolding that makes participating in open-ended and critical discussions a less intimidating prospect.

It is altogether likely that this harmony between the structure of the Literature Circles intervention and the emotional and academic needs of ELLs contributed to many of its successes. One of the clear areas in which the study succeeded, at least based on the *qualitative* data, was in generating student excitement towards reading. A majority of the students--five out of the eight--expressly highlighted aspects of their novels, or a particular role performed within their group, while a sixth expressed excitement at having "learned new English words." Another individual noted at the beginning of the study that "talking about reading" was a personal weakness, then did not mention this again when prompted on the same survey at the end of the intervention.

While only one student of the eight expressed quantitatively, on the student reading survey, that she had experienced a general increase in her self-perception as a reader from the beginning to the end of the intervention, most participating students did at least express that they enjoyed it, thanks either to the reflection activities they were doing or to the content of the books they were reading. Given that all participating students in the sample population were ELLs, it can be reasonably inferred that a lesson protocol structured in such a way as to promote open-ended discussion and critical thinking, as was the case here, can succeed in making reading engaging for a group of students normally at risk of experiencing anxiety and disillusionment when reading in their second language.

In much the same way, the successes of the intervention with respect to actual reading performance can at least somewhat be attributed to the manner in which it encouraged second-language development in an open-ended and low-pressure way. While only one student in the sample population experienced overall reading growth on the QRI-5 reading assessment, it is not unreasonable to infer that participating in open-ended reflection activities in Literature Circles could have boosted this student's performance, given that the QRI-5 requires the students to produce their own responses and that half the questions on the test are inferential in nature. Moreover, a significant quantity of students in the sample population saw meaningful growth in their capacity for language *production*, as measured by certain quantitative indicators applied to the written worksheets completed in their book groups. Six of eight students, for instance, could generate more open-ended questions at the end of the intervention than they could at the beginning. Two of eight generated a larger number of well-supported character traits at the end of the intervention than at the beginning, while three of eight experienced increases in the number of meaningful passages cited and the words used to describe those passages. In these

contexts, the students were more capable of producing language to make their text meaningful as the intervention continued. This suggests that the open-ended, yet structured nature of the Literature Circles protocol enabled these students to overcome language anxieties and assume greater independence over time.

    At the same time, however, the study did have several limitations that may have contributed to the rather limited scope of the intervention's successes, both with respect to reading performance and student attitudes. Some of these weaknesses--specifically the ones tied to the study procedure--were more directly under the researcher's control than others. For instance, as was noted in the prior section, the present intervention did not include any links to relevant content areas, even in cases where it may have been helpful. Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva, and Dorn (2011) noted that a literacy module that taught various literacy strategies through the vehicle of a science and social studies curriculum correlated with improved reading comprehension among ELLs as compared to a traditional basal program. In the case of the Literature Circles protocol utilized here, in which some book groups read works of historical and realistic fiction, there were opportunities for cross-curricular connections that went unutilized. Giving students more insight into the historical background behind *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, or into the cultural background underlying *Because of Winn-Dixie*, among other possibilities, might have made those students more interested in their novels than they already were. Providing students with a deeper base of background knowledge may have enabled them to ask more critical questions, to gain better insight into the behaviors and feelings of characters in the story, or to more easily make connections between specific passages and the real world. This consequently could have led to more positive attitudes toward reading, as measured by the

reading survey, to a better performance on the QRI-5, and even to higher quality and more extensive written responses on book group worksheets.

Another limitation of the present study involved one of the features very prominent in McElvain's (2010) research into the effectiveness of the Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) method, which was similar to the protocol used in this investigation, save for one aspect: the presence of a strong home-school connection. In the method studied by McElvain, the teacher incorporated a weekly open-ended, thematic question into lessons, which was first discussed as a class, then taken home by students to discuss with parents and family. It was expected that students would discuss their family's responses with the rest of their group members, taking time to relate the themes of the week to important events in their novels. The Literature Circles protocol used in this intervention did *not* include this component, largely due to time constraints. It is possible that this, like the omission of cross-curricular integration, was a missed opportunity to further engage students in their reading. Increased family involvement in the particulars of the Literature Circles lessons could have increased *both* student attitudes toward reading and student reading performance. Families could have encouraged their students to read at home and become more inclined to talk about books in the home, which not only would encourage students to read outside of the classroom, but also perhaps make them more excited for reading class itself. This would have translated to a higher likelihood of registering positive attitudes toward reading on the reading survey and to a higher likelihood of doing better on the QRI-5 and on written activities during class, if the assumption is correct that students who generally feel better about reading and read more often become better readers.

