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### Transactional Literature Circles and the Reading Comprehension of At-Risk English Learners in the Mainstream Classroom

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TRANSACTIONAL LITERATURE CIRCLES AND THE READING  
COMPREHENSION OF AT-RISK ENGLISH LEARNERS  
IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Cheryl McElvain

San Francisco  
May, 2005

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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I would also like to thank all of the administrators, teachers, students, and clerical staff who supported the Transactional Literature Circle pilot program. Your willingness to embark on a new pedagogical frontier audaciously challenged the status quo. Your passion for empowerment was fervently manifested through your efforts.

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## DEDICATION

“In her classroom our speculations ranged the world. She breathed curiosity into us, so that each morning we came to her carrying new truths, new facts, and new ideas, cupped and shielded in our hands like captured fireflies. When she went away, a sadness came over us. But the light did not go out. She had written her signature upon us: the literature of the teacher who writes on children’s minds. Many teachers have taught me soon forgotten things but only a few like her created in me a new direction, a new hunger, and a new attitude. I suppose to a large extent I am the unsigned manuscript of that teacher. What deathless power lies in the hands of such a person” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 141).

In 1936, John Steinbeck conducted research on the people who had moved to California from Arkansas and Oklahoma. In 1937, he toured the Dust Bowl and traveled with migrants on their relentless drive to California. From those experiences, he wrote many short stories and novels, which mirrored the lives of my parents. Like Steinbeck, I would like to thank my parents, my first teachers, for making it possible to complete this journey. This dissertation is dedicated to them for I have become *the unsigned manuscript* of all their efforts.

My father first came to California from Oklahoma in 1937. He spent many hours picking oranges in the Imperial Valley, cotton in the Central Valley and lettuce in the Salinas Valley. His parents and 30,000 other displaced farmers had come to the “promised land” of California to find available work. Although poverty invaded his childhood, his determination, perseverance, and tenacious hard work paid off. He became the first person in our family to graduate from college and receive his teaching credential. His persistent work ethic and unshakable positive attitude streamed through my veins as I pursued the completion of this project. Although Haskell Bowen is no longer physically

present to witness the completion of this degree, I want to thank him for providing the *direction, hunger, and attitude* that I needed to finish this venture.

My mother, Anita Goble, first came with her family to California from Oklahoma in 1947. Her father, a stalwart man from ardent Cherokee lineage, had worked assiduously in southern oilfields to no avail. His only hope for employment was to come like many others of his generation, to the fertile Salinas Valley where he found work as a trucker for the Pacific Motor Trucking Company. He instilled in my mother a keen sense of compassion and mercy for the less fortunate, which she passed on to me. My passion for social justice came directly from my mother who taught me how to “weep with those who weep.” Her 16-year teaching career modeled an educational perspective that views each student as a unique gift from God - one that should be consistently exposed to *new truths, new facts, and new ideas*. I want to thank her for the spiritual foundation that she implanted in my soul. Her educational philosophy was fundamental in the development of the Transactional Literature Circles reading program used in this study.

Both of my parents were awe-inspiring teachers. They have impacted the lives of many students, one of whom is thankful for the opportunity to dedicate the work of this study to their devoted efforts. They have left behind a legacy of hope for all children. They have provided the impetus for the *literature of future teachers* who aspire to write *on children’s minds*.





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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The intent of this study is to explore the effects of a critical model of literacy instruction on the reading comprehension of mainstreamed English learners who have been identified *at-risk* by their local educational agency. It investigates how Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) affect the development of strategic literacy skills in thirteen intermediate grade classrooms. The link between the student, his/her peers, the teacher, the curriculum, and the family is considered as each play an important role in the construction of the learning community, which extends beyond the boundaries of the school.

When the school bell rings, thousands of elementary school teachers will face a sea of diversity in their mainstream classrooms. Their students will represent an array of languages, cultures and ethnicities that are different from their own. Nearly one in 12 students will need extra help learning English (Connell, 2004). Many of these English learner (EL) students will come from low socioeconomic and linguistically isolated households, where no one over the age of 14 speaks English very well (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). The range of reading ability in these classrooms will be 5.4 years (Mathes, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1997), thus increasing the range of academic diversity.

The majority of these mainstream teachers will feel overwhelmed. In a U.S. national survey of classroom teachers, 80% of respondents reported that they were not prepared to teach students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). In the absence of special programs designed to

meet their language and literacy needs, these general education teachers will receive little or no training in effective instructional practices that will allow their English learners to become active, contributing members of their classrooms (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Instead, they will follow the typical educational prescription, which involves increased review, drill and practice, and lower level questions (Echevarria, 1995). Enormous amounts of time will be spent preparing students for high-stakes tests (Olson, 2001), even though a narrow focus on preparing students for specific tests does not translate into real learning (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000; Linn, 2000).

When their students fail to progress, a common belief will arise that an inherent linguistic deficiency exists (Cummins, 2001). The students will ultimately be removed from the classroom to be immersed in remedial instruction where opportunities to receive meaningful language and literacy development will continue to diminish (Au & Raphael, 2000; Goodnough, 2001; Mathes, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1997; Valdés, 2001). The instruction will emphasize activities such as oral reading rather than text comprehension (Fitzgerald, 1995) or language structures and sentence copying rather than communicative competence (Valdés, 1998).

Because these English learners will no longer be a part of the mainstream instructional setting, their self-image will be negatively affected (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002). Recognizing that high self-esteem is positively correlated with being successful in school, it will be assumed that these students will struggle to achieve the same level of academic success as their English only peers. Carrasquillo & London (1993) identified the following teachers' behaviors that have significant effects on the self-esteem of English learners:

- the amount of concerned treatment students receive from their teachers,
- the modification of activities that incorporates students' values and
- the manner in which teachers respond to students' questions or remarks.

At the end of the year, school administrators will study annual test scores and realize that they have again been unsuccessful in bringing students of diverse backgrounds to the same levels of literacy as their mainstream peers (Donohue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999). They will assume that the literacy gap was caused by the lack of specific, basic skills. Their answer to the problem will include increased remediation and lowered expectations (Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

Contrasting this transmission model of literacy with a constructivist one, we find the classroom teacher who chooses to embark on the road less traveled. Hidden beneath mounds of quality children's literature, she does not prepare her lessons from a scripted basal. Instead, she views literacy as a sociocultural practice. From this perspective, she considers literacy a social construction that surrounds young learners with literacy processes (Au & Raphael, 2000). She views the autonomous model of literacy as ignoring potentially more meaningful literacy practices within families and communities that might allow her students to gain multiple literacies (Street, 1995).

Utilizing the constructivist model, she envisions her EL students as highly literate and accomplished because she values the literacies that they construct outside of the school discourse. She focuses on complex, meaningful questions and problems that make connections with students' out-of-school experiences and cultures. This approach engages learners in powerful thinking strategies, provides scaffolding to enable them to accomplish complex tasks, and involves high levels of student interaction in small group



and whole class literacy discussions as they work through problems that encourage them to internalize sophisticated question-asking strategies.

When this teacher evaluates the annual test scores of the school in a staff meeting, she realizes that the existing achievement gap tells little about EL students' literacy capacity, because standardized tests measure one, not multiple forms of literacies. From this perspective, she recognizes that the gap is less an indicator of the students' literacy potential than it is an indicator of the schools' deficiency in providing adequate opportunities to acquire mainstream literacy skills (Jiménez, 2001). In an advocacy role, she recognizes her EL students' academic needs and identifies successful instructional programs that consider the students holistically, including social, linguistic, and cognitive development (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002).

This teacher sees herself as a *designer of meaning* (Cazden, C.; Cope, B.; Fairclough, N.; Gee, J.; et al., 1996) who is also an active participant in social change. She embraces a pedagogy of multiliteracies, which are represented in a much broader context than language alone, differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural and social effects. This pedagogy encompasses a learning community that considers the affective and sociocultural needs and identities of all learners. Each student feels secure in taking risks and trusting the guidance of others – peers and teachers. The teacher creates active literacy interventions that focus the student on the important processes and activities within the learning community. These experiences allow access to explicit information that build on and recruit what the learner already knows and has accomplished. The students are able to critically frame their understandings in relation to the historical, social, cultural, and political milieu. They are

empowered to view concerns, themes, problems, and concepts from the perspective of diverse groups thus reflecting the highest form of cultural integration into the curriculum using the *social action approach* (Banks, 1994).

Such an ability to deal effectively with student differences is crucial in mainstream classroom reading instruction. As teachers learn to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, they will provide an educationally compatible avenue for students to benefit and excel. Teachers, who tailor reading instruction in this way, transform the literacy paradigm for students who have historically belonged to marginalized groups.

A primary educational goal for English learners is to help them become literate in their home cultures, and learn the dominant social and school cultures, so that they can engage in literate practices relevant to these contexts. When educators hold to a broad notion of literacy, which includes the reading of one's world, they redefine the traditional view of knowledge construction. Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) observes this construction as both growing from and shaping the social and political world of the literacy learner:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (p. 25).

### Statement of the Problem

Mainstreamed English learner students in the U.S. receive inadequate literacy instruction, thus limiting their ability to achieve educational parity with their native English peers. The vast majority (approximately 90%) of California's EL students are educated in the mainstream classroom with little or no outside support for developing second language literacy skills (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; California Department of Education, 2004). Moreover, research indicates that mainstream classroom teachers receive minimal information, education, or support concerning the literacy instruction of their English learner students (Constantino, 1994; Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Garcia, Willis, & Harris, 1998; Garcia & Beltrán, 2003). Although there are several comprehensive reviews of the literature with regard to second language reading in general (Bernhardt, 1991; Ramírez, 1994; Fitzgerald, 1995; Kerper-Mora, 1999; Geva & Verhoeven, 2000), there is a dearth of research focusing specifically on successful literacy approaches for monolingual, mainstream teachers (Snow, 2000; Grant & Wong, 2003).

Many mainstream classroom teachers feel beleaguered when faced with the quandary of how to differentiate literacy instruction for their English learners (Gersten & Jiménez, 1994). The traditional methods of literature instruction are challenged in their attempt to address the current needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson & Thusty, 2000). Recent research reveals that basal reading programs are not only culturally incongruent, (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998), but promote ineffective instructional strategies (Cummins, 2002; Freeman & Freeman, 2003), and do not acknowledge the importance of building broad, general student knowledge

(Walsh, 2003) as the primary means by which to improve reading comprehension for language minority students.

Struggling EL students in mainstream classrooms often feel distraught. In the primary grades, they typically fail to understand what the teacher is talking about, and may become frustrated when they have an idea, but cannot adequately express their thoughts in the new language. The work of Moll and Díaz (1987) has delineated in great detail the pain and discouragement that EL students sometimes feel when taught in all-English settings.

These students face particular challenges in the later grades when they encounter texts that incorporate sophisticated vocabulary and complex linguistic and discourse structures that they have not yet mastered. Estimates are that 30-40% of school-age English language learners fail to reach acceptable levels of English reading by the end of their elementary schooling (Thomas & Collier, 1997). In order to catch up to grade norms within 6 years, EL students must make 15 months gain in every 10-month school year (Cummins, 2002). From a sociocultural perspective, both the instructional process and the social interactions that contextualize the learning experience are of major importance in helping overcome the current reading achievement gap that exists between English learners and native-English speakers (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Cummins, 2002; Grant & Wong, 2003).

Despite these findings, there has been little research in the area of reading instruction for *at-risk*, upper elementary, mainstream English learners. The studies that have been conducted have focused on EL students at individual grade levels or at the tertiary level. Very few studies have explored the development of literacy skills with

English learners in mainstream elementary classrooms (Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Kong & Fitch, 2003; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; Williams, 2001), and fewer with mainstreamed *at-risk* English learners (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn Hickman-Davis, & Kouzekanani, 2003; Pransky & Bailey, 2003).

This study seeks to examine the problem that many mainstream elementary teachers face today – how to successfully improve second language reading comprehension skills for English learners in an English only environment. This daunting challenge calls for empirical research that studies the effect of an alternative reform effort. One that is culturally relevant and empowering because it develops critical literacy skills in students who are often overlooked and under represented in mainstream reading instruction. One in which English learners will “learn how to read the world and their lives critically and relatedly” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 132).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation is multifaceted. The study will seek to ascertain the extent of the effects of Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) on the reading comprehension of 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade mainstreamed, English learners. Additionally, the study will discover how TLC affects the students’ reading engagement and motivation. Finally, the study will investigate the benefits of TLC instruction through the lens of the participating teachers and students.

#### Background and Need for the Study

##### *California’s English Learners*

The numbers of English Language Learners in California schools have increased at a rate much higher than predicted even a few short years ago. Now, one of every four

students in our K-12 schools is an English Language Learner, and an estimated 40% of all students in the kindergarten and first grade are learning English as a second language (Gandara, 1999). The majority of English learners (nearly 70 percent) are enrolled in the elementary grades, kindergarten through grade six (California Department of Education, 2004a). California English learners are placed in specific instructional settings:

- 48% enrolled in structured English immersion settings for one year.
- 10% placed in bilingual programs through parent waivers.
- 37% placed in mainstream classrooms.
- 5% placed in special education programs.

In June 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227 demanding that students in all classrooms be taught in English. The initiative calls for one year of structured English immersion for all beginning English learners. The expectations are that in one year, beginning language learners will develop the linguistic competencies to fully function in the mainstream, thus raising the number of English learners receiving mainstream classroom instruction.

### *The California Achievement Gap*

Five years after the passage of Proposition 227, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) suggest that the reading achievement gap between English learners and English-background students in California has remained largely unchanged, while the gap has been noticeably reduced in the rest of the country. In 2003, the fourth grade reading achievement gap in California was only reduced by 2 points, while the nationwide gap was reduced by 8 points (Rumberger, Callahan, & Gándara, 2003). The percentage of California EL students in 1998 scoring below the

Nationally Ranked 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in Reading was 71% in grades 2-5, 73% in grades 6-8 and 85% in grades 9-11. In the 1999 Stanford 9 reading test, EL students scored considerably lower than English-only students. Among fourth grade students, only 11 percent of EL students scored at the national average (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) compared to 53% for English-only students (Gandara & Rumberger, 2000).

In 2004, the results of the newly implemented CAT/6 and CST Tests continued to reveal an achievement gap. The reading scores of sixth grade EL students scoring at the national average was 15% compared to 55% for English-only students (California Standardized Testing and Reporting, 2004). The English Language Arts scores of sixth grade EL students scoring Below Basic (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) was 58% compared to 21% for English-only students (California Standardized Testing and Reporting, 2004).

The Thomas and Collier (2001) national research study conducted from 1996-2001 in sixteen school districts throughout eleven states, indicate that sixth grade students who were placed in structured English immersion classrooms for 2-3 years reached the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile in Total Reading. Less than 50% (1 NCE per year) of the gap was closed by the end of high school. Sixth grade students who were placed in these programs for less than one year, in compliance with Prop 227, only reached the 28<sup>th</sup> NCE on the 2000 Reading STAR Test and had no evidence of gap closure by the end of high school. The researchers found that effective programs that indicate at least 3-4 NCEs gain per year must be well implemented, not segregated, and sustained long enough for gap closure to happen.

Documented in a research study conducted by Hakuta, Butler and Witt (2000), EL students in a San Francisco Bay Area school were given the Woodcock Language

Battery, which gives an age equivalent score in 8 areas based on composites of 12 subtests. The researchers found several patterns in the test results. There was a considerable gap between EL student performance and what would be required for age-equivalent performance. Of greatest concern, was that the gap markedly widened in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, EL students were just one year behind native English speakers in basic reading, reading comprehension and broad reading, but at 5<sup>th</sup> grade, they were about 2 full years behind.

This study corroborates longitudinal research conducted by Thomas and Collier (1997) in five large urban and suburban school districts in the United States. The researchers found that students being schooled all in English initially make dramatic gains in the early grades; whatever type of program students receive. This misleads teachers and administrators into assuming that the students are going to continue to do extremely well. Students are then exited from special services and it is rare for school districts to continue to monitor the ELL's progress once they are in the mainstream. They do not detect the fact that these students generally fall behind the typical achievement levels of native-English-speakers (defined as the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile or normal curve equivalent [NCE]) by 1-4 NCEs each year, resulting in a very significant, cumulative achievement gap of 15-26 NCEs by the end of their school year. After initial dramatic gains among most ELLs in grades K-3, these students move into cognitively demanding work of increasing complexity, especially in the middle and high school years. Their rate of progress becomes less than that of native-English speakers, and thus their performance in NCEs goes down. English learners who have received all of their schooling exclusively in English might achieve 6-8 months' gain each school year



relative to the 10-month gain typical of their English-speaking peers. Thus, an achievement gap becomes wider with each passing year (EL students who start school with no proficiency in English and receive a quality ESL content program have as a group reach the 34<sup>th</sup> NCE by Grade 11). To score at the level of the typical native-English speaker (50<sup>th</sup> percentile or NCE) in reading, English learners must make 15 months gain in each of several consecutive school years (Collier & Thomas, 1999).

### *Instructional Implications*

These findings have significant implications for teachers of EL students. While some students are sufficiently fluent in English to participate in many classroom activities, it would be unreasonable to expect these students to perform academic tasks involving reading and writing in English at the same level as native English speakers until they have developed the same academic literacy skills as their English speaking peers. In a recent review of research on the instruction of EL students, Gándara (1999) reports that there is a large discrepancy between oral second language skills and reading and writing second language skills in the early grades. For example, while listening skills are at 80% of native proficiency by level 3 (approximately 3<sup>rd</sup> grade), reading and writing skills remain below 50% of those expected for native speakers. It is not until after level 5 (or approximately 5<sup>th</sup> grade) that the different sets of skills begin to merge. This suggests that while a student may be able to speak and understand English at fairly high levels of proficiency with the first three years of school, academic skills in English reading and writing take longer for students to develop.

Fillmore and Snow (2000) in their paper submitted to the Center for Applied Linguistics state that academic English encompasses a broad range of language

proficiency skills. It relies on broad knowledge of words, phraseology, grammar, and pragmatic conventions for expression, and interpretation. Academic English is learned at school from teachers and from textbooks. Teachers need to provide the help that students need to acquire this level of proficiency through explicit teaching of language skills and strategies. English Learners must interact directly and frequently with people who know the language well enough to reveal how it works and how it can be used. During interactions with English learners, expert speakers not only provide access to the language at an appropriate level; they also provide ample clues as to what the units in the language are and how they combine to communicate ideas, information, and intentions. English learners then receive corrective feedback as they negotiate and clarify communicative intentions. Fillmore and Snow (2000) further indicate that when there is no direct instruction in such situations, children make little progress learning English. The latter process results in *Learnerese* --an interlanguage pidgin that deviates considerably from Standard English. Students, who speak this form of English, are sometimes called *ESL Lifers*, because they have settled into language patterns, which allow them to speak fluently. Many of these students are designated as fluent English speakers and are seen by their teachers as proficient although their performance and test scores indicate a tremendous gap because they have not acquired academic English reading and writing skills. Year after year, these students continue to fall behind academically because teachers do not know enough about language learning to evaluate the appropriateness of various methods, materials, and approaches for helping students make progress in learning English.

The need for exemplary literacy programs in mainstream classrooms, which target at-risk English learners, is growing. With the passing of Proposition 227, mainstream classroom teachers need to examine effective literacy reform efforts that reflect the following classroom attributes: explicit small group skill instruction, student-directed activities, instructional elements that make explicit connections between literacy activities and students' own lives, and a curriculum balanced between basic and higher-order skills (Au and Raphael, 2000; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davis, and Kouzekanani, 2003).

Reform efforts, which promote literacy ownership, can erase the achievement gap. For *at-risk* English learners, ownership of literacy is the key to academic success. Students with literacy ownership understand the personal aspects of literacy, which leads to positive attitudes about literacy and habits of using literacy in everyday life for their own purposes. Helping students gain ownership of literacy contributes to their empowerment because students realize they have tools of communication that can be used to gain a better understanding of the world.

Despite the paucity of experimental studies in the field of second language learning, there remains the need for a drastic increase in the quality and quantity of instructional intervention studies of English language learners, including specific studies involving effective second language literacy programs. Such studies should identify explicit strategies that appear promising for increasing the literacy skills of EL students in mainstream classrooms. The findings of such salient research would help many teachers succeed in increasing the reading comprehension of *at-risk* English learners and would mark the beginning of meaningful reform in California.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Cummins Theoretical Framework for the Empowerment of Minority Students*

The spoken and unspoken messages educators communicate to children about the value of their language and culture are a critical part of the sociocultural processes that affect how well children learn and, ultimately, how far they go in school and beyond (Cummins, 1986; Collier, 1995). Sociocultural processes include such factors as students' self-esteem, the instructional pedagogy, majority-minority relations in the school, and prejudice in the community. As noted in her research, Collier (1995) asserts that sociocultural processes strongly influence, in both positive and negative ways, students' access to cognitive, academic, and language learning. It is crucial that educators provide a socioculturally supportive environment in order to sustain the development of critical literacy skills needed by English learners who struggle in the mainstream classroom.

In his Theory of Empowerment, Cummins (1986) states that minority students are *empowered* or *disabled* as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools. He reasons that ability added to confidence and motivation result in academic success. Cummins explains that there are four dimensions that directly affect whether a minority student will become empowered or disabled by the dominating group.

The first dimension relates to the student's language and culture, which Cummins says needs to be integrally incorporated into the school program. In his current book, *Negotiating Identities*, Cummins (2001) asserts that the dominant group in a society uses coercive relations of power to maintain and legitimate the division of resources and status in the society. He explains that the school failure of language minority students is attributed to alleged intrinsic characteristics of the group itself (e.g., bilingualism,

parental apathy, genetic inferiority, etc.) or to programs that are seen as serving the interests of the group (e.g., bilingual education). The incorporation of a student's primary language into the school program through bilingual education has always been controversial and the target of much antagonism. Historically, and currently with the passing of Prop 227 and other *English Only* educational movements, the use of languages other than English has generally been perceived in American society as a threat to national unity because it questions the very basis of much of the educational system. That is, successful bilingual programs have demonstrated that students can learn in their native language while also learning English and achieving academically. This achievement contradicts the conservative agenda, which calls for a return to a largely European American curriculum and pedagogy. Successful bilingual education threatens to explode the myth of the *basics* if the *basics* mean only valuing a Eurocentric curriculum and the English language (Nieto, 1996).

The second dimension of the empowerment theoretical model addresses the issue of incorporating the minority community into the classroom. This ideology is very threatening to most teachers who view it as a waste of instructional time. Cummins says that when students' language, culture and experience are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage (Cummins, 2001).

A strong perceived student status is a critical component of confidence and motivation, which are two thirds of the equation for academic success. The student's perceived identity about his/her language and culture is influenced by messages given from the home, the school, and the community. When educators involve parents from

minority groups as partners in their children's education, the parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to their children and raises the child's perceived student status from both domains. Most parents of EL students have high academic aspirations for their children and want to be involved in promoting their academic progress (Wong Fillmore, 1982). However, they often do not know how to help their children academically, and they are excluded from participation by the school.

Dramatic changes in children's school progress can be realized when teachers take the initiative to change this exclusionary pattern to one of collaboration. A collaborative orientation may require a willingness on the part of the teacher to work closely with teachers or instructional assistants proficient in the mother tongue in order to communicate effectively and in a noncondescending way with parents from minority groups (Ada, 1988). Cummins (2001) refers to this process as the collaborative creation of power. His proposed framework for improving the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds explains that the micro-interactions between subordinated communities and dominant group institutions constitute a process of empowerment that enables educators, students and communities to challenge the operation of coercive power structures.

The third dimension in Cummins' Theory of Empowerment maintains that EL students should be encouraged to become active generators of their own knowledge. This is achieved through the interactive/experiential model. A central tenet of this model is that talking and writing are means to learning. As students communicate their ideas to their peers, critical thinking skills are employed, thus increasing student motivation, self-

efficacy and academic achievement. The major characteristics of this transactional model, as compared to a transmission model, are:

1. Genuine dialogue between students and teacher in both oral and written modalities.
2. Guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning by the teacher.
3. Encouragement of student-to-student talk in a collaborative learning context.
4. Encouragement of meaningful language use by students rather than correctness of surface forms.
5. Conscious integration of language use and development with all curricular content rather than teaching language as a subject isolated from other content.
6. A focus on developing higher-level cognitive skills rather than factual recall.
7. Task presentation that generates intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation.
8. Student involvement in curriculum planning, teaching students to understand learning styles.

This kind of instruction is automatically culture fair in that all students are actively involved in expressing, sharing, and amplifying their experiences within the classroom.

The final dimension of the Empowerment Theoretical model asserts that an advocacy orientation must be used in the assessment process. Research suggests that psychologists continue to test children until they find the disability that could be invoked to explain the student's apparent academic difficulties (Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986). What is required to reverse the so-called legitimizing function of assessment can be termed an advocacy orientation. To challenge the labeling of EL students as disabled, assessment must focus on (a) the extent to which children's language and culture are incorporated into the school program, (b) the extent to which educators collaborate with parents in a shared enterprise, and (c) the extent to which children are encouraged to use

both their first and second languages actively in the classroom. It is essential, according to Cummins that assessments go beyond psycho educational considerations and take into account the child's entire learning environment. An advocacy approach to the assessment of EL students involves identifying the pathology that exists in the power relations between dominant and dominated groups in society, in the reflection of these power relations in the interactions of schools and communities, and in the mental and cultural disabling of students from minority groups that takes place in classrooms.

The major goal of the empowerment model discussed here is to prevent academic casualties among EL students. Although the Cummins framework provides a strong theoretical framework, it does not offer a practical classroom instantiation. However, a possible reflection of his theory can be found in the Transactional Literature Circles model, which was developed by the author of this study.

#### *The Transactional Literature Circles Model*

The Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) model explored in this study attempts to practically operationalize the four dimensions of Cummins' Empowerment Theory, which strive to prevent academic failure among mainstreamed English learners. Figure 1 outlines the empowering transactions that occur between various participants in this learning community.

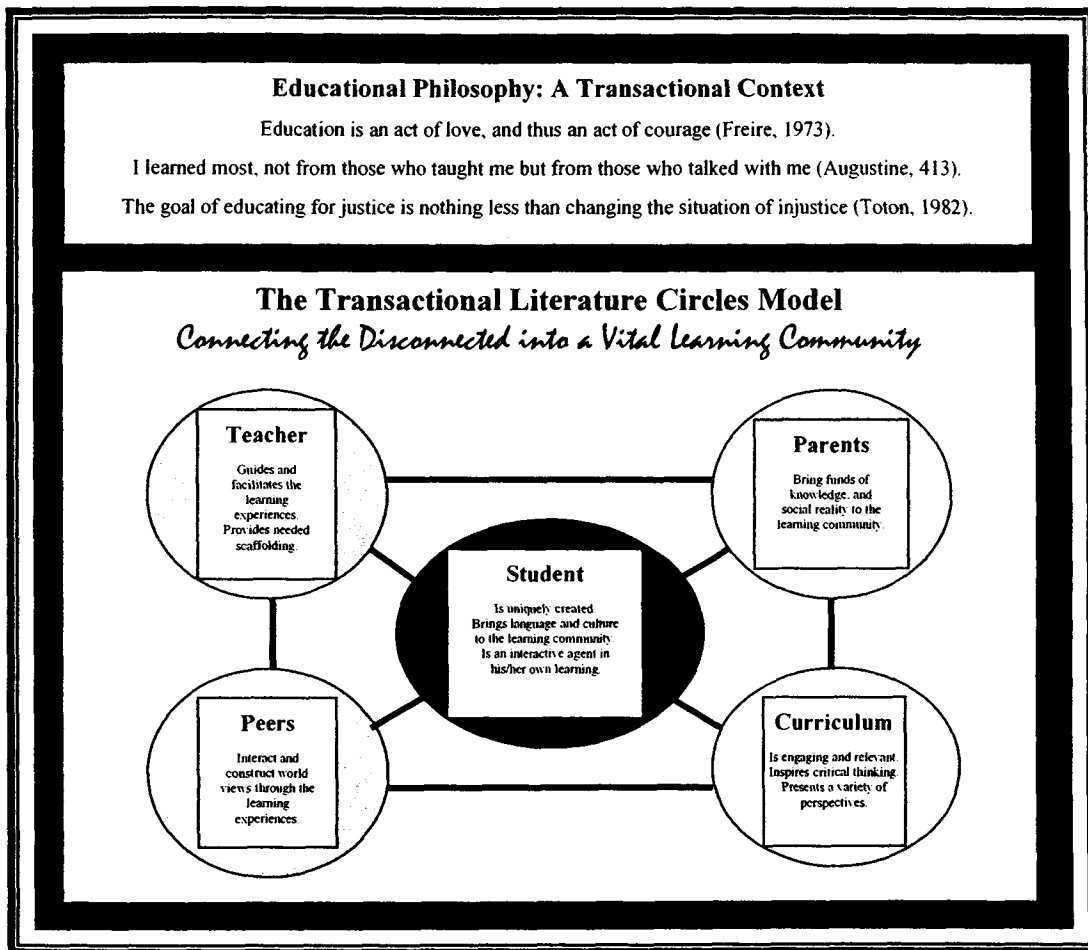
#### *The goal.*

The goal of the TLC model is to connect disconnected, disenfranchised English learners and their parents into a vital learning community. Teachers and instructional programs are still not acknowledging and responding to these students' unique cultural orientations, values, and learning styles (Banks & Banks, 2003). The failure to do so is



negatively affecting their achievement outcomes (Boateng, 1990). Achievement patterns may be a direct result of the disconnect that exists between the student, his/her parents and the school curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2003).

*Figure 1.* The Transactional Literature Circles model



*The student.*

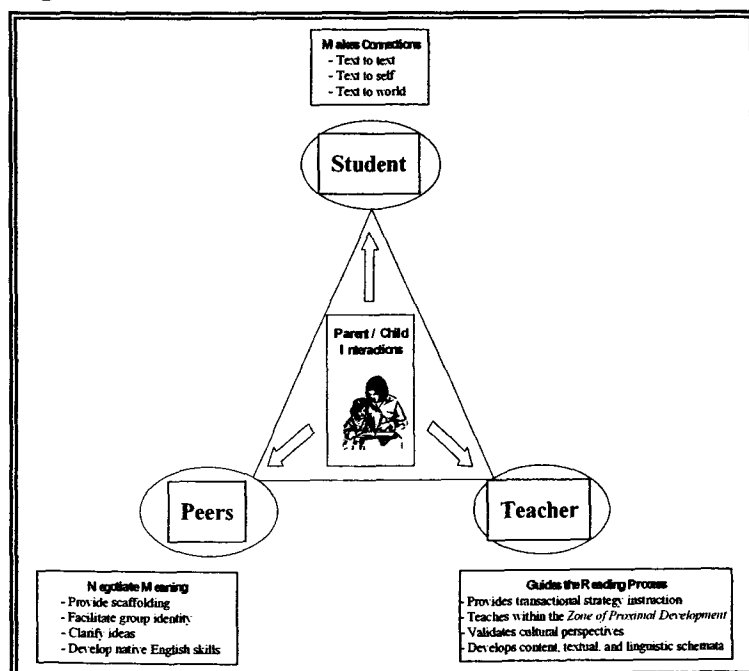
The transactions that exist within TLC primarily focus on the student. The student, uniquely created, brings both language and culture to the community. He/she becomes an interactive agent in learning when relating to his/her teacher, parents, peers and the school curriculum. Effective learning experiences build on and add to what is already present in their lives (Ogbu, 1999; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Pinker, 1994; Wertsch,

1985). Creative bridges are built using the socialization patterns that are familiar in the home language and culture. These bridges are useful in motivating student learning (Banks & Banks, 2003). Literacy achievement begins to improve when protocols and procedures of teaching are synchronized with the mental schemata, participation styles, work habits, thinking styles, and experiential frames of reference of diverse ethnic groups (Gay, 2000).

### *The teacher.*

The teacher's role in the TLC model is to guide, facilitate and promote purposeful literacy activities through experiences that relate to the contexts of the learners' lives. She invites learners to question and to examine the content of the reading, in light of their own experiences and understandings, both individually and collectively. The teacher coaches student understandings through small group interactive instruction. Figure 2 illustrates the dynamics involved during this small group, instructional process.

*Figure 2.* Transactions within the TLC small literature group.



*The parent.*

The role of parents in the Transactional Literature Circles model is essential in the development of their child's literacy skills. The parents create an important bridge between the students and their cultural reality. They provide cultural funds of knowledge and generative themes, which are used to connect the curriculum to the student (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Parents and other family members are often their child's first and most important teachers (Banks & Banks, 2003). Parents directly or indirectly help shape their children's value system, orientation toward learning, and view of the world (Stratton, 1995).

In the TLC model, this connection is made several ways. As students discover critical themes in the text, they are assigned weekly questions, which they discuss with their parents. Family cultural values and personal experiences are shared with the child who in turn, shares them with the literature circle. This small group sharing raises the students' perceived status as they interact and build intrinsic ideas regarding cultural identity.

*The peers.*

In the TLC instructional model, the student's peers interact and construct their own worldview through each learning experience. This student-to-student interaction promotes critical discussion as thoughts are verbalized and presented in multiple contexts. Peers provide the group identity that is needed in order for the student to develop that sense of belonging. Group knowledge develops as students dialogue about new learning and their reflections. Students help each other clarify ideas and negotiate

meaning from the text. Reading comprehension increases because ideas from the text are applied to real life situations.

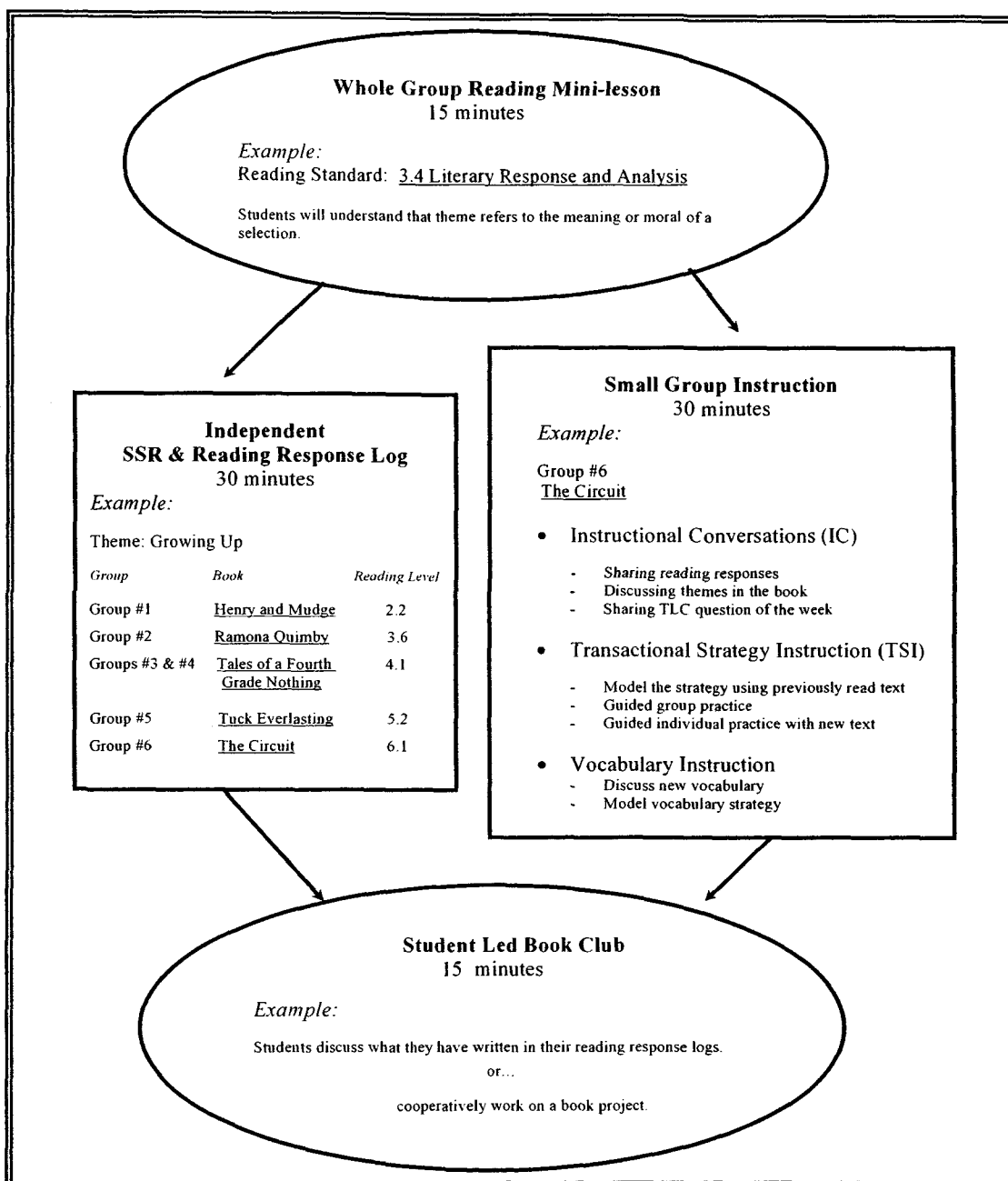
By becoming *knowers* as well as learners in a supportive atmosphere, English learners can establish more equal status relationships with their peers (McGroarty, 1993). When the environment becomes more equitable, students are better able to participate based on their actual, rather than their perceived knowledge and abilities. Teamwork, fostered by positive interdependence among the members, helps students learn valuable interpersonal skills that will benefit them socially and vocationally.

*The curriculum.*

The final participant in the TLC model is the curriculum, which is described as engaging and relevant. The teacher thoughtfully chooses books that inspire critical thinking and presents a variety of perspectives. Students learn best from well-planned, comprehensive, continuous, and interrelated experiences. In effective literacy curriculum, the study of ethnic and cultural content is integrated from preschool through 12th grade and beyond. Literature studies are carefully planned to encourage the development of progressively more complex concepts and generalizations. Students are involved in the study of a variety of ethnic and cultural groups through quality multicultural literature (Banks & Banks, 2003).

Figure 3 details a possible TLC lesson that might be used in any 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade mainstream classroom during the language arts period. It provides a lesson planning model and organizational tool for the preparation of TLC instructional activities. The 60-minute time block begins with a 15-minute minilesson to the whole group. During the next 30 minute block, students silently read and respond to books within their

Figure 3. TLC lesson model.



literature circle. The circle is formed by giving students choice and teaching them how to self select books that they can comfortably understand at an independent reading level. During silent reading, the teaching meets with one of the groups to discuss their responses to the text and provide explicit strategy instruction. Students discuss their

parents' responses to the TLC question of the week, which incorporates elements of the current book theme – e.g. *When you were a child, what was the worst day in your life?* The final 15-minute block is filled with either student led discussions of the book or work on a joint book project, which is ultimately shared within the entire learning community.

### Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How closely will the teachers in the study align their TLC program to the ideal model?
2. How will TLC affect the reading comprehension of mainstream, *at-risk*, English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade compared with a control group of the same population in one school year?
3. How will TLC affect the reading comprehension progress of the treatment group in seven months?
4. How will teachers and students perceive the benefits of TLC instruction?

### Delimitations of the Study

This study confined itself to retrieving archival data from nine elementary schools within the same district. The study involved 75 intermediate grade students in the treatment and 75 similar students in the control group. Thirteen 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers involved in the treatment were used to measure program effectiveness.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in its ability to interact with data that was already collected by the district. The researcher, also the TLC program designer and program specialist at the time of its pilot in the district, used inference and prior knowledge regarding the implementation of TLC to draw statistical conclusions and create categories for the content analysis of teacher and student questionnaires, surveys and interviews.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Several areas of research literature can be considered relevant to a discussion of developing the academic reading comprehension skills and strategies of English learners who are fluent in their conversational skills, but not yet proficient in the academic language needed to read and write in grades 4-6. For this discussion, I will first outline the foundational constructs related to second language reading instruction. Next, I will discuss the process of second language acquisition and examine the differences between first and second language reading comprehension processes. In the third section, I will discuss recent research on second language reading comprehension strategy instruction and effective reading approaches. This segment will also include research on the role of engagement and motivation in second language readers. The final section of this review will examine current perspectives and best practices found in the area of family literacy.

#### Foundational Constructs

The Irish poet William B. Yeats wrote, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” (Andrews & McMeel, 1995, p. 4). Paraphrasing him, we may suggest that in order to motivate our EL students to read, we must understand their cultural heritage and determine effective instructional approaches. Second language literacy pedagogy must be grounded in culturally sensitive theoretical constructs. This section will review those constructs that are foundational to the Transactional Literature Circles reading methodology examined in this study.

### *Critical Literacy*

Critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of self. We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Critical literacy involves questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goal of challenging inequality and developing an activist perspective. The two foundational thinkers in this arena are Dewey and Freire, but the work of Lev Vygotsky is also central.

Critical literacy belongs to Deweyan constructivist education, which has also been associated with activity theory in general and the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) specifically. Cognitivist Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978) proposed that such zones are active when a less developed individual or student interacts with a more advanced person or teacher, allowing the student to achieve things not possible when acting independently. The relationship with the more developed person pulls the less developed forward, a dynamic similar to the way Dewey (1902) understood curriculum that began from student experience and was structured forward into organized reflective knowledge. Critical literacy reconstructs and develops all parties involved, pulling teachers forward as well as students. All participants in a critical process become redeveloped as democratic agents and social critics. Critical teaching is not a one-way development, not “something done for students or to them” for their own good (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p.34). Rather, it is a critical process that is driven and justified by mutuality. This belief of mutual development can be thought of as a Freirean addition to the Vygotskian zone. By inviting students to develop critical thought and action on various subject matters, the teacher herself develops as a critical-democratic educator



who becomes more informed of the needs and perceptions of the students, from which knowledge she designs activities that integrate her special expertise. The critical teacher also learns how to design the course with the students. A mutual learning process develops the teacher's democratic competence in negotiating the curriculum and sharing power. Overall, then vis a vis the Freirean addition to the Vygotskian zone, the mutual development ethic constructs students as authorities, agents, and unofficial teachers who educate the official teacher while also getting educated by each other and by the teacher.

Critical literacy makes clear the connection between knowledge and power (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985). It helps students and teachers develop a "critical relationship with their own knowledge" (Shor, 1992, p.132). Students learn "how to read the world and their lives critically and relatedly...and, most importantly; it points to reforms of social action and collective struggle" (Shor, 1992, p.132). This agenda of praxis is also central to Joe Kretovics' (1985) definition:

"Critical literacy...points to providing students not merely with functional skills, but with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices. Furthermore, critical literacy can stress the need for students to develop a critical vision of what it might be like to live in the best of all societies and how such a vision might be made practical" (p. 51).