A third limitation of this study related to its procedure that could have negatively impacted student performance related to the lack of an avenue for explicit vocabulary

development. The research of both Proctor, Carlo, August, and Snow (2005) and Walters and

Bozkurt (2009) noted how critical vocabulary development and usage is to the development of

second-language reading comprehension, with the latter study in particular highlighting the value

of high-rigor, high-cognitive effort activities to the development of second-language vocabulary.

None of the three student roles prescribed in the present protocol dealt with vocabulary or

encouraged students to work to define and use unknown or difficult words they encountered in

their texts. It is worth speculating, in light of the research-based connection between second-

language vocabulary development and overall reading comprehension, whether this deficiency in

the study procedure indirectly affected student performance on the QRI-5, along with the other

indicators of reading comprehension utilized in the study.

Other limitations of the study were attributable to factors situated largely outside of the

researcher's control. The most prominent of these was time. The survey was conducted over the

course of four weeks during the last month of school, which could have negatively influenced the

intervention's prospects for success in several ways. In the first place, four weeks--nineteen class

sessions, to be specific, since one class was cancelled for a school field trip--was simply too

short a time to measure meaningful changes in the specific indicators assessed in the study. The

QRI-5, for instance, is not an assessment tool designed to measure incremental changes in a

student's reading level. The exam assessed English reading comprehension only at specific

grade levels, and did not include texts leveled incrementally *between* the grades--at the second

semester of third grade for instance--as is the case with other reading inventories. The notion of

a student growing an entire year in reading over the course of merely four weeks seems

instinctively improbable, regardless of the instructional methods to which they were exposed.

This does not mean, however, that the students who registered no growth on the QRI-5 did not

grow in reading during the course of the intervention; instead, it simply indicates that any growth that did occur *could not have been measured by the instrument used*. To a lesser extent, this same criticism could be leveled at the measurement tool designed to assess changes in student attitudes during the course of the intervention. Four weeks is simply not a long period of time in the scope of an entire school year, and may not have been a long enough time for students to register significant changes in their feelings toward reading, especially taking into account the time the young children composing the sample population likely needed in order to adjust to new routines and procedures.

In addition to the length of the intervention, another factor related to timing that may have adversely impacted the results was its place on the calendar. The fact that it took place at the end of the year, alongside so many other events celebrating the end of the school year and amidst general (and understandable) restlessness for the coming summer, may have had an impact upon student engagement and concentration. This is not necessarily to say that students did not try their best to read, understand, and discuss their books. There were few notable discipline and management issues over the course of the Literature Circles lessons; for the most part, students were on-task just as much as they were during the rest of the school year. It is more conceivable, however, that students may not have been inclined to take *the assessment tools* completely seriously at the time the intervention was administered; the end of the year at the school site was filled with standardized tests, including inventories in both Spanish and English reading. While the researcher did not explicitly tell students that the assessment items were ungraded and did instruct them to do their best, the sample population was likely old enough to realize without being told, simply based on the relatively pressure-free environment of the room, that the QRI-5 and reading survey were not the same as the standardized tests to which

they were already accustomed. It is thus not beyond the realm of possibility that students in the sample population did not treat the QRI-5 and reading survey with the same degree of care and critical reflection as they would an assessment that "counted."

In summary, while the present study had many strengths that could have accounted for its successes, it also encountered a number of limitations--some procedural and others circumstantial--that hindered its effectiveness and limited the scope of its successes. On the one hand, the Literature Circles protocol it espoused harmonized well, methodologically speaking, with current research into the social and emotional needs of ELL students in such a way that could have created the conditions necessary to facilitate their second-language development, including a reduction in associated language anxiety. Additionally, the extensive pedagogical use of instructional conversations could have contributed to what limited successes there were for the student population on the QRI-5, as well as to the growth some students experienced with respect to language production on the written open-ended response activities utilized during the protocol. On the other hand, the present study also failed to provide opportunities for student participants to make cross-curricular and home-school connections. Nor did it provide an explicit avenue for students to learn and develop second-language vocabulary. These procedural weaknesses could have dampened student investment--and, correspondingly, student achievement. Moreover, the study was conducted over a relatively short period of time, during a stage in the school year that is normally quite eventful--circumstantial factors that could have reduced the overall likelihood that the intervention would have been effective.

Recommendations for Future Research

The preceding reflection upon the study's results, and the extent to which they were colored by several specific strengths and weaknesses of the study itself, lend themselves to

several recommendations for how future research into Literature Circles and how they contribute to second-language reading comprehension could be improved.

The most basic change that could be made involves either the timing of the study or the primary instrument used to measure English reading growth. As noted in the previous section, simply lengthening the duration of the intervention (using multiple books per group, if necessary) and/or conducting it at a less eventful time during the school year might yield different results. The QRI-5, used in this intervention to measure growth in English reading comprehension, is not a very precise assessment, given that it is gradated by year, rather than by semester or other sub-intervals, as some other reading assessments are. To grow a full year over the course of four weeks in second-language reading comprehension seems instinctively more of an exception than the norm. Better results might be obtained if the intervention were to be repeated over a longer period of time--or, if this were not possible, using a different reading inventory that offers more finely gradated student reading levels (such as Reading A-Z or the Diagnostic Reading Assessment), which would capture any growth that occurred "in between" grade levels.

Other possible alterations would make changes to the study procedure, mainly having in mind remedying some of the limitations mentioned in the preceding section. One change that might contribute to a better relationship between the establishment of Literature Circles, student investment, and student achievement would be the addition of a vocabulary development component. Perhaps this change would be best implemented by changing the size of each student group to four, and adding an additional group role of "vocabulary specialist," whose job would entail identifying difficult words from the text and then using context--and, if necessary, a dictionary--to define them. Expanding book groups to four students would have the added

benefit of reducing the teacher's workload and giving each group increased time for structured strategy instruction and discussion with the teacher, without making the group so large as to diminish each student's individual capacity to participate in the discussion. Additionally, as suggested in the previous section, it seems as though the incorporation of a weekly family engagement activity, along the lines of the "Question of the Week" from the model studied in McElvain's (2010) research, might be beneficial. Such an activity would not be disruptive to implement. It could first be introduced and discussed as part of the 15-minute whole group component at the start of a particular week, then discussed in book groups (either informally or under the supervision of the teacher) during the rest of that same week. Without expending that much time or effort, the researcher could establish a new procedure that may lead to great gains in student sentiment and reading comprehension.

Finally, other changes that could improve future research on the subject involve cross-curricular connections, and the incorporation of content knowledge into the literacy block. As mentioned previously, recent research has shown that the integration of content areas into second-language reading instruction can improve reading comprehension among ELL students. The present intervention did not incorporate this principle into its methodology, even though several of the novels student participants were reading offered the opportunity to do so. Future research could make sure students chose only between books that offered opportunities for integration of science and social studies themes, most likely within the genres of historical fiction, realistic fiction, or even science fiction. "Cross-curricular" instruction could most likely occur during teacher-led, small group strategy lessons, and could perhaps teach relevant reading strategies through the lens of grade-level-appropriate, nonfiction texts related to the themes of the students' novels.

A more daring possibility to better incorporate curricular integration into a Literature Circles program would be to run a model using non-fiction, rather than fiction, texts. This would require some changes to group roles. Character specialist would likely have to be eliminated (unless students picked a narrative nonfiction text retelling some kind of historical event), and other roles relating specifically to nonfiction might need to be incorporated instead; one possibility might be a "text features specialist" tasked with analyzing pictures, tables, and other features and explaining their significance. In this hypothetical scenario, the researcher would also have to make sure to test students on the QRI-5 (or other appropriate reading inventory) using non-fiction materials.

Conclusion

The purpose of the preceding chapter was to explain and interpret the results of the study in light of both existing research and the study's methodological strengths and weaknesses. The study showed limited success for the intervention, both with respect towards fostering more positive attitudes toward reading and increased English reading comprehension among the sample population. While there was some *qualitative* evidence that student attitudes toward reading and themselves as readers improved over the course of the intervention, on the quantitative level only one student experienced statistically significant growth in her attitudes toward reading, as measured by the reading survey, and only one student grew a reading level on the QRI-5 reading inventory. Students did experience more growth with respect to their capacity for language production when engaged in open-ended writing activities, as measured by their written responses when performing their group roles over the course of the intervention.