### *Transactional Theory*

The Transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1986) as it applies to the teaching of literature promotes a reciprocal, mutually defining relationship between the reader and the literary text. Ann Dillard (1982) summarizes the Transactional theory as a metaphor of the mind fitting the world and shaping it as a river fits and shapes its own banks. Transactional theory proposes that the relationship between reader and text is much like

that between the river and its banks, each working its effects upon the other, each contributing to the shape of the poem. A teacher who applies Transactional theory will not view a literary experience as identical with text. Rosenblatt argues that the text is simply ink on paper until a reader comes along. The poem, on the other hand, is what happens when the text is brought into the reader's mind and the words begin to function symbolically, evoking in the transaction, images, emotions, and concepts. That symbolic functioning can happen only in the reader's mind. It does not take place on the page, in the text, but in the act of reading. The text in the absence of a reader is simply print. It does not become a poem until the act of reading makes it one.

Transactional theory places a great deal of emphasis on the role of the reader. If meaning resides not in the text but rather in the enactment by the reader, then the discussion of literature needs to consider the mind of the individual reader or groups of readers. Such a concept affirms the significance of the unique reader. Transactional theory insists that the reader's individuality must be respected and considered; that readers initially understand a work only on the basis of background, the feelings, memories, and associations prompted by the reading. These responses are not only relevant; they are the foundation upon which understanding of a text is built. Transactional theory invites the reader to reflect upon what she brings to any reading, and to acknowledge and examine the response it evokes. It demands attention to who the readers are, what they bring to the text, the expectations they have of the texts, and the choices they make as they read.

Transactional theory offers the teacher of literature several assumptions and principles. It suggests that the poem is within the reader, created in the act of reading,

rather than in the text. The poem is thus changeable, variable, different for each reader, and differing even for a single reader from one reading to the next. Teachers therefore do not lead classes carefully along to predicted conclusions about the text. Instead, they face the difficult task of acknowledging the uniqueness of the reader and each reading, accepting the differences, and creating out of the material relevant discussion. Teaching guided by this theory becomes a matter of encouraging students to articulate responses, examine the text in light of their own life experiences, and analyze them in light of other readings.

Transactional classroom atmosphere is cooperative rather than combative. Discussion encourages students not to win but to clarify and refine. Students are encouraged to enter into a reciprocal, mutually defining relationship in their discussions with other students and teachers. This critical discussion expands the literary knowledge. The result of such reflection and discussion is the greater knowledge of self, the text, and others with whom the student talks. The literary transaction in itself may become a self-liberating process, and the sharing of student responses may be an even greater means of overcoming their limitations of personality and experience. The principles of instruction implicit in the Transactional theory are:

1. Invite response. Make clear to students that their responses, emotional and intellectual, are valid starting points for discussion and writing.
2. Give ideas time to crystallize. Encourage students to reflect upon their responses.
3. Find points of contact among students. Help them to see the potential for communication among their different points of view.
4. Open up the discussion to the topics of self, text, and others.

5. Let the discussion build. Students should feel free to change their minds, seeking insight rather than victory.
6. Look back to other texts, other discussions, and other experiences. Students should connect the reading with other experiences.
7. Look for the next step. What might they read next?

### *Social Constructivism*

Educator Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was an early thinker of social constructivism and learning community organization. In his theory, Vygotsky (1933, 1978) posits that social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world. He notes that individual cognition occurs in a social situation. They cannot be separated. The group is therefore vital to the learning process for all participants who experience higher forms of mental activity via more knowledgeable peers and adults who jointly construct and transfer this activity primarily through language.

In the classroom setting, students learn through interactions with their peers, teacher, manipulatives, and their contextual setting. Vygotsky advocates this setting, and uses holism to unite his approach's components. He similarly employed the congruent concept of networking in his approach. He sought to determine how students make sense of themselves and their world via their learning experiences. To do this, he avowed that teachers obtain knowledge about how students categorize their world, in order to create interdisciplinary themes or schemata networks that correlate with the interests of their students. Unlike traditional teaching, Vygotsky advocated a bottom-up teaching approach where the teacher facilitates, as opposed to directs, what and how students learn concepts both in and out of the classroom. Ideally, teachers use

participant observations of student actions to inductively and deductively ascertain how they derive meaning from their social settings (Erickson, 1986).

Vygotsky's stress upon experiential learning is further evident in the role of the teacher as a facilitator. The nature of the adult role is reflected in his *zone of proximal development*. The teacher must foster learning among students that combines internal and external experiences. These experiences form interplay of cognitive, emotional and external interactions. The *zone of proximal development* delineates a child's learning environment that is all around them.

The surrounding social nature of learning encompasses the child's interactions with other peers and the teacher. Teachers use their abstract knowledge of language they learned via others throughout their lives to direct lessons that will facilitate their students' understanding of new concepts. As students engage in dialogues with more competent partners and adults, they internalize the language of these interactions and use it to organize their individual endeavors. Language thus plays an essential part in socially shaping the minds of students. As Vygotsky writes, "the mind extends beyond the skin and is inseparably joined with other minds" (cited in Wertsch, 1990, p. 90).

#### The Second Language Acquisition Process

The March 1999 Language Census reported a total of 1,480,527 English language learners (ELL), formerly referred to as limited-English proficient students, enrolled in kindergarten through grade twelve in California school districts. This number represents about 25 percent of California's 5.9 million students and 36 percent of the 4,148,997 English learners estimated for the U.S. in 1999. In order to attain English proficiency skills necessary for mainstream classroom success, these students

must go through a second language acquisition process. Tracy Terrell (1981) has described this process through four stages of development, which is the second general principle of his Natural Approach pedagogy.

The first stage of the second language acquisition process is labeled Preproduction because it consists of a silent response period. During this time, the acquirers are concerned with understanding conversational messages at the single word level. This period of time lasts from three to six months.

The second stage is called Early Production. Students at this stage can utter single word responses; short fixed phrases, or routine expressions. These are usually words they have heard and understood in daily contexts and they feel confident enough to produce. This stage can last another 3-6 months. As acquirers slowly expand their vocabulary, they begin to produce longer and longer phrases.

When they begin speaking in complete sentences they have entered the Speech Emergence stage. During this stage, students begin to acquire the rules of conversation and they are ready for formal instruction in reading and writing. Generally speaking, students at this stage can understand most of what is said by their English-speaking peers. They can also follow most of the instruction given by their teachers. This stage lasts from 2-3 years. At the end of this time period, students are considered Fluent English speakers (FES). They can read and write at about a second or third grade level. They are said to have acquired English fluency in basic interpersonal conversation skills (BICS). James Cummins, the Canadian researcher from the Toronto Language Institute, refers to these skills as the tip of the iceberg in his Iceberg Theory of

Language Proficiency because these conversational skills are easily determined through observation (Cummins, 1981).

Unfortunately, this information is unknown to many teachers who “assume that once children can converse comfortably in English, they are in full control of the language” (Goldenberg, 1996, p.357). Language proficiency skills are made up of both oral and academic literacy skills (De Avila, 1997). Although oral proficiency may take 3-5 years to develop, it is only the tip of Cummins' Iceberg (Cummins, 1981; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). The lower half of the iceberg encompasses cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALPS), which are developed in the fourth stage of the second language process (Cummins, 1981; Terrell, 1981).

This final stage of development in acquiring a second language is labeled Intermediate Fluency. In this stage students are beginning to develop CALP skills, which involve academic reading and writing. This academic form of English is much more difficult to understand because it has fewer picture clues and the vocabulary is more abstract than what is found in everyday conversation (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). At the end of this stage, a student is said to be Fluent English Proficient (FEP) and is typically exited out of an English Language Development program if he/she scores above the 36% on the SAT 9 Testing and passes district mandated English writing exams. This stage can last from 4-7 years because research says that it takes much longer to approach commonly accepted age/grade norms in context-reduced aspects of English proficiency than in context-embedded aspects (Cummins 1981).

Recent research has reported that the total amount of time it takes English learners to reach the age and grade-level norms of their native English-speaking peers is

between 7-10 years (Collier, 1995). The analysis conducted by the researchers revealed a continuing and widening gap between EL students and native English speakers, which markedly widened in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) noted in their research that while the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were just one year behind native English speakers in basic reading, reading comprehension and broad reading, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were about 2 full years behind. This illustrates the formidable task facing these students who not only have to acquire oral and academic English, but also have to keep up with native English speakers.

Collier (1995) also reported similar findings in an article for *Direction in Language & Education*. She found that non-native speakers being schooled in a second language for most of the school day typically do well in the early years of schooling through second or third grade. But from fourth grade on through middle school and high school, when the academic and cognitive curricular demands increase rapidly, students with little or no academic and cognitive development in their first language do less well as they move into the upper grades. She found that classes in school that are highly interactive, emphasizing student problem-solving and discovery learning through thematic experiences across the curriculum are likely to provide the kind of social setting for natural language acquisition to take place, simultaneously with academic and cognitive development. Collaborative interaction was found to be central to the language acquisition process, both for oral and written language development.

Academic English skills are not only acquired through extended periods of cognitive language development but also with effective teaching and learning methods, which are brain compatible. Research into the relationship between brain activity and



second language learning and acquisition remains mixed with competing hypotheses and contradictory findings. Nevertheless, close examination of this literature reveals some interesting findings. There is some consensus among researchers suggesting that age is an important variable in acquiring or learning a second language. A study by Johnson and Newport (1989) is generally recognized as best evidence in supporting the existence of a critical period about puberty for second language acquisition/learning. De Cos (1999) in her report to the Senate and Assembly Education Committees discussed a 1994 review of the Johnson and Newport literature. She concluded that the indicated progressive decline in second language learning as the subjects aged was a result of the fact that learning abstract linguistic structures (e.g., grammar) becomes increasingly more difficult with age for second language learners. In the report, de Cos continued to discuss evidence that as children and adults age, native-like proficiency in a second language becomes increasingly more difficult because different parts of the brain may be used to process the language in older children and adults. She reported that initial discoveries pointing to the left hemisphere of the brain being dominant for language processing are now discovering that as a child matures, second language acquisition is more likely to shift to the right hemisphere, which processes novel stimuli. She summarized Genesee's (1982) research by stating that there is more right hemisphere brain involvement in second language processing when the second language is acquired informally and greater left hemisphere brain involvement if the second language processing is acquired formally.

Interpreting this research as an educator, one begins to wonder if the instructional sequence in our current English Language Development (ELD) program is

backwards. Most informal interactive learning takes place in grades K-3 when EL students are language processing with their left brain, best engaged in formal learning settings and most formal textbook centered learning begins in 4<sup>th</sup> grade when EL students are processing with their right brain, best engaged in informal learning settings. Maybe there should be more traditional bottom-up, skill based approaches to language learning in the K-3<sup>rd</sup> grades and top-down, whole language approaches in 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades.

In conclusion, research from Danesi (1988) states that brain functions now allow us to characterize language learning as a bimodal process in which both of the brain's hemispheres should be used in a complementary and cooperative fashion. This finding agrees with my query about the sequence of language teaching approaches. Current successful K-6 second language instructional programs should incorporate methodologies, which attempt to combine the formal, (left brain hemisphere) grammatical approach with the informal, (right brain hemisphere) communicative approach. Throughout the next sections of this literature review, we will find that these integrated approaches are also effective for developing reading comprehension in at-risk 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade EL students.

### *The Second Language Reading Comprehension Process*

There are several theories of how text is comprehended. These theories offer differing views on how readers construct meaning from words on a page. The traditional view of comprehension focuses on the development of four main types of sub skills: literal, inferential, evaluative and critical. This study will focus on the literature supporting (a) the fundamental differences between first and second language

cognitive reading processes and (b) the more current psycholinguistic approach to reading comprehension, which investigates the interrelationship between the text and the reader.

In her summary of the psycholinguistic theoretical approach to reading comprehension, Thompson (2000) defined comprehension as a bridge between the known and the unknown. She stated that incoming information is understood as the reader relates it to previously stored knowledge and that if the information cannot be properly related, comprehension will not take place. The author described forming concepts and interrelating concepts as the two major functions of comprehension. She emphasized that a student's prior knowledge determines their ability to interrelate new and pre-established concepts.

The literature on the second language reading comprehension process indicates that linguistic knowledge as well as prior personal experiences helps the reader create context, which provide clues to the meaning of text (Dycus, 1997). The ability to make sense of a text written in English is dependent on the reader's proficiency in the English language. Second language (L2) readers who are orally proficient in speaking are not necessarily proficient in reading because of their limited vocabulary knowledge (Dycus, 1997; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Less proficient L2 readers are thought to focus more on low-level process strategies such as word meaning, whereas more proficient readers attend to abstract conceptual abilities and are thus better able to make use of their background knowledge creating the context necessary to comprehend (Dycus, 1997; Chun & Plass, 1997).

Second language readers bring context to the text as they activate schemata. Schemata are conceptual abilities in cognitive processing, which organize information in long-term memory (Alvarez & Risko, 1989; Blanton, 1998; Parmer, 2001; Singhal, 1998). Singhal summarizes the important points in the research on the theory of schema. She states that there are several types of schemata. Content schema refers to a reader's background or world knowledge. Formal or textual schema refers to the organization of written text. It includes the knowledge of different text genres, language structures, vocabulary and grammar. Linguistic or language schemata include phonemic awareness and syntactical knowledge. First language readers are often better able to generalize a language pattern or guess the meaning of a word because prior language patterns have been constructed as a part of their linguistic schema.

The use of content schema or cultural background plays an important part in L2 comprehension. Singhal describes Carrell's 1987 study of 28 Muslim Arabs and 24 Catholic college age Hispanic second language learners that had reached high-intermediate proficiency levels. They were enrolled in an intensive English program at a midwestern university. The subjects were asked to read two texts. One was Muslim-oriented; the other was Catholic-oriented. After reading each text, the subjects answered a series of multiple-choice comprehension questions. Analysis of the questions revealed that content schemata affected the readers' comprehension and recall. The participants understood and remembered passages that were similar in some way to their native cultures. However, when only content or only form was unfamiliar, unfamiliar content caused more difficulty for the readers than did unfamiliar form. Singhal concludes that Carrell's study, suggests that the readers' schemata for content

affected comprehension and recall more than did their formal schemata, which involved text organization.

Peregoy and Boyle (2000) concur with these findings. They suggest that cultural background knowledge is a powerful variable in reading comprehension because it increases understanding as it interacts with difficult vocabulary in the text. Without cultural prior knowledge, students reading a second language text may not always understand the complete idea or vocabulary of the passage.

Singhal (1998) continues in her research summary to describe the affect of formal or textual schemata on second language readers. She found that different types of text structure affected comprehension and recall. She noted that some studies showed that there might be differences among language groups as to which text structures enable better recall. For example, she refers to Carrell's (1984) study that explained how Arabs remembered best from expository texts with comparison structures, next from texts involving problem-solution or description, and least well from causation structures; while Asians recalled best from problem-solution texts, and least well from comparative or descriptive text collections.

In a related study, Stone (1985) looked at whether language patterns found in English would have a significant effect on elementary aged English language learners. The study involved average Spanish background fifth grade readers who were randomly assigned to either a Spanish-speaking or English-speaking group. Nine stories were developed for the study, three for each of the following different language pattern categories: similar, moderately similar, and dissimilar. After reading the stories, participants were asked to retell the story and answer comprehension questions. Results

revealed that on the retelling, the lowest scores were found on stories that were most dissimilar from the students' primary language, and that there were fewer oral reading errors on stories with similar language patterns. The results of both studies reveal that texts, which do not meet readers' expectations about language patterns, can disrupt the comprehension process.

Reading is a meaning-making process that involves an interaction between the reader and the text. Good readers use mental activities in order to construct meaning from the text. These mental activities involve the use of reading strategies. According to studies conducted by Goodman (1996) and Smith (1986), effective L2 readers use both top-down and bottom-up strategies. Good L2 readers do not read word for word, but use their background knowledge and various strategies such as predicting and confirming to comprehend the text.

It is apparent that many differences exist between reading in a first and a second language. English language learners begin reading their second language with a different knowledge base than their English only counterparts. Many times, they bring inferences to the text based on their cultural assumptions and beliefs. Such assumptions may interfere with their formation of the main ideas in a passage.

English only readers already have a sufficient vocabulary base and know thousands of words before they actually start to read. They also have some grammatical knowledge of their own language that is not shared by English learners. Research shows that reading in a first and second language differs when cultural backgrounds are dissimilar. Reading in a second language requires knowledge of content and L2 linguistic schema. A reader, who does not possess the same linguistic or cultural base

as L1, will encounter difficulties in comprehension. Second language reading comprehension instruction should include strategies that build schemata and create context for the students as they interrelate with the text.

#### Effective Second Language Reading Comprehension Instruction

From a social constructivist perspective, *the conversation* can be used as a metaphor for reading instruction with the instruction seen as a transaction process between teacher and student. Messages move between teacher and student, as ideas are exchanged for the purpose of generating knowledge. Transaction oriented literacy activities foster productive teacher-student, and student-student relationships and communication. These productive relationships are shaped when students' interest and involvement in meaningful literacy activities serve as the starting point for instruction (Au & Raphael, 1998).

Interest and involvement become more likely when teachers include instruction that makes explicit connections between literacy activities and students' own lives and concerns. Teachers may lead students to make these connections directly or they may guide students to discover these connections through independent reading, writing and talk about the text. Teachers that emphasize both the social, as well as the literacy skills, raise the comprehension and personal response with students of diverse backgrounds who may be unfamiliar with the interactional demands of classroom activities (Au & Raphael, 2000).

In a review of instructional research in literacy for English learners, Raphael and Brock (1997) summarize their observations about the nature of quality instruction. First, studies suggest that quality literacy instruction occurs in meaningful contexts.

Transactional approaches enable students to understand the functions of the skills and strategies they have been taught. An awareness of these functions appears to enhance students' willingness to engage in literacy and view literacy in positive terms.

Second, research supports the notion that quality literacy instruction actively engages students in meaning construction. Students create, select, and carry out activities that allow them to construct their own understandings of literacy. The meaning process begins when students connect the text to real life experiences.

Third, studies support the idea that quality literacy instruction requires teachers to have a repertoire of instructional strategies. Research recognizes the cultural, linguistic, and academic diversity that is present in mainstream classrooms and understands the range of strategies teachers need in order to reach every student. Successful teachers of English learners know how to select and adapt these strategies to the individual needs of their students.

Fourth, research suggests that quality literacy instruction entails a paradigm shift in the changing conceptions of the roles of teachers and students in instructional encounters. For example, students, not just the teacher, may initiate literacy activities. Teachers may teach students to conduct discussions of literature among themselves, instead of continuing to direct the discussions themselves. Many studies have documented the benefits of student-student talk in promoting engagement, response, comprehension, and interpretation of the text. Raphael and Brock (1997) concluded that a common theme cutting across these four observations is the valuing of participatory literacy events that both students and teachers find meaningful.



The New London Group (1996) proposes a theory of literacy instruction that is consistent with the conclusions of Raphael and Brock (1997). This theory is based on four components that interact in multifarious ways. The first component, situated practice, involves students' immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who can take on a variety of roles, depending on their backgrounds and experiences. The second component, overt instruction, includes active interventions by the teacher that scaffold learning activities and focus the learner's attention on important features of their experiences and explorations within the community of learners. Overt instruction includes teacher-student collaborations within the zone of proximal development that enables the learner to gain explicit information at the critical moments when it can be most useful to practice.

Critical framing, the third component, requires students to see the abilities they have gained through situated practices, along with the conscious understandings gained through overt instruction. Students adopt an ideological perspective and question or rethink what they have come to know, in terms of their own cultural frames of reference. Ultimately students move beyond critique to reflective practice in transformed practice, the fourth component. This involves a return to a situated practice but with a difference, because students begin to demonstrate what they have learned by implementing new practices growing out of their own goals and values, with real purposes and relevance to real-world issues. Here, one can see the connections to Freire's (Freire & Macedo, 1987) idea of transforming the world through conscious, practical action or *praxis*. The theory posed by the New London Group (1996), adds

explicitness to the manner in which quality instruction can be used to support critical literacy in English learners.

Au and Raphael (1998) identified five roles teachers may assume in instructional encounters with English learners. In explicit instruction, the teacher transmits specific knowledge of reading comprehension strategies. In modeling, the teacher provides demonstrations of these strategies. In scaffolding, the teacher supplies varying degrees of support for students' performance, which they practice newly learned strategies. In facilitating, the teacher offers opportunities for students to practice the strategies through their independent reading. Finally, in participating, the teacher engages in the same activities as the students, such as literature discussions or sustained silent reading.

The examples of instructional strategies discussed below are grounded in the previously described definitions of literacy. They are considered transactional or constructivist in their approach to literacy instruction. A growing body of research demonstrates the advantage of using this approach for improving the reading comprehension of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

#### *Comprehension Strategy Instruction*

Second language reading research began to focus on reading strategies in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Reading strategies demonstrate the way readers interact with the written text. There has been much literature recently written about how the use of these strategies is related to effective reading comprehension. The literature written about first and second language reading comprehension reveals that reading strategies

are related to other cognitive strategies which all readers use to elaborate, organize, and evaluate textual information (Carrell, 1998).

In her article summarizing the effects of successful second language reading strategies, Carrell (1998) observed that the use of such strategies demonstrates both metacognition and motivation. She stated that the research done in first language reading over the last 25 years revealed that young and unskilled readers do not use strategies often or effectively without help. This failure to use reading strategies was observed when students: (1) failed to monitor their comprehension, (2) believed that the strategies will not make a difference, (3) lacked knowledge about text features, (4) were disinterested in the text or were unwilling to use the strategies. Students ultimately decided to use ineffective familiar strategies over effective less-familiar ones. Carrell concluded that this nonstrategic reading behavior was a result of developmental naiveté, limited practice, lack of instruction, and motivational reluctance.

Moreover, Carrell's (1998) research review revealed that there were no one-to-one relationships between particular strategies and successful or unsuccessful reading comprehension. She suggested that there was wide individual variation in the successful use of the exact same reading strategies; however readers reporting the use of a higher number of different strategies tended to score higher on various comprehension measures. She found that second language reading comprehension was not just a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but how to use it successfully and how to integrate its use with other strategies. The reader must be able to strategically apply reading strategies. Carrell stated that this application ability necessitated the use of metacognition in reading strategy instruction. She stated that in all the studies she

reviewed, significant positive effects were found compared with traditional approaches to second language reading comprehension instruction. The inclusion of metacognition in reading strategy instruction significantly increased the second language reader's understanding of the text and their motivation to read.

Current research reveals that metacognitive approaches to teaching second language readers who have been placed *at-risk* for reading must address at least two areas (Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson & Tlusty, 2000; Pransky & Baily, 2002). First, *at-risk* second language readers may miss important ideas and focus on details associated with their cultural experiences rather than ideas presented by the author. If such cultural discontinuity appears between the text and the students' concept of what is important, the students' success in learning key information is jeopardized. Teachers using culturally compatible reading strategy instruction can help bridge the gap between diverse students and their comprehension of the text (Pransky & Baily, 2002).

A second consideration lies within the reality that these *at-risk* second language readers may not use processing strategies that can help them learn and remember content. While many second language readers think strategically to solve problems outside of the classroom, such reasoning is not always present with second language readers who experience difficulties with reading (Holiday, 1985). Most of these students are strategic learners; they just are not able to recognize that the strategies they use in their home cultural context can and should be applied to learning and solving problems at school. Combining activities such as reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and retellings can help increase these students' ability to recognize the

important and less relevant information (Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson & Tlusty, 2000; Pransky & Baily, 2002).

Several case studies have addressed the problems of second language students placed *at-risk* and the use of metacognitive strategies to improve reading comprehension in mainstream classroom settings. These studies have reported marked improvement in reading comprehension through the implementation of contextual instruction, reciprocal interactions, interactive and dynamic assessment, and culturally responsive strategy instruction that highlights social relationships (Brozo, 1990; Coley & Hoffman, 1990; Peresich, Meadows, & Sinatra, 1990).

Pressley, Snyder and Cariglia-Bull (1987) conducted significant research on the role of metacognition in general learning. Their research asserted that if readers are not consciously aware of what they can do when comprehension is breaking down, strategies introduced by the teacher will fail and the learner will not be able to strategically use the strategies. They concluded that reading strategy instruction must be explicitly taught and modeled by the teacher.

Studies conducted by Winograd and Hare (1988) proposed five elements, which should be included in the direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies: (1) what the strategy is, (2) why it should be learned, (3) how to use it, (4) when and where to use it, and (5) how a reader can evaluate their own use of the strategy. After reviewing seven instructional reading strategy studies which used this direct instruction procedure, Winograd and Hare reported significant gains in the use of the strategy taught when one or more of the above elements were included in the lesson.

This direct explanation approach to the development of reading strategies eventually came to be known as *transactional strategies instruction* (Pressley, et al., 1992). Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI) emphasizes reader transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 1978), interpretations constructed by readers thinking about text together, and teachers' and students' reactions to text. TSI involves direct explanations and teacher modeling of strategies, followed by guided practice of strategies. Strategy instruction is carefully scaffolded within the *zone of proximal development*. Critical discussions of the text occur when students are encouraged to interpret and respond to the text and their classmates. There are no restrictions on the order of strategies execution or when the particular members of the group can participate. The transactional strategies instructional approach succeeds in stimulating interpretive dialogues in which strategic processes are used as interpretive vehicles, with consistently high engagement by all group members (Pressley, 2000).

An important study completed by Dole, Brown, and Trathen, (1996) compared *at-risk* fifth and sixth grade students' reading achievement using the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) following students' participation in one of three instructional treatments for reading. Students in one group received story content instruction that focused on activating prior knowledge and building declarative knowledge. The second group received instruction using the transactional strategy instructional model, to improve comprehension during independent reading. Instruction for the third group followed the traditional basal lesson. The findings suggested that the *at-risk* students who learned procedures for using strategies through transactional strategy instruction

performed significantly better on the SAT comprehension measures than did students from other treatment groups.

The recent research conducted on the best practices for second language reading strategy instruction emphasized the use of the following components: small group instruction, meaningful texts, accessing and building background knowledge, teaching vocabulary in context and guided group discussions (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). These studies suggested that when text is meaningful to students, they become more engaged and are better able to make predictions. It was found that a meaningful text provides the reader with many opportunities to build on both comprehension and word recognition.

Studies in the field of effective reading comprehension strategy instruction for second language readers revealed that these students require more support and more demonstration of reading strategies than English only students (Routman, 2000). Effective reading comprehension strategy instruction should be communicative, build on the student's oral language, and be motivating to the students (Hamayan & Pflieger, 1987). Small group instruction has been found to be the best way to provide needed scaffolding and reading strategy instruction for *at-risk* second language learners in a mainstream classroom setting (Suits, 2003; Valencia & Buly, 2004).

### *Effective Reading Approaches*

Many researchers specializing in second language student populations today call for abandoning instruction that involves reductionistic skill-building activities. Instead, they support approaches, which promote an interactive or experiential model (Au & Raphael, 2000; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Cummins, 2002; Freeman & Freeman,

2003; Johannessen, 2004; Linan- Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davis, & Kouzekanani, 2003; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000; Watts-Trafte, & Truscott, 2000). They advocate for instruction that consists of genuine dialogue between the student and teacher, as well as student-to-student collaborative talk. The teacher's role is to be a facilitator, encouraging students to use meaningful language without focusing on the correctness of form. Development of higher-level comprehension, rather than literal recall, is the goal. Two responses to the call for change are literature circles and instructional conversations. Both approaches lead to the development of reading comprehension skills, self-efficacy, and most importantly, viable membership in a classroom literacy community.

*Literature circles.*

Although the term *literature circles* is new to education, research supporting these student-centered reading groups dates back to several historically great educational theorists. John Dewey's research (1916) supported children learning by doing. He believed that children needed to have more choices in education in order to take personal responsibility for their learning. He advocated for teachers as guides and coaches. A half century later, Carl Rogers (1960) again called for student ownership of their educational opportunities through increased involvement in learning choices.

Another great educational theorist, Jerome Bruner, introduced his scaffolding theory in 1961. Although Bruner's theory focused on the natural ways in which children develop language, several of his scaffolding ideas, such as predictability, playfulness, focus on meaning, role reversal, and modeling, are also important ingredients of literature circles (Daniels, 1994).



More recently, Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory (1982) has been influential in the development of literature groups. Rosenblatt theorized that reading is a transactional process between the text and the reader who brings unique experiences to understanding of the text. Vacca, Vacca, and Gove (1991) also stated that children analyze literature in a way that is culturally unique. Literature circles embrace reading as a transactional process and respect each student's meaning making from quality literature.

There are several major components of literature circles. Creating an appropriate environment, choosing quality literature, forming groups, assigning reading, guiding responses, facilitating discussions, assessing student performance, and deciding upon the instructor's level of involvement are all key elements teachers must consider as they plan to implement literature circles (Daniels, 2002). Although the routines and procedures may vary, the purpose for literature circles remains constant: "Readers come together to build conversational skills for talking about texts in enlightening, personal and thoughtful ways" (Brabham & Villaume, 2000, p. 278).

Literature circles advocate a move to literature-based reading instruction, which reflects a change in our beliefs about curriculum materials. The current emphasis on testing and accountability has pressured many districts to embrace traditional reading programs, which are standards based. These basal programs emphasize the use of a teacher's guide to determine when and how particular strategies and skills should be taught (Raphael & Brock, 1997). In contrast, the movement underlying the use of literature in small group reading instruction views curriculum materials as tools used by professional teachers who know their students' needs and interests. Thus it assumes

that teachers are better able to shape instruction than are the publishers of generic curricula.

Scaffolds that are used by readers to prepare for literature circles take many forms. Sometimes readers get ready for the discussion by assuming different roles such as discussion director, vocabulary enricher, illustrator, and connector and then completing an assignment sheet to prepare for the role (Burns, 1998; Daniels, 1994). In other cases, readers simply write down their own questions or responses as they read silently. Students may record interesting words or words that need clarification that are eventually used for vocabulary study during the circles. Some readers jot down comments on notes that they stick to the text, others use a reading journal, and some map thoughts onto a large sheet of paper. Across all the various literature circle routines these scaffolds promote active and thoughtful stances toward reading. They position each reader as a major contributor to the classroom literacy community.

Many exciting studies have been conducted using literature circles with *at-risk* language minority students. All of these studies reveal that literature circles raised the reading comprehension (Raphael & McMahon, 1994), participation level and overall motivation and enthusiasm for reading (Jewell & Pratt, 1999). Students who participated in the literature circles approach became more active readers (Dugan, 1997). They learned to justify their responses, question each other and the text, reread portions of the novel to clarify puzzling parts, and increase their awareness of the authors' writing styles.

In a current study conducted by Peralta-Nash & Dutch (2000), literature circles were used in a fourth grade bilingual classroom to encourage students to develop

stronger reading and writing skills in both Spanish and English. Results of the study indicated that all of the English learners took more risks in their second language reading experiences. Additionally, students moved beyond the texts making text to life connections and discussing issues not addressed in everyday classroom conversations.

*Instructional conversations.*

The current focus on more effective ways to foster literacy in school-age children, especially language minority students, has led to the development of alternative instructional approaches. In their report to the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, Rueda, Goldenberg, and Gallimore (1992) suggested that one such approach is Instructional Conversations (IC). This approach is based on early work in the Hawaiian Kamehameha Elementary Education Project (KEEP), neo-Vygotskian theory, and on recent classroom-based research on reading comprehension.

Recent theory and research suggest that IC is a very effective approach for second language readers, especially when carried out in culturally compatible activity settings (Pérez, 1996; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Borrowing from Tharp & Gallimore (1988) the term *instructional conversations* is used to describe an approach to teaching that goes beyond imparting knowledge and teaching skills. It encourages thoughtful discussions as students grapple with ideas. An important aspect of instructional conversations is that they rely heavily on contextualized, meaningful communication. A good instructional conversation appears as an excellent discussion conducted by a teacher and a group of students, however it is carefully planned to include

ten specific elements (Rueda et al., 1992). Goldenberg (1992-93) defined instructional conversations:

“The instructional conversation is a process in which students engage in extended discussions – conversations with the teacher and among themselves. Teachers and students are responsive to what others say so that each statement or contribution builds upon, challenges, or extends a previous one. Topics are picked up, delivered elaborated...Strategically, the teacher questions, prods, challenges, coaxes - or keeps quiet. He or she clarifies and instructs when necessary, but does so efficiently without wasting time or words...Perhaps, most important, he or she manages to keep everyone engaged in a substantive and extended conversation, weaving individual participants’ comments into a larger tapestry of meaning” (p. 318).

Some preliminary work investigated the effects of an IC approach on student performance (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1992). The study was conducted in a general education classroom setting and examined the effects of an IC approach versus a traditional basal approach on student performance. Results indicated that IC promotes higher-level understanding of significant concepts without sacrificing literal comprehension.

Another, more recent study conducted by Echevarria (1995) presented similar findings. Her study examined the effects of IC on the language and concept development of Hispanic students with learning disabilities. The study compared traditional instruction (basal approach) with instructional conversations. Results of proximal measures indicated higher levels of discourse and greater participation with IC than with a basal approach. Evidence of greater concept understanding followed IC, but there were no differences in literal comprehension on post lesson narrative results.

*The Role of Engagement and Motivation in Second Language Readers*

Guthrie, McGough, Bennett and Rice (1996) described engaged readers as motivated to read for a variety of personal goals. They are strategic in using multiple approaches to comprehend, knowledgeable in their construction of new understandings from text, and socially interactive in their approach to literacy. Their reading engagement is strongly correlated with reading achievement. Students who read actively and frequently improve their reading comprehension (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992). This connection between engagement and achievement was shown in a national sample of students (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997). At all three ages studied (9, 13, and 17 years), the more highly engaged readers showed higher achievement than the less engaged readers. The 13-year-old students with higher reading engagement were higher in achievement than the 17-year-old students who were less reading engaged. In other words, middle school students who were engaged in reading achieved as highly as students who were less engaged in reading but had 4 more years of schooling. As students become engaged readers, they provide themselves with self-generated learning opportunities that compensate for low family income and educational background.

As engaged readers become good readers, they tend to read more, thus increasing their reading ability. This is consistent with the *Matthew Effect* coined by Stanovich (1986), to describe the phenomenon that a single unmediated deficit can have a significant impact on the development of skills that are not deficient. For example, children with reading problems show cumulative deficits over time because lack of access to the orthography influences development, not only of academic skills, but also of processing

ability. Stanovich's phrase comes from the Gospel according to Matthew where it is inferred that *the rich get richer and the poor get poorer*.

Researchers suggest that motivation mediates the *Matthew Effect*. That is, increasing competence is motivating, and increasing motivation leads to more reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999). Motivation is the link between frequent reading and reading achievement. Utilizing this perspective, motivation can be seen as the foundational process for reading engagement and is a major contributor to disengagement from reading. Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) state that, "Reading motivation is the individual's personal goals, values and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p. 405).

Walk into any mainstream U.S. classroom populated by *at-risk* English learners and you will hear one of the teachers asking, "How can I motivate my students to read? If I could just get them to care about reading, I know I could teach them all the skills they need to know" (Au, 2002, p. 395). Teachers often observe their second language readers getting up from their seats several times during sustained silent reading to get another book, which they never seem to finish. When the class visits the library, they often wander around choosing books based on the picture of the front cover. They do not read at home, and have difficulty proving that they read the number of required pages on homework assignments.

This lack of motivation is not based on laziness or an attempt to skirt required reading assignments. It is actually an extremely complex problem. Students of diverse backgrounds may not just show indifference, but actual resistance to school. Ogbu (1981) suggests that this resistance develops because students do not believe that there is any

value in cooperating with their teachers and staying in school. Ogbu points out that students of diverse backgrounds may not place a high value on education because they have not seen the connection between education and job opportunities in their own families. In his research of African Americans, Ogbu (1981) discovered that regardless of how far they had advanced in education, African Americans were always consigned to menial, low-paying jobs. He concluded that the indifference and oppositional behavior that some diverse students display in school may result from their own observations that education does not necessarily lead to a better life.

D'Amato (1988) extended Ogbu's views by analyzing the differences between classrooms of mainstream students with diverse classrooms. In the mainstream classrooms that were not diverse, D'Amato observed that the teachers held the control. The students were willing to comply and follow the teachers' directions even when they were bored and saw little value in the activities. These students complied because they understood the importance of pleasing the teacher, getting good grades, graduating from high school, and continuing on to college. Their family histories revealed a strong connection between schooling and employment advancement.

When D'Amato studied the diverse classrooms, he found that the students, not the teacher, held the control. Teachers new to working with these students experienced difficulties with classroom management and felt that the students were always working against the order they were trying to establish. If the teacher failed to strike the proper balance between being strict and being fair, the students' behavior escalated into the arena of disruption. Because the teacher was unable to establish a positive relationship with the

students, little instruction and academic learning occurred. Learning was replaced by time spent on management issues.

This sociological perspective of many students with diverse backgrounds provides a context for better understanding their lack of interest in reading. Several steps have been recommended by researchers to help teachers overcome this problem (Au, 2002; Au and Kwakami, 1994; Margolis & McCabe, 2003; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Valdes, 1998). First, the teacher needs to establish a positive relationship with the student. The teacher should have a broad understanding of the student's cultural background and the values they bring to school. Once open communication has been established, students will accept the teacher as a role model and as a model of literate behavior.

Second, teachers need to demonstrate a good role model of literate behavior. Teachers must see themselves as readers if they want their students to read. If teachers want students to self select books during silent sustained reading teachers must read books they have chosen for their own enjoyment. If teachers want students to share their chosen books with the class, they must participate by sharing the books they have enjoyed. If teachers want students to participate in literature circles, they must also present their own responses to the literature.

Third, teachers should avoid tasks learners find frustrating or anxiety provoking. If a student frequently encounters such tasks in reading, they will display dysfunctional and avoidance reactions such as the refusal to start or complete work; off-task dawdling; unthoughtful, careless responses; distractibility and fidgetiness (Margolis & McCabe, 2003). As Newcomer (1986) noted, "Continuing to expect a child to read



material at his or her frustration level can create serious achievement and emotional problems” (p. 26).

Finally, teachers need to be aware of other factors affecting their students’ motivation to read. One of the factors discussed by Valdes (1998) is the difference in the life experiences and worldviews of the teacher versus the students and their families. Valdes writes about Garden School, representative of many diversely populated schools in the U.S.:

“According to one teacher who worked closely with the Latino community, most teachers at Garden School could predict few of the problems their new students would encounter. Most knew little about poverty. They had little notion of why working parents might not be able to make midday appointments with their children’s teachers. They suspected disinterest, apathy, and even antagonism, and were baffled and troubled by the failure of these parents to *care* about their children.

The new students, on the other hand, did not quite yet know how to be American middle school students. They knew little about school spirit. They were not sure why being in band or the chorus or in the computer club might be important. They frequently confused teachers’ friendly demeanor with permissiveness, and they quickly found themselves in trouble. They understood little of what went on around them and often became discouraged and disinterested” (p. 5).

As Valdes implies, the issue of low motivation may not simply be one of language. It may involve cultural differences. Sometimes students will need to be taught how to participate appropriately in a reading activity. For example, some students may have learned not to respond until they are sure they know the right answer (Pransky & Bailey, 2002). These students will need to understand that, in a literature discussion group there may be questions without right answers. If students are not

participating or not participating appropriately in a reading activity, teachers may want to discuss the situation with students and model and explain the desired behavior.

Teachers need to develop a repertoire of strategies for student participation, having students work as a whole class, in small groups, in pairs, and as individuals (Au and Kwakami, 1994). In a culturally responsive fashion, teachers need to help students learn to respond to literature in ways that may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for them, so that they will be prepared to succeed in the variety of classroom situations they are likely to encounter.

#### Family Literacy

The value of a partnership between teachers and parents in the promotion of children's literacy appears self-evident. It symbolizes both the school's accountability to the community it serves and the responsibility of families to support the school's agenda of empowering their children with the tools of literacy. However Auerbach's (1995) English Family Literacy Project revealed that many of the existing family education programs follow a "transmission of school practices model" (p. 17) in which knowledge is transmitted from teachers to children and from the school to parents to children. The following practices were noted as the most prevalent in these transmission model programs:

1. Giving parents guidelines, materials, and training to carry out school-like activities in the home.
2. Training parents in effective parenting.
3. Teaching parents about the culture of American schooling.
4. Developing parent language and literacy though skills, grammar, and behavioral approaches.

All the programs reviewed by the English Family Literacy Project appeared to begin with the notion that there is something wrong or lacking in the family. Because educators know what parents should be doing, their job is to help parents change their ways of relating to their children and to teach them the skills needed for school-related literacy tasks. The researchers in this project found that this orientation toward family literacy was rooted in six assumptions:

1. Ethnic and linguistic minority families do not engage in literacy practices at home.
2. The success of literate children is due to parent-to-child literacy instruction and transfer of skills.
3. Successful readers come from home environments where parents replicate school-like tasks.
4. Children of families who do not speak the dominant language (English) at home are at a disadvantage.
5. The schools are doing an adequate job of teaching children, and more school-like tasks need to be done at home. It is the home that is the root cause of literacy problems.
6. Social, cultural, and economic factors are obstacles to learning and must be addressed or overcome outside the classroom.

Auerbach (1995) argued that this approach to family literacy merely cloaks a cultural deficit perspective under a position of institutional dominance – thereby rendering it even more dangerous than explicitly deficit-oriented programs. In contrast, she described a *multiple literacies perspective* that focuses on home-school mismatch and favors cultural maintenance over assimilation. She urged educators to adopt a *social change perspective* that stresses the right of families to determine for themselves the direction of family literacy and school involvement efforts, rather than having outsiders

dictate what is best for them. Auerbach noted that this perspective draws its inspiration from Freire (1970).

Early in his life, Paolo Freire committed himself to working with the peasant population in the impoverished northeastern part of his native Brazil. He viewed education as a way to help bring about a better world. As he began to recognize that the preliterate people with whom he was working were not receptive to formal education, he began to analyze and explore with them new approaches to literacy development. Alma Flor Ada (1993), educator, children's author, and student of Freire, eloquently expressed his vision:

“He showed us that, rather than seeing ourselves as privileged owners of education, generously willing to bestow it upon others, we have to look at ourselves humbly as learners who can join in solidarity with those who are also learning, and thus bring about a shared process of liberation. By sharing the joy of learning and discovery with our students, we reaffirm the human capacity, inherent in all of us, to generate knowledge and transform the world” (p. 25).