These successes--along with their limited scope--could be explained largely by reflecting on the present intervention's place within the existing body of research pertaining into the social,

emotional, and academic needs of ELL in school, principles of best practice for second-language

literacy instruction, and into previous attempts to adopt these best practices via protocols that

step away from an "Initiate, Response, Feedback" (IRF) pattern. Reflecting upon the Literature

Circles procedure used in this investigation in light of the research considered in Chapter 2

yielded insight into the overall strengths and weaknesses of the intervention, many of which

could have been responsible for its positive and inconclusive results. After contextualizing the

results, the chapter concluded by offering several ways that future research could correct some of

the current study's weaknesses and possibly obtain data that more conclusively illustrates any

correlation that may exist between a Literature Circles model and improvements in both student-

self conception and second-language reading comprehension. Because the successes of this

particular intervention were so limited in spite of the overwhelmingly promising picture painted

by several other similar studies, additional research should be conducted to determine the

effectiveness of Literature Circles as a teaching tool for ELL students. It is too soon to dismiss

the method entirely, as it is very possible that correcting the methodological and circumstantial

flaws that hindered the present investigation could lead to substantially different results.

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Appendix A: Student Reading Questionnaire

Name: _____

Number: _____

Reading Survey

Part 1: Read the statements below and say how much you agree with them, from 1 (No, not at all) to 5 (Yes, definitely).

1. I am a good student.   1   2   3   4   5

2. I am a good reader.   1   2   3   4   5

3. I enjoy reading and think it makes me   1   2   3   4   5
smarter.

4. I like reading many different kinds   1   2   3   4   5
of books.

5. I read a lot at home.   1   2   3   4   5

6. It is easy for me to talk about   1   2   3   4   5
the books I read.

Part 2: Answer the questions using complete sentences.

1. What are your *strengths?* What are you good at?

2. What are your *weaknesses*? What do you need to improve at?

(After study ONLY):

3. What was your favorite part of literature circles? Your least favorite part?

Appendix B: Book Group Roles--Discussion Director

Literature Circle Roles
DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

The "Discussion Director" asks questions to increase comprehension.

Name _____

Book _____

1. Why do you think the author had _____
   happen in the story?

2. How is _____ alike/different from

   _____ ?

3. If you had been _____, how would you have

   _____ ?

4. How did you feel about _____ ?

5. What do you think caused _____ ?

6. How would the story have been changed if the author had not let

   _____ happen?

7. Tell a short summary of _____ .

8. Predict: _____ .

9. Do you think _____
   happening will be important later on? Why do you think so?

10. How?

11. Why?

12.

13.

14.

Appendix C: Book Group Roles--Character Specialist

Character Trait Chart

Directions: In the left-hand column, write the character traits of the one of the characters in the story. In the right-hand column, list how the trait is revealed in the text. (Traits can be revealed by events, actions, words, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings.)

Character: _____

Trait	Revealed by...

Character Traits Word Bank

adventurous, afraid, ambitious, arrogant, bad, bold, bossy, brainy, brave, brilliant, calm, careful, careless, charming, cheerful, childish, cowardly, cruel, curious, demanding, depressed, dishonest, eager, easygoing, energetic, evil, faithful, fearless, foolish, friendly, funny, gentle, giving, gloomy, graceful, greedy, guilty, happy, healthy, helpful, honest, hopeful, imaginative, impatient, impolite, innocent, inventive, intelligent, jealous, kind, lazy, lonely, loving, loyal, lucky, mature, mean, mysterious, nervous, nice, noisy, obedient, peaceful, pleasant, polite, poor, proud, quiet, responsible, rough, rowdy, rude, sad, scared, selfish, serious, shy, silly, sly, smart, sneaky, spoiled, strange, sweet, talented, thoughtful, thoughtless, trusting, trustworthy, unfriendly, unhappy, upset, warm, weak, wicked, wise, worried, zany

Appendix D: Book Group Roles--Literary Luminary

Literature Circle Roles
LITERARY LUMINARY

The Literary Luminary locates 4 sections of text to share with the group and states the reasons for choosing the selections.