In a recent review of family literacy programs, Caspe (2003) from the Harvard Family Research Project asserted that there is a growing body of research suggesting that despite good intentions, family literacy programs are inadvertently undermining the very families they attempt to help. They present notions of family and literacy that are divorced from their social and political contexts. She stated that successful family literacy programs come from a social constructivist perspective. Such programs maintain participant control, invoke dialogue as a key pedagogical process, develop content that centers on critical social issues from participants' lives, and create pathways for action and social change. From this critical perspective, she outlined several principles that schools can use to help guide the development of family literacy programs:

1. Strive to understand parents' literacy strengths and reinforce their knowledge and skills.
2. Believe that literacy is acquired through shared dialogue, where learners are actively contributing to their own learning.
3. Provide opportunities for adults and children to reflect on literacy practices in their daily lives.
4. Recognize the literacy history of parents and that all parents come with some memories of literacy.
5. Grow out of the needs of the participants and examine resources in a sociocultural context.
6. Adopt an empowerment philosophy and take action to break down patterns of social isolation.
7. Respond to the interests of adults and children.
8. Document their experiences and learn from them, which at the same time contributes to building a research base for family literacy. (p. 4)

The teacher's role in the education of her diverse students should be to connect what happens inside the classroom with the outside world so that literacy is used as a meaningful tool for considering issues important to students. Understanding students within a cultural community context can help teachers learn about the resources available for their students. Several researchers have found that students were successful when teachers used community practices as the basis for informing school practices. For example, Ada (1988b) involved parents and children in writing stories together. Latino parents came once a month and met in the school library to discuss in their home language Spanish children's literature. They met in small groups with facilitators and dialogued around themes from the children's books that were relevant to their lives. Many of the parents had experienced oppression and were reluctant to share their ideas at first. The group facilitators were trained to draw the participants out through validating their ideas

and asking participants further questions to help them expand their thoughts. Results indicated that as parents began to read aloud to their children at home, children brought more books home from the school library and parents and children increased their visits to the public library. Anecdotally, parents reported that as a result of the family storybook reading, their children were more enthusiastic about school and reading, parents and children became closer to each other, and parents discovered that there is much to learn even from the oral traditions of their parents. Parents also reported increased confidence in their interactions with teachers.

Another study conducted by Morrow & Young (1997), connected home and school literacy contexts by involving parents in developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive literacy activities with their children in the 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. The purpose of the program was to enhance children's achievement and interest in literacy. The family program was similar to a literature-based school program that included classroom literacy centers, and teacher-modeled literature activities. Meetings were held monthly, with parents, teachers and children all working together. The pre- and posttest data determined achievement and motivation differences favoring the children in the family programs.

More recently, Keis (2002) examined a family literacy program for the Latino community in Independence, Oregon. The program, an adaptation of Ada's (1988b) model, used children's literature in Spanish as a springboard to family literacy. It brought in prominent Latino authors and artists to work with the community and published parent writing on a monthly basis. Data analysis revealed that the program made significant contributions to the Latino community. Participants felt that the program had: (1) strengthened their sense of community, (2) increased their self-esteem and cultural pride,

(3) validated their cultural identity, (4) increased their level of critical consciousness and desire for self-improvement, and (5) improved family literacy practices and parenting skills.

### Summary

The above literature review addresses the major problem of this study in that it explains particular developmental phases of the language acquisition process that pertain to the participating *at-risk* EL students. Abstract thinking involving such cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALPS) as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation has never been understood or addressed for English learners in their former schooling experience, so slowly they have been falling farther behind their English only peers in the comprehension of content area instruction and academic reading.

The literature review of the second language reading comprehension process reveals several important reasons for the existence of the reading problem in this study. One reason is that academic English skills are not only acquired through extended periods of cognitive language development but also with effective teaching and learning methods that are brain compatible. The students in this study have never experienced Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skill (CALPS) instruction that should have commenced in the fourth grade. Secondly, research by Thomas and Collier (2001) revealed that it takes 15 months for EL students to make 10 months growth. Therefore, sixth grade students in the study were 1 to 2.5 years behind depending on their primary language literacy and exposure to English.

The portion of the literature review summarizing second language reading comprehension strategy instruction describes a possible solution to the reading

problems experienced by all *at-risk* EL students. Many of the strategies and approaches mentioned have proven to be very effective in developing the critical literacy skills so desperately needed by these students. However, a limited one-year exposure is not enough time to ensure that they will begin transferring these skills independently. Continuous instructional scaffolding is needed to move students through the stages of literacy development. Gradually, with scaffolding, EL students will be able to direct their own attention, plan, and control of their reading.

The final section of the literature review emphasizes the critical need for family involvement in the literacy development of their children. Literacy is not an all-or-none phenomenon that begins when children start school. Rather, it has its origins early in the life of a child. It consists of cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are developmental precursors to more established forms of literate behavior. It develops not only as a result of direct instruction at school, but also as a product of a stimulating and responsive home environment. Research has clearly shown that good emergent literacy skills provided through the home culture enhance the school experiences of English learners and help them get started on the path to reading success.

As diversity in the world grows, it becomes increasingly important for EL students in the United States to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values essential for functioning in cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-cultural situations. Hopefully, with the collaborative effort of parents, teachers, and students working together in a vital learning community, critical literacy skills will eventually grow, and ultimately bridge the reading gap that threatens to undermine their academic future.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This study examines both the academic and psychosocial effects of TLC on at-risk, English learners. Multiple sources of evidence archivally collected under the auspices of the school district were used to provide the researcher with an in depth understanding of the program's impact on the reading comprehension of second language readers who struggle to succeed in mainstream classroom settings.

Explicit instruction in reading comprehension skills is essential for many children to ensure their transition from beginning readers to proficient readers. Second language students face particular challenges in the later grades when they encounter texts that incorporate sophisticated vocabulary and complex linguistic and discourse structures that they have not yet mastered. From a sociocultural perspective, both the instructional process and the social interactions that contextualize the learning experience are of major importance in helping overcome the current reading achievement gap that exists between English learners and their English speaking peers.

Presently, the research base necessary to inform teachers and schools about best practices for teaching reading in the post-primary grades is not adequately developed (Snow, 2002). Little direct attention has been devoted to helping teachers develop the skills they need to promote reading comprehension, ensure content learning through reading, and deal with the differences in comprehension skills that their students display.

In a recent report the RAND Research Study Group (2003) stated that the teacher must be front and center as we discuss how to improve comprehension instruction for

diverse learners in schools today. One of their salient questions for future research in reading was how to bring about increased teacher quality and expertise in teaching reading to linguistically and culturally diverse students. The report indicated that even though the research base on effective teacher education and professional development is thin, there is a need to pursue research which provides enhanced content about excellent comprehension instruction and about improved models for teacher education and professional development.

Transactional Literature Circles is not only a comprehensive instructional model; it is also a reform effort – a vital element of multicultural education. Banks and Banks (2003) state that multicultural education incorporates the idea that “all students regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (p. 3). Furthermore, multicultural education embraces the realization that some students, because of these social characteristics, have a better chance to succeed in schools than do students who belong to culturally diverse populations.

Although the quantitative design of the Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) program focused on the academic outcomes of TLC, the qualitative elements are equally important to study because multidimensional information is needed in order to understand the total effects of this reading intervention program. When multiple types of evidence can be cited in support of a particular conclusion, a greater capacity exists for building consensus, ensuring the translation of research to practice, and supporting the sustainability of research-based practices (Lloyd-Jones, 2003).

### Research Design

The data retrieved for this study was collected from the district sponsored TLC reading program that was piloted during the 2003-04 school year. The researcher was chosen by the district to lead the pilot. Three dependent variables were used to assess reading achievement and growth:

- the 2003/2004 California STAR Test in English-Language Arts (CST-ELA)
- the 2003/2004 California Achievement Test for Reading (CAT 6)
- the 2003/2004 California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

In addition to reading achievement, the researcher examined district-collected data that measured the reading progress of students in the TLC program. The district used the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-3) to track student progress. The classroom teachers participating in the TLC program administered the test three times throughout the year.

To ascertain perceptions of the TLC program, the researcher created and conducted teacher/student surveys and interviews toward the end of the 2003-04 school year. Teacher survey and interview results were used to determine the effect of the TLC program on the students' reading ability and motivation. Student survey results were used to examine the benefits of the TLC program from the students' point of view.

Throughout the school year, the researcher collected field notes from informal observations conducted in each classroom. The field notes were coded, categorized, and ranked according to a 5-point rubric developed by the researcher. The rubric ranking determined how closely each teacher's program was aligned with the ideal TLC model.

### Population and Sampling Unit

The population comprising the treatment group included 75 English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades at two Title I elementary schools who were designated *at-risk* by the district. A control group of 75 students meeting the same criteria were chosen from 7 other elementary schools throughout the district.

Table 1 shows that a proportional number of students from the treatment group were represented at each grade level. There were almost twice as many boys as there were girls in the treatment group and most of the students were of Hispanic/Latino origin.

Table 1  
*Grade Level, Gender, Ethnicity of Treatment Group*

Grade	No.	%
Fourth	28	37
Fifth	27	36
Six	20	27
<hr/>		
Gender		
Female	28	37
Male	47	63
<hr/>		
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	54	72
Filipino	11	15
Vietnamese	5	7
Asian Indian	1	1
Chinese	2	3
Pacific Islander	1	1
White	1	1

Table 2 shows that there were more than three times as many boys as there were girls in the control group. Although most of the students in the control group were of Hispanic/Latino origin, there were also a significantly higher number of Filipino and Vietnamese students than the treatment group. This demographic variation between both groups was due to the increased number of sites used to obtain an adequate number of students for the control group.

Table 2  
*Grade Level, Gender, Ethnicity of Control Group*

Grade	No.	%
Fourth	27	36
Fifth	28	37
Six	20	27
<hr/>		
Gender		
Female	17	23
Male	58	77
<hr/>		
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	23	31
Filipino	19	25
Vietnamese	17	23
Asian Indian	8	11
Chinese	2	3
Pacific Islander	3	4
White	3	4

### Instrumentation

The researcher used archivally retrieved formal and informal assessment instruments in order to determine the effect of the TLC program on the reading achievement of mainstreamed at-risk English learners. The 2003/04 CST English-Language Arts (CST-ELA) and CAT 6 Reading parts of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) data were used to evaluate the reading achievement of both the treatment and control group of students.

The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) was used by this study to evaluate the growth of English language proficiency skills in both the treatment and control groups. The CELDT test was particularly useful in this study because the listening, speaking, reading and writing test items are designed to measure growth specific to English learners. Because the CELDT results are reported in grade level spans, a closer vertical alignment was ensured.

The researcher investigated teacher perceptions and the psychosocial aspects of second language reading by examining the results of teacher surveys and interviews conducted in May of 2004. A similar investigation of student observations and opinions of the TLC program was conducted through the use of student surveys given during the same time period. The researcher examined the data and divided it into two corpus units: (a) teacher surveys and interviews, and (b) student surveys. Each corpus unit was coded separately into meaning units and analyzed using Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological method of analysis. The content analysis was conducted by three analysts – the researcher and two fellow colleagues in the field of education not associated with the study.

Throughout the 2003-04 school year, the researcher regularly met with teachers to problem solve, answer questions and design the TLC program to meet the instructional needs of all 75 students involved in the treatment. As each teacher implemented the program, the researcher collected informal observation field notes to measure how closely they aligned their classroom model with the ideal program model. At the end of the year, the field notes were coded into recording units by three analysts – the researcher and two fellow colleagues not associated with the study. Each coded recording unit was categorized and placed on a 5-point rubric designed by the researcher.

Listed below is a description of the 6 assessment instruments used for this study. The first three are formal standardized instruments used by the district to publicly report gains made by English learners. The last three are informal instruments that were used by the researcher to report: (a) student growth in reading throughout the 2003-04 school year, (b) teacher and student program perceptions, and (c) teacher program alignment with the ideal model.

1. The California STAR Test (CST) in English-Language Arts

This study reported on 150 out of 150 possible CST-ELA test scores. The CST-ELA) administered to all students in California public schools. It is an accountability measure mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. In 2003, all English learners who had been in the United States for more than 1 year were required to take the test. Test results were publicly reported and used to calculate the districts' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) that was based on achieving annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for student test scores, having 95% student participation in state testing, and

meeting standards on state-selected additional indicators. The federal government required that AYP targets for each school in the district be met in order to secure Title I funding. To meet the AYP target in 2004, 13.6 % of the students in the school were to reach the *proficient* level on the CST-ELA test. The State Board of Education set the minimum scale score target of “350” as *proficient* for all California students (California Department of Education, 2004c). This percentage included the performance of English learners.

Except for a writing component that was administered as part of the grade 4 and 7 test, all questions were multiple-choice. The CST-ELA tests for 2003 and 2004 at grades 4-6 were each 75 questions in length. Approximately 20% of the questions were specifically related to reading. The reading comprehension portion of the test contained 15, 16 and 17 questions respectively.

These tests were developed specifically to assess students' performance on California's Language-Arts Content Standards. The California State Board of Education adopted academic content standards in 1999 to specify what all California children were expected to know and be able to do in each grade or course. Only the English-Language Arts and Math content standards were tested in 2003 and 2004.

Individual student and group results for the CST are reported using five performance levels adopted by the State Board of Education. Performance levels establish the points at which students have demonstrated sufficient knowledge and skills to be regarded as performing at a particular



achievement level. The following performance levels are assigned on the basis of scaled scores: (a) *far below basic*, (b) *below basic*, (c) *basic*, (d) *proficient*, and (e) *advanced*. The 2003-04 scaled score range was 150-600. Table 3 shows the scale score ranges for CST performance levels in grades 4-6 (California Department of Education, 2004c).

Table 3

*Scale Score Ranges for CST Performance Levels in Grades 4-6*

Grade	Far Below Basic	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
4	150-268	269-299	300-349	350-392	393-600
5	150-270	271-299	300-349	350-394	396-600
6	150-267	268-299	300-349	350-393	394-600

The researcher chose to study performance level increases rather than scaled scores to determine achievement differences on the CST-ELA among the treatment and control groups because the scaled scores were not vertically scaled across grades (California Department of Education, 2004d). However because the scaled scores had to be collapsed into 5 categories, the researcher statistically reduced the chances to discern significant differences in achievement between the treatment and control groups.

## 2. California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition (CAT 6) Survey for Reading

The researcher was able to report on 150 out of 150 possible CAT 6 test scores for this study. In April 2002, the State Board of Education designated the California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey published by CTB/McGraw-Hill to replace the Stanford Achievement Test, ninth edition (Stanford 9) as the national norm-referenced test for the STAR Program. All

English learners who had been in U.S. schools for more than one year were required to take the test along with the rest of the students in their school. Like the Stanford 9, the CAT 6 Reading test is a national norm-referenced achievement test, and all test questions are multiple choice. The CAT 6 tests for 2003 and 2004 at grades 4-6 contained 60 questions. Approximately 50% of the questions were specifically related to reading.

In 2003-04, the CAT 6 test was included as both a state and federal accountability measure to determine the district's AYP target; however its indicator weight was substantially less than the CST-ELA test. The CAT 6 Reading test was weighted 6% compared to the 48% weight given to the CST-ELA test because it was norm-referenced not standards based.

California's purpose for administering the CAT 6 Reading test was to determine how well each student is achieving academically compared to a national sample of students tested in the same grade at the same time of the school year. The CAT 6 Reading test results contained averages and comparisons of norm-referenced scores across grades. Norm-referenced scores such as these were not normalized across grades and test forms. Therefore, the researcher chose to use Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points to ascertain differences between the treatment and control groups.

### 3. California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

This study reported on 136 out of a possible 150 CELDT test scores (68 in both the treatment and control groups) because 14 of the students either moved or were redesignated as Fluent English Proficient (FEP).

In 1999 California Senate Bill 638 required school districts to assess the English language development of all English learners. The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) was the test chosen to fulfill these requirements. The purpose of the test is threefold: (1) to identify pupils who are limited English proficient, (2) to determine the level of English language proficiency of pupils who are limited English proficient, (3) to assess the progress of limited-English-proficient pupils in acquiring the skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing in English (California Department of Education, 2004a).

The CELDT test is also an accountability measure mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. All English learners who had been in the U.S. more than 1 year were required annually to take the test. All test scores were publicly reported and used to monitor annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs), which determine each district's Title III funding.

The CELDT test assesses English learners in the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is aligned with the California English Language Development Standards. The resulting scores from each skill area are combined to create an overall score. The Listening/Speaking portion of the test is double-weighted, with the Listening portion of the test administered in groups, and the Speaking portion of the test administered individually. The Reading and Writing skill areas are single-weighted and given in group administrations.

The CELDT test items are divided into four grade level span: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. In 2001, the CELDT test items were calibrated and scaled together, thus creating the CELDT Scale. The standard scaled score range was 200 to 800. For this study, the researcher chose to use scaled scores to determine differences between the treatment and control groups because unlike raw scores, scaled scores permit the direct comparison of test results from one administration to another.

In 2002, the CELDT Bookmark Standard Setting was conducted with the participation of 95 English Language Development experts selected by the California Department of Education. The purpose was to create cut scores from the scaled scores that would define five proficiency levels: *Advanced*, *Early Advanced*, *Intermediate*, *Early Intermediate*, and *Beginning*. Table 4 shows the cut-scores for each grade span associated with this study.

In 2003, NCLB required annual increases in the percentage of students making progress in learning English on the CELDT. The annual growth target was for students to gain one proficiency level per year until they reach the level where they are considered English language proficient (*early advanced* with no sub skill below *intermediate*). Students at the *beginning*, *early intermediate* or *intermediate* levels are expected to gain one proficiency level per year. Using these criteria, 51% of students within the school district are expected to meet this annual growth target. In 2004, 30% of EL students with two years of CELDT scores at the intermediate level or above are expected to reach the *early advanced* overall level.

Table 4

*CELDT Cut-Scores*

Test Grade Span	Early Int. Cut	Int. Cut	Early Adv. Cut	Adv. Cut
<b>Listening/Speaking</b>				
3-5	438	482	526	569
6-8	438	482	526	560
<b>Reading</b>				
3-5	466	499	533	566
6-8	466	499	533	566
<b>Writing</b>				
3-5	445	488	530	573
6-8	445	488	530	573

*Note: From Technical Report for the California English Language Development Test 2003-2004, published 2004 (California Department of Education, 2004e).*

#### 4. Qualitative Reading Inventory – 3 (QRI-3)

This study reported on 75 out of 75 possible QRI-3 test scores completed for the treatment group of students. During the 2003-04 school year, the district chose to use the QRI-3 to measure reading growth in the treatment group. The QRI-3 is an informal reading inventory providing text passages (preprimer – grade 12) designed to assess the reading comprehension of a student (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). All the selections are self-contained and are highly representative of the structure and topic of materials found in basal readers and content-area textbooks.

This test allowed each teacher in the TLC program to evaluate their EL student's comprehension abilities in light of his or her background knowledge about a subject and whether the text was narrative or expository. The student's answers to explicit and implicit comprehension questions helped the teacher to assess their understanding of the text.

The publisher of the QRI-3 test has measured its consistency of scores in three ways: interscorer reliability, internal consistency reliability, and alternate-form reliability. In a study conducted in 2001 samples of 393 passages were used to estimate scoring reliability. The alpha estimate of inter-judge reliability was .94 and the reliabilities of the instructional level decisions based on comprehension scores were all above .80 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

##### 5. Teacher/Student Surveys

The researcher analyzed teacher surveys from 7 out of 7 teachers who participated in the study. Only 68 out of 75 student surveys in the treatment group could be collected and analyzed. Both the teacher and student surveys were examined in order to ascertain individual perceptions of the TLC program participants. Each survey was composed of three questions.

Figure 4 depicts the teacher survey that was developed by the researcher for district use. The purpose of the teacher survey was to understand how the program benefited English learner reading ability or motivation through explicit small group reading instruction and student-led literature circles.

*Figure 4. TLC teacher survey*

TLC Teacher Survey	May 2004
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What benefits have you seen in your target students' reading ability or motivation from reading books at their instructional reading level?</li> <li>2. What benefits have you seen in your students from receiving explicit, small group, reading instruction?</li> <li>3. If applicable, how have student-led literature circles affected your target students' reading comprehension or motivation?</li> </ol>	

Figure 5 depicts the student survey developed by the researcher. The purpose of the student survey was to determine how the treatment group felt about being in the program, participating in small group reading instruction, and general overall reading attitudes.

*Figure 5. TLC student survey*

TLC Student Survey	May 2004
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What have you enjoyed most about TLC this year?</li> <li>2. What have you enjoyed most about learning from your teacher in a small reading group?</li> <li>3. What have you learned about reading this year?</li> </ol>	

## 5. Teacher Interviews

This study analyzed 7 out of 7 possible audio-recorded teacher interviews in order to determine the TLC program benefits from an instructional viewpoint. The audio recording was transcribed and analyzed by 3 research analysts: the researcher and 2 colleagues not associated with the study.

Individual follow up questions were used in the interview to elicit specific strategies and techniques that were observed during informal observations of each teacher's program. Figure 6 depicts the interview questions answered by all of the participating teachers. The researchers analyzed each teacher's transcribed response through the use of Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological method of analysis, which was used to bring together common themes that emerged within the teachers' responses.

*Figure 6.* TLC teacher interview questions

TLC Teacher Interview Questions	May 2004
2. Think back throughout the year, and describe for me the benefits you saw when you were meeting with the students in small groups?	
3. What reading strategies were most effective for your students?	
4. How did you feel about having the students read different books at their level?	
5. How did you integrate TLC into your Language Arts program?	
6. Are you going to use TLC next year? How will you modify it?	

#### 6. TLC Program Observation Rubric

This study examined how closely all of the participating teachers aligned their program to the ideal TLC program model. Figure 7 portrays the TLC Program Observation Rubric designed by the researcher to measure the teachers' program alignment. Each level contains descriptors, which were used to define a classroom's TLC program.



Level 5 indicates an exemplary alignment with the ideal TLC program model because it contains all of the following research based elements: (a) literature circles determined by the students' reading level, (b) daily student reading response using previously modeled reading strategies, (c) weekly student led literature circle discussions (d) weekly teacher led literature circle discussions, (e) the use of the Instructional Conversations (IC) approach in teacher led literature circle discussions, (f) the use of the Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI) approach to guide differentiated small group reading strategy instruction for each literature circle, (g) differentiated vocabulary strategy instruction for each literature circle and (h) regular cultural connections shared during literature circle discussions.

Level 3 indicates a moderate alignment for TLC program effectiveness because it contains the minimal number of elements needed to implement a successful TLC program. Level 1 indicates a low alignment of the TLC program yielding ineffective program results because elements of the ideal model are minimally represented.

In May of 2004, field notes collected by the researcher were coded and analyzed by 3 research analysts using a defined content analysis procedure. The coded field notes were ranked according to the descriptors under each level on the 5-point rubric to determine the total number and percentage of teachers who aligned their program at each level.

Figure 7. TLC program observation rubric

5	<p><b>Exemplary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students daily respond to their reading using targeted reading strategies.</li> <li>• Student led literature circles meet weekly.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with each literature circle weekly.</li> <li>• The Instructional Conversations (IC) approach guides book discussions.</li> <li>• Reading strategy instruction is differentiated using Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI).</li> <li>• Vocabulary strategy instruction is differentiated for each book.</li> <li>• Cultural connections are shared during small group instruction.</li> </ul>
4	<p><b>Proficient</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students daily respond to their reading using reading strategies.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with each literature circle weekly.</li> <li>• The IC approach guides book discussions.</li> <li>• TSI reading strategy instruction is used, but not differentiated.</li> <li>• Vocabulary strategy instruction is used, but not differentiated.</li> <li>• Some cultural connections are shared.</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>Accomplished</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students daily respond to their reading using reciprocal teaching.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with each literature circle weekly.</li> <li>• Reciprocal Teaching guides book discussions.</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Developing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students read the same book.</li> <li>• Students daily respond to their reading using traditional literature circles role sheets.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with each literature circle weekly.</li> </ul>
1	<p><b>Beginning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students read the same book.</li> <li>• Students respond to their reading using teacher or publisher prepared comprehension questions.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with each literature circle weekly.</li> </ul>

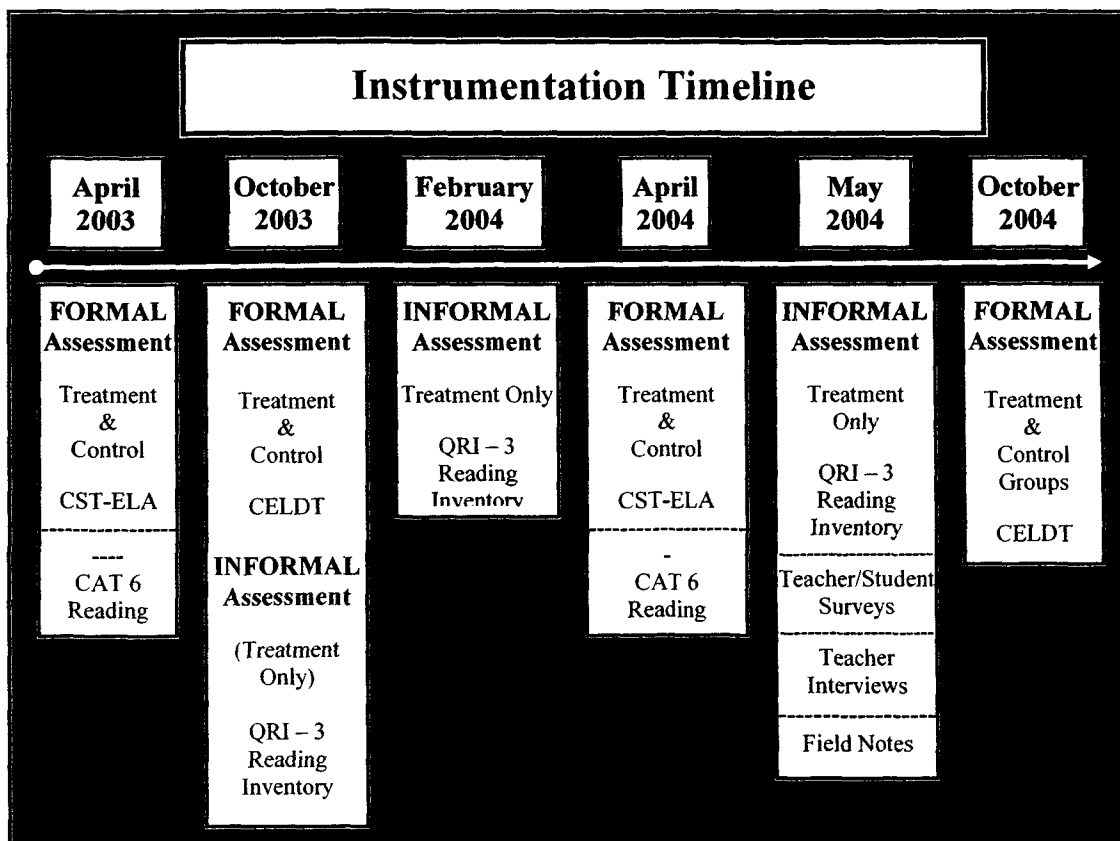
### Data Collection Procedures

This study examined data that was collected under the supervision of the school district during the 2003-04 school year. The researcher, as the program specialist for the TLC reading program, was directed to conduct the surveys and interviews herself. The district used all data to comply with No Child Left Behind (2001) and California Compliance mandates.

The standardized CST-ELA and the CAT 6 Reading tests were given in April 2003 and April 2004. The teacher/student surveys, teacher interviews, and compilation of field notes were completed in May 2004. The QRI-3 reading inventory was given by the classroom teachers in October, February and May of the 2003-04 school year.

Figure 8 illustrates the instrumentation timeline.

*Figure 8.* Instrumentation timeline for formal and informal assessments



Although the central purpose of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) was to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and score at the *proficient* level on challenging state academic achievement standards, research has shown that emphasis on standardized tests is not always amenable in reflecting change for English learners (Menken, 2000). Instead of being a tool to help fix public education for English learners, researchers suggest that the federal law sets up schools to fail (Mathis, 2003; Posnick-Goodwin, 2004). The newly integrated accountability system places a greater emphasis on the progress of student subgroups by requiring that each student meet the same standards for performance and participation. EL students are expected to take a standardized test in English and be considered proficient in one year. Districts with federally funded English learner programs are held accountable for both the progress of English learners in attaining English proficiency and for the attainment of grade-level academic standards as required for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). If schools are unable to demonstrate AYP, they are likely to be labeled as “failing” and corrective actions may be imposed under NCLB. These may include school-wide restructuring or requiring schools to provide students the option of transferring to another school.

The severity of such sanctions caused the researcher to use prudence when interpreting the standardized test results. As with all English learners, it is crucial to remember that one test cannot accurately reflect everything that a person knows and is able to do. Low scores on the CST-ELA test may mean nothing more than that a learner has not yet mastered enough English to demonstrate his or her reading skills on a standardized test. Therefore, multiple assessments, including some performance-based

(QRI-3) or alternative assessments (surveys/interviews) that mirror what students are learning in class, were used in this study to paint a much more accurate picture of students' knowledge, skills, and progress than any single test score could indicate. High-stakes decisions need to be carefully made regarding a program with high numbers of English learners based solely on test data. Such data may not accurately account for student progress, nor will it be reflective of program effectiveness (Coltrane, 2002)

#### Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher analyzed data from the 2003/2004 CST-ELA, CAT 6 Reading, and CELDT tests to determine achievement differences between the treatment and control groups. A chi-square test was used to determine differences in performance standard rankings on the CST-ELA test. A t-test was used to determine differences in Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points on the CAT 6 Reading test and differences in the scaled scores on the CELDT test. Achievement differences for all of the tests were considered significant if  $p < .05$ .

The QRI-3 test scores from the treatment group were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA. The purpose of this test was to examine growth in reading skills by ascertaining differences in student scores between the fall, winter, and spring testing sessions. Test results would reveal the time of year that significant student achievement growth occurred.

The content analysis procedure used on the teacher/student surveys and interviews incorporated the following steps outlined by Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological method. This method analyzes extensive texts by looking for natural meaning units and explicating their main themes. Five steps were involved in the use of this approach: first,

the corpus was read in its entirety to get a sense of the whole. Second, the analysts determined natural meaning units as expressed by the subjects. The technique used for generating meaning was taken from one of thirteen such tactics used by Miles and Huberman (1994): (1) noting patterns (2) see plausibility and (3) clustering (4) making metaphors (5) counting (6) making contrasts/comparisons (7) subsuming the particulars under the general (8) factoring (9) noting relations between variables (10) finding intervening variables (11) building a logical chain of evidence and (13) making conceptual / theoretical coherence.

The third step consisted of stating as simply as possible a theme that dominated a natural meaning unit. The analysts attempted to read the subject's answers without prejudice and to thematize the statements. The fourth and final step entailed the tying together of essential, nonredundant themes into a descriptive statement, thus condensing the expressed meanings into more specific understandings of teacher and student perceptions.

The content analysis procedure utilized on the teacher observation field notes used *a priori* coding (Weber, 1990). The researcher and two other colleagues not associated with the study, coded the notes into recording units (Krippendorff, 1980) that were associated with the following categories: (a) how literature circles are determined, (b) how often the teacher meets with each literature circle (c) how students respond to daily reading (d) how often student led literature circles meet (e) what approach is used to guide literature circle discussions (f) how reading strategy instruction is delivered and differentiated for each literature circle (g) how vocabulary strategy instruction is delivered and differentiated for each literature circle (h) how cultural connections are

made during literature circle discussions. The analysts then compared the categorized recording units to the descriptors on the TLC Program Observation Rubric to determine each teacher's TLC program ranking. Once the ranking was completed, the analysts tallied the numbers in each level on the rubric, thus representing how many teachers scored at the *exemplary*, *proficient*, *accomplished*, *developing*, and *beginning* levels.

#### Reliability / Validity of the Analysis

The reliability of the quantitatively analyzed data for this study was determined by a detailed description and analysis of each test. The reliability of the total scores on the CST-ELA was established in two ways: First, the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), an index of internal consistency, was calculated for each test. Next, asymptotic conditional standard errors of measurement (CSEM) were calculated via item response theory to supplement the KR-20 reliabilities. The KCT KR-20 coefficient for the CST-ELA ranged from 0.92 to 0.94, indicating that all grade specific tests were highly reliable, (California Department of Education, 2004f). The KR-20 coefficient of 0.90 for the CAT-6 Reading tests in grades 4-6 was also high (Rogosa, 2003).

The 2003-2004 operational test reliabilities for each of the CELDT tests were reported by skill area and grade span. For the Listening and Speaking portion of the test in grades 3-5, the test reliability was 0.85; in grades 6-8 it was 0.87. For the Reading portion of the test in grades 3-5, the test reliability was 0.90; in grades 6-8 it was 0.85. For the Writing portion of the test in grades 3-5, the test reliability was 0.89; in grades 6-8 it was 0.87 (California Department of Education, 2004e).

The publisher of the QRI-3 test measured its consistency of scores in three ways: interscorer reliability, internal consistency reliability, and alternate-form reliability. In a

study conducted in 2001, the alpha estimate of inter-judge reliability was 0.94 and the reliabilities of the instructional level decisions based on comprehension scores were all above 0.80 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

The qualitative findings for this study were analyzed using content analysis. The reliability of the findings was established by using three different analysts in the procedure – the researcher, and two fellow colleagues in the field of education that were not associated with the study. The analysts separately coded each corpus unit using the prescribed steps. When substantive differences in interpretation were found, they were worked together into a dialogue leading to an intersubjective agreement of at least 0.86. The use of several analysts served as a control of random or prejudiced subjectivity and lead to an enrichment of the analysis because it included multiple perspectives. The discussions about the different interpretations led to a conceptual clarification and refinement of the issues in question.

Validity of both the quantitative and qualitative findings for this study was determined by using the following primary procedures that were established to ensure credibility (Creswell 2003):

1. Triangulation – different data sources were used to build a coherent justification for conclusive statements. In this study, the sources of information originated from: a) the 2003/2004 CST-ELA test, b) the 2003/2004 CAT/6 Reading test, c) the 2003/2004 CELDT test, d) the QRI-III test, e) teacher/student surveys, interviews and f) informal observation field notes.



2. Researcher bias – was clarified to create an open and honest narrative. In this study, the role of the researcher as an employee of the selected district was clearly identified and explained. Any bias resulting in a conflict of interpretation was truthfully presented.
3. Negative or discrepant information – was disclosed and discussed. In this study, the interpretation of all qualitative findings was agreed upon or reported by three different analysts throughout the content analysis procedure.
4. The researcher spent prolonged time in field (10 months), in her role as district program specialist in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The quantitative findings of this study are displayed via narrative explanation and the use of tables in Chapter 4. The CST-ELA, CAT 6 Reading, and CELDT test findings are described under research question #2 - How will TLC affect the reading comprehension of mainstream, *at-risk*, English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade compared with a control group of the same population in one school year? The findings drawn from the QRI – 3 are presented through narration and tables under question #3 - How will TLC affect the reading comprehension progress of the treatment sample in seven months?

The qualitative findings derived from the teacher / student surveys and teacher interviews are presented through the use of narrative explanation and tables under research question #4 - How will teachers and students perceive the benefits of TLC instruction? Each table summarizes the natural meaning units and their corresponding central theme. The findings retrieved from the informal observation field notes are

presented through narration and tables under question #1 - How closely will the teachers in the study align their TLC program to the ideal model? The researcher used the TLC Program Observation Rubric to summarize the alignment of each teacher's program with the ideal model.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects was not needed for this study because the researcher used archival data that was already collected and analyzed by the school district. No students, teachers, schools or district names were used to identify where and with whom the project and resulting research was conducted. The researcher provided an assurance by the university to the district that the criteria for research with human subjects had been met.

#### Background of the Researcher

The researcher has been a teacher for twenty-nine years. Her interest in English learners began when she first started working in a Bay Area school district with a large majority of Vietnamese boat refugees twenty years ago. She has conducted staff development for teachers in English Language Development (ELD), Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) and has taught the CLAD coursework for San Jose State University, The University of San Diego, and The University of Santa Clara.

When she received her Master's Degree in Language and Literacy, she conducted a case study using a modification of the TLC model. All of the participants were intermediate *at-risk* English learner students. The analysis of the case study concluded that the SAT 9 Reading test scores of the participants significantly improved because of

the yearlong intervention program. These positive results led the researcher to develop an expanded model of TLC.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, the researcher was hired by her district to lead a pilot program implementing the expanded model of TLC in two Title I elementary schools with high numbers of EL students. As a full time employee of the district, the researcher collected and reported on the progress of the TLC pilot program to district administrators and the board of education. As part of the agreement to lead the pilot, the district gave the researcher permission to use the archivally collected data analyzed in this study.

Currently, the researcher is an assistant professor of education working at the University of Santa Clara in the teacher education program. She teaches second language acquisition classes and conducts research in the newly formed reading clinic.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This study explored the effects of the Transactional Literature Circle (TLC) model of literacy instruction on the reading comprehension of mainstreamed English learners who had been identified *at-risk* by their local educational agency. During the 2003-04 school year, the TLC reading program was piloted in two Title I elementary schools with 75 students in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades. All data was reported to the district described in the study and all names or identities have remained anonymous.

Achievement results on three standardized tests were used to ascertain differences in reading achievement between the treatment and a control group of 75 *at-risk* English learners who did not participate in the program. Teacher and student perceptions of the TLC program were examined through the use of interviews and surveys that were coded into meaning units and thematized using Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological method. Teacher alignment with the ideal TLC program model was assessed through informal observation field notes that were coded and ranked on a 5-point observation rubric.

This chapter is organized around the four research questions posed in Chapter I. It first reports how closely the teachers aligned their instruction to the ideal TLC program model; next it identifies the reading achievement differences between the treatment and control groups; then it examines the reading growth made by the treatment group; and finally it documents the perceived benefits of TLC instruction by the teachers and students involved in the study.

### Research Question #1

The first research question posed for this study was - How closely will the teachers in the study align their TLC program to the ideal TLC model? The researcher collected informal observation field notes over a 9-month period of time. At the end of the 2004 school year, the researcher used the TLC Program Observation Rubric to determine the level of program implementation for each teacher in the treatment group. The TLC Program Observation Rubric was designed by the researcher to measure how closely the participating teachers aligned their program with the ideal TLC model. Each level contains descriptors, which would be used to define the TLC program. Level 5 indicates an exemplary alignment with the ideal TLC program model. Level 3 indicates a moderate alignment for TLC program effectiveness. Level 1 indicates a low alignment of the TLC program that would yield ineffective program results because elements of the ideal model are minimally represented.

Three analysts performed the content analysis procedures on the observation field notes: the researcher and two other analysts not associated with the study. The inter rater reliability was .86. Using a priori coding (Weber, 1990), the analysts coded the field notes into recording units (Krippendorff, 1980) that were sorted into the following categories: (a) how literature circles are determined, (b) how often the teacher meets with each literature circle (c) how students respond to daily reading (d) how often student led literature circles meet (e) what approach is used to guide literature circle discussions (f) how reading strategy instruction is delivered and differentiated for each literature circle (g) how vocabulary strategy instruction is delivered and differentiated for each literature circle (h) how cultural connections are made during literature circle discussions. The

sorted recording units were later ranked on the TLC Program Observation Rubric to determine each teacher's TLC program alignment with the ideal TLC model.

Once the ranking process was complete, the analysts tallied the numbers and percentages of teachers who scored at each level. Table 5 represents the number and percentage of teachers who scored at each level. The results indicate that all of the teachers in the treatment group scored at rubric levels 3, 4, or 5 indicating that their alignment with the TLC model was in the *accomplished to exemplary* range.

Table 5

*Teacher Alignment with TLC Model*

TLC Rubric Level	No.	%
<b>5 Exemplary</b>	4	.31
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students respond using reading strategies.</li> <li>• Student led literature circles meet weekly.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with literature circles weekly.</li> <li>• IC approach guides discussions.</li> <li>• Differentiated TSI approach is used.</li> <li>• Differentiated vocabulary strategy instruction is used.</li> <li>• Cultural connections are shared.</li> </ul>		
<b>4 Proficient</b>	5	.38
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students respond using reading strategies.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with literature circles weekly.</li> <li>• IC approach guides discussions.</li> <li>• TSI approach is used.</li> <li>• Vocabulary strategy instruction is used.</li> <li>• Some cultural connections are shared.</li> </ul>		
<b>3 Accomplished</b>	4	.31
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature circles are determined by reading level.</li> <li>• Students respond using reciprocal teaching role sheets.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with literature circles weekly.</li> <li>• Reciprocal Teaching guides book discussions.</li> </ul>		
<b>2 Developing</b>	0	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students read same book.</li> <li>• Students respond using traditional role sheets.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with literature circles weekly.</li> </ul>		
<b>1 Beginning</b>	0	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students read same book.</li> <li>• Students respond using prepared comprehension questions.</li> <li>• Teacher meets with literature circles weekly.</li> </ul>		

## Research Question #2

The second question posed for this study was - How will TLC affect the reading comprehension of mainstream, English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade compared with a control group of the same population in one school year? The researcher used three dependent variables to assess reading achievement and growth:

- the 2003/2004 California STAR Test in English-Language Arts (CST-ELA)
- the 2003/2004 California Achievement Test for Reading (CAT 6)
- the 2003/2004 California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

Independent sample t-tests were performed on the CAT 6 and CELDT assessments. The 2003 test results showed no statistical achievement differences between the treatment and control group. The 2003 CAT 6 Reading test result reported  $t(148, 150)=1.66, p>.05$  and the 2003 CELDT tests reported  $t(134,136)=1.66, p>.05$ . This enabled the researcher to ascertain reliable growth differences in the 2004 test scores.

### *California Standards Test for English-Language Arts (CST-ELA)*

The 2003-04 California Standards test for English-Language Arts was administered to all students in California public schools, including English learners not yet proficient in English. It is an accountability measure mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. All English learners who have been in the United States more than 1 year were required to take the test.

In 2003-04, the district involved in this study considered the CST-ELA test results more significant than the CAT-6 Reading test results because in 2003 NCLB required that all schools ensure that 13.6% of their students reach the *proficient* level on standardized, standards based assessments in order to receive Title I funding (NCLB does

not reward growth or improvement). To comply with this federal mandate, the California State Department of Education has counted the CST-ELA test more heavily (48%) than the CAT 6 Reading test (6%) in determining a districts' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) target because it is standards based not norm-referenced.

The CST-ELA test was developed specifically to assess students' performance on California's Language-Arts Standards. The State Board of Education adopted these standards to specify what all California children are expected to know in reading and writing at the end of each grade. The California State Department of Education has provided five possible performance standard levels that can be used to measure student progress: (a) *far below basic*, (b) *below basic*, (c) *basic*, (d) *proficient*, and (e) *advanced*.