Possible reasons for picking a passage to be shared aloud:

good dialogue	surprising	tells about characters
well-written	figurative language	funny
confusing	sets a mood	thought-provoking

Name _____   Book _____

Passage #1

Page _____   Paragraph _____

Why did you pick this passage? _____

_____

How will you share it with the group?_____

Passage #2

Page _____   Paragraph _____

Why did you pick this passage? _____

_____

How will you share it with the group?_____

Passage #3

Page _____   Paragraph _____

Why did you pick this passage? _____

_____

How will you share it with the group?_____

Passage #4

Page _____   Paragraph _____

Why did you pick this passage? _____

_____

How will you share it with the group?_____

Appendix E: QRI-5 Pre-Assessment

The Trip to the Zoo

The day was bright and sunny. Carlos and Maria jumped out of bed and dressed in a hurry. They didn't want to be late for school today. It was a special day because their classes were going to the zoo. When they got to school, all of the children were waiting outside to get on the bus. When everyone was there, the second and third graders got on the bus and rode to the zoo. On the bus, the children talked about the zoo animals that they liked the best. Joe and Carlos wanted to see the lion, king of the beasts. Maria and Angela wanted to see the chimps. Maria thought they acted a lot like people.

When they got to the zoo, their teachers divided the children into four groups. One teacher, Mr. Lopez, told them if anyone got lost to go to the ice cream stand. Everyone would meet there at noon. Maria went with the group to the monkey house, where she spent a long time watching the chimps groom each other. She wrote down all the ways that the chimps acted like people. Her notes would help her write a good report of what she liked best at the zoo.

Carlos went with the group to the lion house. He watched the cats pace in front of the glass. Carlos was watching a lion so carefully that he didn't see his group leave. Finally, he noticed that it was very quiet in the lion house. He turned around and didn't see anyone. At first he was worried. Then he remembered what Mr. Lopez had said. He traced his way back to the entrance and found a map. He followed the map to the ice cream stand, just as everyone was meeting there for lunch. Joe smiled and said, "We thought that the lion had you for lunch!"

Level: Three

____ They thought
____ the lion had Carlos
____ for lunch.

55 Ideas

Number of ideas recalled _____

Other ideas recalled, including inferences:

Questions for "The Trip to the Zoo"

1. Why was it a special day for Carlos and Maria?
   Explicit: their classes were going to the zoo

2. What grades were Carlos and Maria in?
   Implicit: second and third

3. What animal did Carlos want to see?
   Explicit: lions

4. Why was Maria watching the chimps so carefully?
   Implicit: so she could write a report for school

5. How did Carlos get separated from his group?
   Explicit: he was watching the lions so carefully he didn't see his group leave

6. What made Carlos realize that his classmates had left the lion house?
   Implicit: it was quiet; he didn't hear any talking; or he turned around and no one was there

7. Where did Carlos find the map?
   Explicit: at the zoo entrance

8. Why did Carlos go to get a map from the zoo entrance?
   Implicit: to help him find his way to the ice cream stand

Without Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: ____

Number Correct Implicit: ____

Total: ____

____ Independent: 8 correct

____ Instructional: 6–7 correct

____ Frustration: 0–5 correct

With Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: ____

Number Correct Implicit: ____

Total: ____

____ Independent: 8 correct

____ Instructional: 6–7 correct

____ Frustration: 0–5 correct

Level 3

Appendix F: QRI-5 Post-Assessment (Level 3)

The Friend

Once upon a time there was a boy named Mark. Mark loved to go to the ocean and play his flute. One day he was playing his flute when a school of dolphins swam by. They leaped in the air every 30 seconds. Mark could almost predict when they would leap again. He watched them for a long time because he was so interested in their play. That day he decided that he wanted to learn more about dolphins. Mark went to the library.

The next weekend he took a boat and rowed out about as far as he had seen the dolphins before. He started playing his flute, trying to mimic the pulsed sounds he had heard on tapes of dolphin sounds. He had learned that they make two kinds of pulsed sounds. One kind is called sonar and is used to locate dolphins and objects. The other kind of sound is a burst pulse that tells the emotional state of the dolphin. Mark was trying to mimic sonar. Soon, about 400 yards away, he saw the roll of the dolphins. The boat bounced in the waves as the dolphins came closer. They seemed to be curious about the sounds coming from the boat. Suddenly, the boat tipped sharply and Mark fell out. Somehow he held on to his flute. Mark was a good swimmer, but he was too far from land to swim. The only thing to do was to try to mimic the sound of a dolphin in trouble. Maybe then the dolphins would help him to land. Kicking strongly, he kept himself up above the water. He blew high, burst pulse sounds. Just when he was about to go under water, he felt a push against his leg. Again and again a dolphin pushed him. She managed to keep his face above water as she gently pushed him to shore. Mark couldn't

believe what was happening. He got safely to shore, although the boat was never seen again. As he sat on the beach, still shaking from fear, he realized that he had reached his goal. He had surely learned a lot about dolphins that day!