Table 6 shows the percentage of students from both groups who scored at each performance level in 2003 and 2004. All of the students in both groups scored at the *basic*, *below basic*, or *far below* levels in 2003, designating them *at-risk*. The same number of students in the treatment group of students scored at the *basic* level in 2004 (37%) as the control group (37%).

On the 2004 CST-ELA test only 9% of California's English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades met the *proficient* level requirement (California STAR State Summary Report, 2004). No consideration for *at-risk* status within this subgroup was reported or defined. The CST-ELA test results for this study reported that only 1% of the treatment group and 5% of the control group reached the *proficient* performance level. However, in the treatment group, the students in the *far below basic* level increased their performance by 34 percentage points, while the control group of students at the same level increased their performance by only 2 percentage points (see Table 6). The district involved in this study



did not recognize these significant performance differences because they were not relevant to the NCLB mandates needed in order to acquire Title I funding.

The recent EdTrust West (2004) report examining the STAR and CAHSEE data stated that Latino and African American 4th graders are over 2 times as likely as their White peers, and 3 times as likely as their Asian peers to score below or far below basic in reading. In the TLC program study, 72% of the students in the treatment group were classified as Hispanic/Latino (see Table 1, Chapter III), compared to 31% in the control group (see Table 2, Chapter III). All of the students in the treatment group were classified as low-income, but because the study could not provide a control for socioeconomic status, it is not known how many students in the control group came from low-income families. However, with the discrepancies in the population makeup of both groups, it is clear that some of the achievement differences (47% of the treatment group and only 21% of the control group remained at the *below basic* level) may be due to ethnicity and socioeconomics.

Table 6

Percentage of Students Scoring on CST Performance Levels

CST Performance Levels	T		C	
	2003	2004	2003	2004
5 – Advanced	.00	.00	.00	.00
4 – Proficient	.00	.01	.00	.05
3 – Basic	.22	.37	.37	.37
2 – Below Basic	.64	.47	.44	.21
1 – Far Below Basic	.13	.15	.19	.23

Note. T=Treatment Group (N=75), C=Control Group (N=75).

The researcher chose to use performance standard rankings rather than scaled scores on the chi-square test analysis of the CST-ELA because the scaled scores were not vertically aligned between grade levels. The chi-square test was used in order to ascertain differences in the CST-ELA 2003-04 performance level increases between the treatment and control group. The chi-square test determined whether the frequency (counts) differences in performance level increases were significant.

Table 7 shows the number of performance level increases in the treatment and control groups,  $\chi^2(4, 150) = 0.79, p > .05$  on the 2003-04 CST-ELA. Since  $\chi^2 > .05$ , the null hypothesis was accepted, the differences in performance level increases were rendered insignificant. There were equal frequency distributions for both groups showing that both the treatment and control group of students had equivalent performance level increases on the CST-ELA in 2004. Out of 75 students, 48% (35 students in the treatment group and 36 students in the control group) did not increase a performance level; however 32% (24 students in both the treatment and control groups) did increase one performance level.

Table 7

*Number of Student Increases on CST Performance Levels*

Performance Level Increases	T	C
-2	2	3
-1	12	9
0	35	36
1	24	24
2	2	3

*Note.* T=Treatment Group (N=75), C=Control Group (N=75).

*CAT 6 Reading Test*

Table 8 reports the t-test results of the 2004 CAT 6 Reading test. The purpose of administering the 2004 CAT 6 Reading test was to discover how well each student in the treatment group achieved in reading compared to the control group of students. In 2003-04, the CAT 6 Reading test was included as both a state and federal accountability measure to determine the district's AYP target; however because its indicator weight was substantially less than the CST-ELA test (6% compared to the 48%), the results of the CAT 6 Reading test were not considered significant to the district involved in this study.

The CAT 6 Reading test results contained averages and comparisons of norm-referenced scores across grades levels. Norm-referenced scores such as these are not normalized across grades and test forms; therefore, the researcher chose to use Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points rather than raw test scores. A t-test was performed on the 2003/2004 CAT 6 Reading tests to determine NCE differences between the treatment and control groups.

The t-test results on Table 8 report a statistically significant reading achievement difference in favor of the treatment group,  $t(148) = 1.89, p < .05$ . Results showed that English learners in the TLC program improved their reading and outperformed the students in control classes. The treatment group increased their reading achievement by 3.8 NCE's compared to the control group NCE increase of 0.1. National research conducted by Thomas and Collier (2001) found that effective English learner programs gaining at least 3-4 NCEs per year result in a full achievement gap closure that exists between English learners and their native English speaking peers. This finding suggests that the TLC program might be a successful alternative in closing the achievement gap.

Table 8

*T-Test Results of 2004 CAT 6 Reading and CELDT Tests*

Category	Mean		Std Deviation		df	t(df)	t(critical)	Sig.
	T	C	T	C				
CAT-6								
Reading	4.16	0.06	15.17	11.00	148	1.89	1.65	<i>s</i>
CELDT								
L/S	43.76	48.76	48.05	69.16	134	0.49	1.65	<i>ns</i>
Reading	34.32	22.75	40.24	42.25	134	1.63	1.6	<i>s</i>
Writing	30.14	12.02	56.33	34.58	134	2.26	1.65	<i>s</i>

Note. T=Treatment Group, C=Control Group. CAT-6 scores (N=75) CELDT scores (N=68)

*California English Language Development Test (CELDT)*

Table 8 reports the results of the 2004 CELDT tests in Listening/Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The CELDT test is an accountability measure mandated under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) specifically designed to monitor growth in English language proficiency skills for English learners. All California EL students are annually assessed and test results are reported in one of five ELD levels: (a) *beginning*, (b) *early intermediate*, (c) *intermediate*, (d) *early advanced*, and (e) *advanced*.

Students earn a raw score for each skill assessed on the CELDT. The state has converted the raw scores (number correct) to scale scores, which represent a specified numerical range. The researcher chose to use scale scores to determine differences between the treatment and control groups because unlike raw scores, scale scores permit the direct comparison of test results from one administration to another.

A t-test was performed on the scale scores of the 2003/2004 CELDT tests. There were 14 missing cases on the t-test analysis because some of the students involved in the

study were reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP) or did not return to the district in 2004.

On the 2004 CELDT Listening and Speaking test the t-test results report a non significant achievement difference between the treatment and control groups,  $t(134) = -0.49, p > .05$ . The t-test results on the 2004 CELDT Reading test report a statistically significant achievement difference in favor of the treatment group,  $t(134) = 1.63, p < .05$ , as well as on the 2004 CELDT Writing test,  $t(134) = 2.26, p < .05$ . The treatment group increased 33.1 points on the 2004 CELDT Reading test compared to the control group's increase of 25.2 points.

An unexpected finding on the CELDT test results was the achievement difference in writing. The treatment group increased 30 points compared to the control group's increase of only 12.4 points. This 17.6 point difference in achievement scores might be explained by the intrinsic relationship that exists between reading and writing skills.

### Research Question #3

The third question posed for this study was – How will TLC affect the reading comprehension progress of the treatment group in seven months? The QRI-3 Informal Reading Inventory was given to the students in the treatment group three different times throughout the year. The teachers in the TLC program administered and individually scored the tests. The purpose of the test was to ascertain growth pattern differences in student reading achievement between the fall, winter, and spring. There was a 4 month time span between the fall and winter tests and a 3 month time span between the winter and spring tests.

Table 9 shows the grade level mean obtained by the treatment group of students in the fall, winter, and spring testing sessions. The results show that although the average 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade student could read at only a beginning 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level in the fall, by the spring, he/she could read at a beginning 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Reading ability grew one year in 7 months.

A longitudinal study conducted by Thomas and Collier (1999) indicates that English learners who are instructed exclusively in English normally make one year's reading growth in 15 months. The treatment group of students involved in the TLC program study outperformed the students in the Thomas and Collier (1999) study. They made one year's reading growth in less than half the time.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics on QRI-3 Scores

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
QRI Fall	3.08	.85	75
QRI Winter	3.58	1.11	75
QRI Spring	4.10	1.17	75

The researcher chose to analyze the QRI-3 reading test scores by using a one way ANOVA general linear model. Table 9 shows that on the tests of within-subjects contrasts there was a significant linear trend ( $F=143,566$ ), indicating that each successive score was significantly higher than the previous one. The partial  $\eta^2$  indicated that the linear trend accounted for 66% of the variance in scores. These results provide strong evidence that the TLC program could be successfully used as a reading intervention program for helping *at-risk* English learners achieve grade level norms.

Table 10

*General Linear One Way ANOVA for QRI-3 Scores*

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig	Partial $\eta^2$
Between Subjects						
Intercept	2892.65	1	2893.65	999.29	.00	.93
Error	214.21	74				
Within Subjects						
QRI-3	39.02	1	39.02	143.57	.00	.66
Error	20.12	74	272			

## Research Question #4

The fourth question posed for this study was – How will teachers and students perceive the benefits of TLC instruction? The researcher investigated teacher and student perceptions of the TLC program through the content analysis of teacher and student surveys and teacher interviews. The research results are presented sequentially by interview or survey question. The number of meaning units derived from the content analysis is displayed in relationship to the total number of meaning units within the theme. The total percentage of meaning units for each theme is presented in an adjacent column.

Table 11 presents the results of the teacher surveys and interviews. A complete transcription of the teacher interviews can be found in Appendix A. Question #1 asked teachers to describe the benefits of meeting with students in small groups. The teachers stated that they observed several positive psychosocial effects related to how the

Table 11

*Teacher TLC Program Perceptions*

Question	Themes	No.	%
1 - Small Group Benefits	Psychosocial	98/128	.77
	Academic Skills	30/128	.23
2 - Effective Reading Comprehension Strategies	Text-to-self Connections	8/23	.35
	Predicting	5/23	.22
	Asking Questions	5/23	.22
	Summarizing	2/23	.08
	Visualizing	2/23	.08
	Clarifying	1/23	.04
3 - Advantages to Leveled Books	Psychosocial	38/47	.81
	Academic Skills	9/47	.19
4 - Modes of Integration With Language Arts	Differentiated Instruction	11/20	.74
	Reading Workshop	5/20	.25
	Cross Curricular	3/20	.15
	Centers	1/20	.06
5 - Future TLC Modifications	Use Relevant Books	7/22	.32
	Increase Cultural Connections	5/22	.23
	No Changes	4/22	.18
	Increase Cross Curricular Connections	3/22	.14
	Decrease Use of Harvey Daniels Literature Circles	2/22	.09
	Increase Student Led Groups	1/22	.05
	Create Fewer Groups	1/22	.05



students felt about themselves as readers and how they felt about reading with their peers.

When asked to describe the number one benefit of TLC, one fifth grade teacher responded,

“I observed a lot of confidence and enthusiasm. They were excited to come to the literature circle and talk about their book. Because they were in their own peer group they were talking more. I think if they were in a larger group they would have never raised their hand. It would have been beyond them. But in the small group they all contributed and all talked about things like that.”

Table 11 indicates that most of the teachers observed a marked increase for psychosocial effects in (a) motivation, (b) confidence, (c) interest, (d) engagement, (e) reading self esteem, (f) enthusiasm, (g) sense of community, (h) participation, (i) social interaction, (j) cultural identity, (k) teacher connection, (l) self directed learning and (m) security in reading. The teachers also noted an increase in skill development related to academic learning in reading and other content areas. The teachers observed a marked increase for academic effects related to (a) reading comprehension, (b) use of reading comprehension strategies and (c) content area learning.

Question #2 asked the teachers to identify the reading strategies they found most effective in increasing the reading comprehension of their EL students. All of the teachers stated that they observed an increase in the overall use of reading comprehension strategies by their students. Most of the teachers felt that the use of text-to-self connections markedly increased the reading comprehension of their students because it caused them to relate culturally to the book. Text-to-self connections encouraged the students to connect what was going on in the book with their own personal life experiences. The teachers reported that many students began to see themselves in a book for the first time. One teacher commented,

*“Esperanza Rising* was a special connection because it had a dual language...Spanish and English. Those kids felt like successes right off the bat because they could tell me things that I didn’t know. They were the experts. So that was very important to them. Then there were a lot of family issues that come up in *Esperanza Rising*...things like the grandmother passing away, or the family struggling with finances, or moving from Mexico to the United States and feeling like outcasts. And so the kids really related to that. Especially with the population here at this school...they know it because they have lived it. And even kids who come from places like the Philippines or Vietnam, they were able to relate too because it is all about coming to a new country...starting over...and not maybe being accepted by other kids.”

Question #3 asked teachers how they felt about having the students read different books at individual reading levels. Most of the teachers stated that they observed a marked increase in psychosocial effects. One fourth grade teacher stated,

“I think like teacher P was saying, I think that they are able to talk more. Like sometimes they may be intimidated by what they think are the smarter kids...the ones that are always answering the questions. And they felt more comfortable working at their own level. And I realized, usually we split a group up if it is not in TLC and we say it is either that table or this table or mixed levels. At primary we used to do a lot of leveling but we don’t do that much at intermediate. Perhaps they had memories back to primary when they could do guided reading with the same level kids. So I was impressed when a lot of them said, ‘You know, I like working with the same level kids.’ That is probably because, like I said, they may feel intimidated because somebody always has the answer ready before they even know it. I think that is interesting.”

Table 11 indicates that many of the teachers noticed an increase in (a) motivation, (b) confidence, (c) enthusiasm, (d) security, (e) the feeling of belonging, (f) participation, (g) student perceptions of reading, (h) sense of community, (i) self directed learning, and (j) reading self esteem. During the interviews, the teachers indicated that the academic benefits of reading leveled books were (a) an increase in general reading skills,

(b) vocabulary development, (c) reading comprehension strategy use, (d) cross curricular connections, and (e) content area learning.

Question #4 asked the teachers how they used Transactional Literature Circles with their general language arts program. The teachers described several modes of integration. Most of the teachers found that TLC provided an effective model of literacy differentiation for all of their students. Although it is common for mainstream classrooms to be impacted by a broad range of student needs, the teachers in this study found that they could use TLC to meet the literacy needs of their special education, gifted, and grade level students as well as their English learners. Additionally, the teachers felt that the TLC program had a lot of flexibility. They realized that they could use trade books within a social studies or science theme, which allowed them to deliver cross curricular instruction while teaching nonfiction reading comprehension strategies.

Question #5 asked the teachers to describe how they might modify their TLC program next year. Most of the teachers expressed a need to acquire more culturally relevant literature for their students to read. They recognized that a discussion oriented book had to contain multicultural perspectives and some element of social controversy. The teachers stated that because of the recent mandates to use scripted reading programs, it had been 15 years since the district had purchased class sets of children's literature, which were now outdated, culturally biased, and in disparate need of repair. Therefore, many of the teachers had to purchase class sets of books on their own which became a real frustration and one of the greatest roadblocks for successfully implementing their TLC program.

Table 12 presents the results of the student surveys. In addition to investigating teacher perceptions, the researcher wanted to understand how the students perceived the TLC program. The researcher used student surveys distributed by their classroom teachers in May 2004 to explore how they felt about the program. The students responded in writing to three questions on the survey.

Table 12

*Student TLC Program Perceptions*

Question	Themes	No.	%
1 – TLC Program Benefits	Psychosocial	77/99	.77
	Academic Skills	22/99	.22
2 – Benefits of Small Group Learning	Comprehension	15/93	.16
	Reading Skill Development	13/93	.14
	Teacher Interaction	10/93	.11
	Discussion	10/93	.11
	Quiet, Enjoyable, Comfortable	10/93	.11
	Vocabulary Understanding	9/93	.10
	Teacher Explanation About Vocabulary and Main Ideas	8/93	.09
	Opportunities to Ask and Answer Questions	7/93	.08
3 – Things Learned About Reading	Small Group Thinking and Working Together	6/93	.07
	Using Reading Strategies	36/76	.47
	Reading Is Fun	21/76	.28
	Textual Understanding	13/76	.17
	Vocabulary Understanding	6/76	.07

Question #1 asked students what they enjoyed most about TLC. Most of the students reported an increase in psychosocial rather than academic benefits. Over half of the students used the words *enjoyed*, *liked* or *fun* in their responses. Some of the benefits reported by the students included: (a) making family connections, (b) being able to talk about the book while reading it, (c) learning to enjoy reading, and (d) working together in a small group. One sixth grade student commented, “What I enjoyed most was that I got to see what other people thought or what their perspective was.” Another added, “I liked that we worked as a team, not individually.” A fifth grade student said, “What I liked most was that I could share what I read.” A fourth grade student added, “It was fun to work with students in a small group at my level.”

Question #2 asked students what they enjoyed about learning from their teacher in a small group. Many of the students reported that the increase in reading comprehension and general reading skills was a direct result of small group interaction with their teacher. The students indicated that the time their teacher spent explaining the vocabulary and discussing the main ideas of the story had a direct effect on their ability to understand and retain major ideas in the text. One sixth grade student wrote, “I learned how to write good questions and how to understand the book better.” A fifth grade student shared, “I’ve enjoyed my teacher explaining things that I really didn’t understand.” A fourth grade student wrote, “I like the way the teacher explained to us the words that we didn’t understand.” Another student added, “I learned faster in a small group because it was more comfortable.”

Question #3 asked students what they learned about reading during the school year. The students’ replies reported a significant academic benefit. Most of the students

indicated that the number one thing they learned about reading was how to use reading strategies to help them comprehend and retain the main ideas of the text. One sixth grade student wrote, "I learned new words and their meanings and how to do predictions." Another added, "I read *Hatchet* and I think I learned a lot about survival, family divorce, and bravery." A fifth grade student wrote, "I have learned that you can compare life to reading and other books." A fourth grade student said, "This year I learned how to predict, clarify, summarize, and question while I read." Another added, "I learned to picture the movie playing in my head." A sixth grade student said, "I learned how to mark a word or pages that I felt were too hard to read, or ones that were interesting that I could talk about." A final sixth grade student who was three years below grade level wrote, "I am happy because I have been improving in my reading skills."

These findings from the student surveys indicated that 47% of the students successfully learned how to employ reading comprehension strategies with various texts thus increasing their reading metacognition. The students became consciously aware of what they could do when their reading comprehension was breaking down.

The second most often mentioned aspect of reading that the students learned was that reading was fun. This positive emotional response to reading was important because it was also noted in the teacher surveys and interviews. One fourth grade student wrote, "Reading is very fun. It boosts your imagination." Another wrote, "Reading is fun because you learn a lot of new things." A fifth grade student said, "The best thing about reading is that it is quiet, enjoyable and I learn a lot." A fifth grade student said, "Now I love to read."

## Conclusion

The results presented above clearly indicate that the TLC program had a positive impact on the academic and psychosocial aspects of reading in the students who participated in the program. The students in the treatment group academically outperformed the students in the control group on 3 out of 5 standardized tests annually given in California. They also made significant progress in reading throughout the year. Overall, students increased one grade level of reading in seven months.

The most obvious effect of the TLC program was the increase in reading strategy development. Over 47% of the students indicated that the effective use of reading strategies was the number one thing they learned about reading. Increased use of effective reading strategies not only resulted in improved comprehension for these students, but it also resulted in increased engagement, motivation to read, confidence, and a willingness to participate in whole class discussions. Both the teachers and the students noted an increase in reading self-efficacy as a direct result of weekly small group discussion with their teacher and peers.

Both the treatment and control group of students involved in this study were in the same class as thousands of other mainstreamed English learner students in California who receive inadequate literacy instruction, thus limiting their access to the educational advantages experienced by their native English speaking peers. The conclusions drawn from this study indicate that Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) can change this disparaging paradigm because this pedagogy encompasses a learning community that considers both the academic and psychosocial needs of all learners. Each student in the TLC program felt secure in taking risks and trusting the guidance of others. Active

literacy events created by the teacher focused the students on culturally relevant understandings. As a result, TLC empowered both the teachers and the students to participate in a learning community that promoted critical discussions and equal status relationships. Equity infused instructional models like TLC will mark the beginning of meaningful reform in California because it provides students with the conceptual tools necessary to develop a critical vision of justice.

We must not allow ourselves to become like the system we oppose. We cannot afford to use methods of which we will be ashamed when we look back, when we say, '...we shouldn't have done that.' We must remember, my friends, that we have been given a wonderful cause. The cause of freedom! And you and I must be those who will walk with heads held high. We will say, 'We used methods that can stand the harsh scrutiny of history.'

--Archbishop Desmond Tutu  
Nobel Prize for Peace (1984)



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This study examined a problem that many mainstream elementary teachers face today – how to successfully improve second language reading comprehension skills for English learners in an English only environment. Mainstreamed English learner students in the U.S. receive inadequate literacy instruction, thus limiting their ability to achieve educational parity with their native English speaking peers. Mainstream classroom teachers receive little or no training in effective instructional practices that will allow their English learners to become active, contributing members of their classrooms (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002).

Although there are several comprehensive reviews of the literature with regard to second language reading in general (Bernhardt, 1991; Ramírez, 1994; Fitzgerald, 1995; Kerper-Mora, 1999; Geva & Verhoeven, 2000), there is a dearth of research focusing specifically on successful literacy approaches for monolingual, mainstream teachers (Snow, 2000; Grant & Wong, 2003).