Level: Three

____ A dolphin pushed him
____ to shore.

Resolution

____ He got safely
____ to shore.
____ He realized
____ he had learned a lot
____ about dolphins.

55 Ideas

Number of ideas recalled ____

Other ideas recalled, including inferences:

Questions for "The Friend"

1. What instrument did Mark play?

2. Where did Mark go to learn more about dolphins?

3. How did Mark learn about the dolphin sounds?

4. What two kinds of sounds do dolphins make?

5. Why was Mark trying to mimic sonar?

6. Why did the boat tip over?

7. What did Mark do to save himself?

8. How did Mark get to shore?

Without Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: ____

Number Correct Implicit: ____

Total: ____

____ Independent: 8 correct

____ Instructional: 6–7 correct

____ Frustration: 0–5 correct

With Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: ____

Number Correct Implicit: ____

Total: ____

____ Independent: 8 correct

____ Instructional: 6–7 correct

____ Frustration: 0–5 correct

Appendix G: QRI-5 Post-Assessment (Level 4)

Early Railroads

Railroads began as rails laid down in a road. The rails were made of wood topped with iron. Horses pulled carts running along the rails. The rails were smoother than the roads so the horses could pull the carts faster than they could pull wagons over roads.

Then Peter Cooper got a better idea. Why not develop a steam engine, or locomotive, to pull the carts? He believed a steam engine would be able to pull heavier loads faster than horses could.

In 1830, Cooper built a steam-powered engine. It was small and weighed barely a ton. Because of its small size, it became known as the Tom Thumb, who was a tiny hero in old English stories. Cooper wanted to let people know about his new machine so he advertised a race between the Tom Thumb and a gray horse.

On an August day that year, the locomotive and the gray horse lined up side by side. Cooper stood at the controls of the Tom Thumb. The race began. At first the horse pulled ahead. Then the train picked up speed and soon it was neck and neck with the horse. Then Tom Thumb pulled ahead and a great cheer went up.

But suddenly a safety valve in the engine broke. The locomotive slowed and then fell behind the horse. Although Tom Thumb lost the race, steam engines would soon take over from horses.

Over the next 20 years, railroads replaced canals as the easiest and cheapest way to travel. By 1840, the United States had about 3,000 miles of railroad tracks. This was almost twice as much as Europe. A person could travel about 90 miles by railroad in just a few hours. Such a trip took a day and a half by horse-drawn wagon.

Level: Four

Details

___ Over the next 20 years,
___ railroads replaced canals
___ as the easiest
___ and cheapest way to travel.
___ By 1840,
___ the United States had 3,000 miles
___ of tracks.
___ A person could travel 90 miles
___ by railroad
___ in a few hours.
___ Such a trip took a day and a half
___ by wagon.

57 Ideas

Number of ideas recalled _____

Other ideas recalled, including inferences:

Questions for "Early Railroads"

1. What is this passage mainly about?

2. Why did Peter Cooper build a steam engine?

3. Why was the first steam engine called Tom Thumb?

4. Why did Cooper set up the race between Tom Thumb and the horse?

5. How do you know that people who watched the race wanted Tom Thumb to win?

6. Even though the horse won the race, why could you say that Tom Thumb really won?

7. Why did the horse win the race?

8. By 1840, what country had more miles of railroad track?

Without Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: _____

Number Correct Implicit: _____

    Total: _____

___ Independent: 8 correct

___ Instructional: 6–7 correct

___ Frustration: 0–5 correct

With Look-Backs

Number Correct Explicit: _____

Number Correct Implicit: _____

    Total: _____

___ Independent: 8 correct

___ Instructional: 6–7 correct

___ Frustration: 0–5 correct

Level 4

Middle School and High School Materials

Early Railroads   279