#### Review of the Methodology

This study examined both the academic and psychosocial effects of the Transactional Literature Circles Program (TLC) on *at-risk*, English learners. Multiple sources of evidence archivally collected under the auspices of the school district were used to provide the researcher with an in depth understanding of the program's impact on the reading comprehension of second language readers who struggled to succeed in mainstream classroom settings.

The data utilized for this study was collected from the district sponsored TLC reading program that was piloted during the 2003-2004 school year. The researcher, who was also the designer of the TLC program, was directed by the district to lead the pilot. The quantitative program results were retrieved from three data sources that were used to assess reading achievement and growth:

- the 2003/2004 California STAR Test in English-Language Arts (CST-ELA)
- the 2003/2004 California Achievement Tests for Reading (CAT-6)
- the 2003/2004 California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

In addition to reading achievement, the researcher examined district-collected data that measured the reading progress of students in the TLC program. The district decided to use the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-3) to track reading comprehension growth in each student. Classroom teachers involved in the study were directed to individually test each student three times throughout the 2003-04 school year.

The qualitative data retrieved for this study included an examination of teacher and student perceptions of the TLC program. Teacher survey and interview results were used to determine the effect of the TLC program on the students' reading ability and motivation. Student survey results were used to examine the benefits of the TLC program from the students' point of view.

The treatment group included 75 English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades at two Title I elementary schools who were designated *at-risk* because they scored 325 or lower on the 2003 CST-ELA test. A control group of 75 students meeting the same criteria were chosen from 7 other elementary schools throughout the district. The four research questions posed for this study were:

1. How closely will the teachers in the study align their TLC program to the ideal model?
2. How will TLC affect the reading comprehension of mainstream, at-risk, English learners in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade compared with a control group of the same population in one school year?
3. How will TLC affect the reading comprehension progress of the treatment group in seven months?
4. How will teachers and students perceive the benefits of TLC instruction?

### Summary of Results

The results of this study indicate that the TLC program positively impacted the reading comprehension of the mainstream, *at-risk*, English learners who participated in this nine month study. Major findings include:

- All of the teachers in the study aligned the technical application of the TLC program to the ideal model at the *accomplished – exemplary* level.
- There were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups on the 2004 CST-ELA test. Neither group met the district's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) target of 13.6 % reaching the *proficient* level.
- The students in the treatment group outperformed the students in the control group on the 2004 CAT 6 Reading test.
- There were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups on the 2004 CELDT test for Listening and Speaking.
- The students in the treatment group outperformed the students in the control group on the 2004 CELDT tests for Reading and Writing.
- The students in the treatment group increased one grade level of reading on the QRI-3 reading test in 7 months.

- The teachers and students in the TLC program noted an increase in reading engagement and motivation resulting in increased reading self efficacy, confidence, and a willingness to participate in whole class discussions.
- The students in the treatment group noted an increase in the use of reading comprehension strategies, which helped them understand and retain important ideas in the text.

### Discussion of the Results

The significant findings of this study provide an answer to the problem that plagues many mainstream elementary teachers in California – how to successfully raise reading comprehension skills for English learners in an English only environment. Despite the pressures of raising test scores on mandated standardized tests and the push toward using scripted basal reading programs, the teachers involved in this study took a risk in changing their reading instructional program. All of these teachers had experienced the frustration of using ineffective instructional strategies found in basal reading programs (Cummins, 2002; Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Walsh, 2003) as the primary means by which to improve reading comprehension for language minority students. So they bravely put the newly adopted reading series on the shelf and began rummaging through the book room attempting to find adequate sets of children's literature that could be used for the program.

Although 5 out of the 14 teachers involved in the program were relatively new to the field, they were willing to put their principal evaluations and tenured positions on the line because they believed that the program would work. This dedication to the heart of

teaching explains why all of the teachers reasonably implemented the TLC program close to the model that was presented. During a teacher interview, one teacher responded,

“To me reading only from the basal gives them the message that you can only read something partly. You can never read anything from beginning to end. And what does that do to their confidence? It makes them not want to read because they can’t read. They say to themselves, ‘I am only able to read this part.’ So they never have mastery over a whole story from beginning to end. They never have mastery over a story that they know they can digest and interact with. It’s just so disabling.”

Such spoken and unspoken messages educators communicate to children about the value of their language and culture are a critical part of how well children learn and succeed in school (Cummins, 1986; Collier, 1995). The TLC program was theoretically based on Cummins’ Theory of Empowerment (1986), which states that minority students are *empowered* or *disabled* as a direct result of their interactions with educators in school. His premise stating that ability added to confidence and motivation results in academic success seems to be the primary reason why teachers saw their students outperform students in the control group on the 2004 CAT 6 test for Reading, and the 2004 CELDT Reading and Writing tests. Important components of the Cummins’ Theory are four dimensions that directly affect whether a minority student will become *empowered* or *disabled*:

1. Incorporate the student’s language and culture into the curriculum.
2. Incorporate the student’s community into the curriculum.
3. Use interactive instructional strategies
4. Adopt an advocacy orientation in the assessment process.

Instructing students in small group settings helped teachers acknowledge and respond to their students’ unique cultural orientations, values, and learning styles (Banks

& Banks, 2003), thus positively affecting achievement outcomes (Boateng, 1990). As teachers began encouraging students to transact with the text and each other, effective learning experiences built on and added to what was already present in their lives (Ogbu, 1999). Reading skills began to improve when a change in the teaching protocol occurred; thus synchronizing instructional procedures with the mental schemata, participation styles, and experiential frames of reference of their diverse ethnic backgrounds (Gay, 2000).

The achievement growth on the CAT 6 Reading test in this study could be considered remarkable according to the recent Thomas and Collier research completed in 2001. The students in this study's treatment group made a 3.8 NCE growth on the 2004 CAT 6 Reading Test compared to the .1 NCE growth of the control group. This difference in growth is a direct result of the school program according to Thomas and Collier who found that EL students being schooled all in English initially make dramatic gains in grades K-3, whatever type of program they receive. However, although districts assume that EL students are going to do extremely well, they do not detect that these students generally fall behind the typical achievement levels of native-English-speakers by 1-4 NCEs each year, resulting in a very significant achievement gap beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. In order to reverse that gap, Thomas and Collier state that schools must offer programs in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grades, that result in a 3-4 NCE gain each year in order to close this gap. The current mainstream program that exists in California has resulted in a 0.1 NCE gain and gap closure (Thomas & Collier, 2001). The only program found by Thomas and Collier to fully close the achievement gap so far has been two-way bilingual

education. The TLC program results (growth of 3.8 NCEs) point to a possible alternative in a state, which has prohibited the use of bilingual education under Prop 227.

The students in the TLC program were reported to have gained one grade level growth in seven months according to the QRI-3 reading inventory. This achievement gain is again in stark contrast to the Collier and Thomas (1999) research findings, which indicates that English learners who are instructed exclusively in English normally make one year's reading growth in 15 months. The treatment group of students involved in the TLC program study seemed to equal the students in the Thomas and Collier (1997) study in 7 months. These results indicate that mainstream classroom instruction can work as long as culturally relevant constructivist pedagogy is used.

An important finding about the TLC program came from the students themselves. Over 47% of the students indicated an increase in the use of many different reading comprehension strategies. In her article summarizing the effects of successful second language reading strategies, Carrell (1998) observed that the use of such strategies demonstrates both *metacognition and motivation*. Carrell's review revealed that there were no one-to-one relationships between particular strategies and successful reading comprehension. She suggested that readers reporting the use of a number of different strategies tended to perform higher on various comprehension measures.

Both the teachers and the students who participated in the TLC program stated that the use of effective reading comprehension strategies not only resulted in improved comprehension, but also resulted in increased engagement, motivation to read, confidence, and a willingness to participate in whole class discussions. This result concurs with Carrell's (1998) research review, which stated that the inclusion of

metacognition in reading strategy instruction significantly increased the second language reader's understanding of the text and their motivation to read.

The majority of the teachers in the TLC program (69%) adopted a *multiple literacies perspective* (Auerbach, 1995) that focused on home-school connections. TLC gave the teachers an opportunity to connect what happened in the literature circle books with the outside world. Both the teachers and the students found that reading motivation and engagement increased because of regular small group interaction that employed a critical literacy stance. The teachers and the students developed a "critical relationship with their own knowledge" (Shor, 1992, p. 132). In one teacher interview, a teacher commented "For the first time students began to talk about the ideas of prejudice and racism. It was hard at first. They realized they were seeing it in the book, yet they didn't want to admit it. It took a lot of prompting before they actually began relating it to their own lives and bringing it up in our book club discussions."

Peregoy and Boyle (2000) have suggested that cultural background knowledge is a powerful variable in reading comprehension because it increases understanding as it interacts with difficult vocabulary in the text. Without cultural prior knowledge, students reading a second language text may not always understand the complete idea or vocabulary of the passage. The students in the TLC program found that the most powerful reading comprehension strategy was the use of text-to-self connections. The teachers found that discussions around these connections not only increased comprehension, but ultimately formed a sense of community within the group.

This finding concurs with research conducted in 1998 by Au & Raphael who stated that transaction oriented literacy activities foster productive teacher-student, and



student-student relationships and communication. These productive relationships are shaped when students' interest and involvement in meaningful literacy activities serve as the starting point for instruction. One teacher in a combination 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade TLC classroom shared,

“I had two 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in my target group and they really added life experiences to our discussions. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the group really looked up to them. They enjoyed hearing about those personal connections. There was a boy that told me one story really made him weep. He said he cried and cried when we got to that part of the story. The story talked about losing a mom and he just connected with that so personally that it really touched him. When he shared that with the group, the group just got a whole new understanding of him as a kid because he had always put up this *tough guy* front. That's what the transactional part of TLC is all about: students are transacting not just with the book, but also with their own lives. There are so many things with teaching that we do that are really ineffective. They are just kind of part of what we think is supposed to work, but when push comes to shove, the kids talking about things that kids have read is just so important. It is so important that their voice gets heard and that other people listen to what they have to say. And that just doesn't happen in a whole class with thirty-three kids. That can't happen with whole group instruction.”

The teachers and the students who participated in the TLC program noted an increase in reading self-efficacy as a direct result of weekly small group discussion with their teacher and peers. Many of the teachers (69%) in the TLC program reported using the Instructional Conversations (IC) approach during their small group literature circles discussion. In Echevarria's (1995) study examining the effects of IC on the language and concept development of Hispanic students, she found that the IC approach produced higher levels of discourse and greater participation than with a basal approach. Guthrie, McGough, Bennett and Rice (1996) described engaged readers as motivated to read for a variety of personal goals. They are strategic in using multiple approaches to comprehend,

knowledgeable in their construction of new understandings from text, and socially interactive in their approach to literacy. Their reading engagement is strongly correlated with reading achievement. Students who read actively and frequently improve their reading comprehension (Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992).

Many of the TLC teachers also reported observing an increase in interest and amount of reading because the students were motivated to prepare a response for the small group discussion. One 6<sup>th</sup> grade TLC teacher reported,

“Once they started reading and we talked about the book, I couldn’t get them to shut up. I just wanted to talk about a few key words or something. Next thing you know, they were talking about this or that. Or how this would work or how that would work, or what this would be like in Mexico, or what women ought to do in this situation. All of these roles were discussed. I tried to push them along in the book, but they just kept jabbering away about the connections to their lives. I guess I’ve learned that it’s not so much about the book. It’s about the people and how they are relating to what is in the book, and developing the sense of community around the book.”

Reform efforts such as TLC can erase the achievement gap because they promote literacy ownership. For *at-risk* English learners, ownership of literacy is the key to academic success (Au & Raphael, 2000; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davis, & Kouzekanani, 2003; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000). Students with literacy ownership understand the personal aspects of literacy, which leads to positive attitudes about literacy and habits of using literacy in everyday life for their own purposes. Helping students gain ownership of literacy contributes to their empowerment because students realize they have tools of communication that can be used to gain a better understanding of the world.

The TLC educators in this study were not surprised that “what is taught is not necessarily what is learned” (Pollard, Thiessen, & Filer, 1997. p.5). They realized that what is learned is what students take from their experiences, not only as shown on standardized tests, but also in terms of how students connect with their own life experiences. Students’ experiences of reading in school are building blocks for learning how to “read the world and their lives critically and relatedly” (Shor, 1992, p. 132). How the students in this study perceived reading in school was powerful in informing teachers about their instructional practice on many levels.

#### Recommendations for Educators and Suggestions for Further Research

The TLC program implemented during the 2003-04 school year was not easy. All of the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in both pilot schools were mandated to participate in the TLC program. This caused some resentment among the teachers and administrators, which took several months to overcome. However, when the researcher maintained weekly support through demonstration lessons and frequent dialogue, positive student responses eventually occurred which changed the teachers’ attitudes and helped them buy in to the validity of the program.

The response of the district in this study is common in our highly politicized educational system. In 2003-04, the district involved in this study considered the CST-ELA test results of this study very significant because the results reported that only 1% of the treatment group reached the *proficient level* thus jeopardizing their Title I funding. In 2003, NCLB required that all districts ensure that 13.6% of their students at each school reach the *proficient level* on the CST-ELA test. Though the students in the lowest level of the TLC treatment group increased their performance by 34 percentage points, the district

did not consider these results relevant because NCLB does not reward growth or improvement. Thus the efforts of the TLC program were disregarded by the district and not given further consideration.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) financial support has been reduced to the interpretation of arbitrary test scores that marginalize English learners and alternative reform efforts. Well intentioned though NCLB may be, certain aspects of the law actually deter districts from fostering academic growth for English learners (Olsen, 2005). In his recent 2005 Educational Leadership article, Olsen reports that the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements mandated by NCLB skew school improvement efforts by considering only a narrow group of students who perform at the *proficient* level. Other students who have fallen far behind are lumped into the non-proficient group even though those students may have demonstrated dramatic growth, which actually reflects school success. This was the case at both schools involved in this pilot.

It is recommended that educators remember that one test cannot accurately reflect everything that a person knows and is able to do. Low scores on the California STAR Tests may mean nothing more than that a learner has not yet mastered enough English to demonstrate his or her reading skills on a test. Multiple assessments, including some performance-based (QRI-3) or alternative assessments (surveys/interviews) that mirror what students are learning in class, could be used to paint a much more accurate picture of students' knowledge, skills, and progress than any single test score could indicate. High-stakes decisions need to be carefully made regarding a program with high numbers of English learners based solely on standardized test data. Such data may not accurately

account for student progress, nor will it necessarily be reflective of instructional quality or program effectiveness (Coltrane, 2002).

The findings in this study benefited from using multiple measures to obtain a complete picture (Krathwohl, 1998). The researcher integrated several data sources to obtain information from multiple perspectives. The TLC program effectiveness was not just based on standardized achievement data; teacher/student perspectives and program implementation were equally considered in the final analysis. The formation of literacy communities, increased reader self-efficacy, motivation and enthusiasm could not have been found within standardized test data. These perspectives were discovered through conversations with the teachers and students themselves who were delighted to share their own individual experiences.

Suggestions for future research include examining the effect of quality family literacy programs on Transactional Literature Circles. Family literacy programs such as the model implemented by Morrow & Young (1997) which connects home and school literacy contexts by involving parents in developmentally appropriate literacy activities with their children, and Keis (2002) who uses children's literature in Spanish as a springboard to family literacy projects should be considered as valuable tools to enhance and further develop the TLC program model.

Additional suggestions for further research include examining the effects of quality multicultural literature on the reading engagement of students in a TLC classroom. Opening up culturally relevant notions of text allows teachers to think in terms of literacy for social change because the author's meaning is situated in the reader's head in such a way that the message can be questioned, critiqued, and used in socially

empowering ways. The researcher believes that whatever efforts are made to create spaces for extended discussions about literature will be richly rewarded as students begin to forge deep connections to books through TLC.

A final suggestion for further research involves the need to look beyond the short term results of TLC. How would the possibility of following the students and their achievement beyond one year affect the final outcome of the TLC program effectiveness? Thomas and Collier (2001) state that mainstream programs associated with achievement gap closure (annual growth of 3-4 NCEs) can only be measured longitudinally across six years. If the TLC program results for the 2003-2004 school year were repeated for six years, these students may well end up scoring on par with their English speaking peers on all achievement tests.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reflects the belief that the basic premises and organizational structures of schools should be reformed to reflect the nation's multicultural realities (Banks, 1991a). The curriculum should be reorganized so that ethnic and cultural diversity is an integral, natural, and normal component of educational experiences for all students, with ethnic and cultural content accepted and used in everyday instruction, and with various ethnic and cultural perspectives introduced (Banks, 1991b).

TLC is more than a reading intervention; it is a reform effort that incorporates the idea that “all students regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (Banks & Banks, 2003, p. 3). The transactions that occur in TLC not only foster the development

of such fundamental skills and abilities as reading, thinking, and decision making but they also teach young students to engage in conversations about social realities experienced in their daily lives. In a letter to three students, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1967) wrote, "Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice."

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Appendixes



## Appendix A

## TLC Transcripts

## Pilot School #1

R = Researcher

Interview with G.  
4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.

R: OK, so, what I wanted to talk to you about today is... I wanted you to kind of think back through the year and describe the benefits that you saw when you were meeting with the kids in small groups. What exactly happened there? It could be that you saw an increase in certain skills that you taught them. It could be that you saw an increase in the motivation to read or things started clicking with them, just because they were with you...and just maybe comments that they made to you that let you know that working with them in a small group was really beneficial.

G: Right... Well, definitely working in a small group did reinforce the mini lessons that I did as a whole group. You know, as a whole class. And then when we met, we would sort have gone over, you know, the mini lesson and use, apply it to, the reading. So... it was good for reinforcement. The students also...I've seen have more motivation to read the books because they knew that we were meeting in a small group. And we were going to discuss, you know, the books in depth. And so they were more motivated to read. And also, just, doing the whole TLC thing. I think it also helped them to visualize what they're reading. That's one thing that they really improved on. You know, before they just read, "The girl was just standing in the room and there was a desk there and you know, books over here." They just read through it, you know. But now, I see them actually picturing the girl, where the desk is located, and where the books are. And it really, allows them to be in the story. And I think that's what the students were lacking before, you know. And so they, no matter what level they're at, you know, they're able to visualize.

R: Visualize

G: ... what they're reading.

R: That's great. That is probably, the one strategy they liked the most.

G: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And also...I incorporated the reciprocal teaching strategies. And so, that really helped them with the predicting and asking questions.

I mean they still needed to work on in depth questioning, you know. I mean, especially with books that were a little easier, you know. They said, "Oh, I don't know what question to ask...I don't have any questions."

R: Right.

G: But then, I was always able to give them a question. And so they still needed their practice.

R: Yeah, yeah. How did you deal with having them read different books at their level? And how did they feel about that?

G: Everyone was really comfortable with that. You know, I was afraid that they all sort of thought, oh she's in a high group or he's in a high group and low group...whatever, but, there was really no bad talk or anything like that.

R: Yeah, yeah.

G: I think talking to them about the books in a whole class book talk really helped.

R: Yeah.

G: Before I passed out the books...I got really excited about the books. No matter what level they were at. And so, they're like, "Oh if the teacher is excited about it then it must be good."

R: Yeah.

G: ...I'm excited about it. Yeah, and so, they really enjoyed being in their own levels. And, they weren't frustrated, you know. If somebody's a low reader and they're reading, you know a high book, obviously they're going to be frustrated

R: Right, right.

G: They're having a much easier time with their reading.

R: You were really fortunate, because you had a parent that had help do some of the small groups.

G: Yeah.

R: How, how did that go with the parent?

G: That went really well because she took the lowest groups...the kids who were almost non-English speakers...some that were just really learning English for the first time. They had only been here for maybe a year.

- R: Right, right.
- G: And so she was really able to help me because...I had like six different groups going on. You know, and so without her help, I wouldn't have been able to meet with all of them.
- T: Right.
- G: You know, and she came in every...Monday, Wednesday, Thursday...or something like that. Three times a week.
- R: Did you see growth in those kids?
- G: Oh, yeah.
- R: As a result...What kind of growth did you see?
- G: Uh, they were more confident in speaking. You know, because she did apply a lot of the reciprocal teaching and TLC things. And so, you know...they raised their hands in class to talk.
- R: Great!
- G: You know, I think that was the biggest improvement. Before they were so shy and they didn't want to say anything. But now...and even if they are wrong they don't care.
- R: Yeah. So it kind of helped them participate more...
- G: Yeah.
- R: ...in other avenues in the classroom.
- G: Exactly.
- R: ... other than just the small group.
- G: Exactly, exactly.
- R: So, are you going to do pieces of it next year?
- G: Oh, yeah, definitely.
- R: What, what, how are you gonna modify it? Change it.

- G: I think next year...I don't want to have so many different groups. Maybe, I'll limit it to like five. Instead of like six or seven, now that I know the books well. There are some books that I don't know if I would use early on. Maybe I'd use later on. Things like that.
- R: So fewer groups.
- G: Yeah, fewer groups.
- R: And now that you know the books...
- G: Yeah, I would sort of...you know...change what books go in which level. There were some books that weren't as deep as I wanted them to be. Like...*How to Eat Fried Worms*. It was a fun book...but there wasn't enough thinking required...you know.
- R: Right, right, right. I have really found that the books you use not only have to be kind of interesting to the kids, but there has to be some kind of controversy in there...something for the kids to talk about.
- G: Yeah, exactly.
- R: Otherwise, it's like they read and say "Okay...there's something bad that's happened...so what?"
- G: Exactly.
- R: So how would you incorporate the basal series into meeting with the kids in small groups? And would you still use trade books in addition to the basal next year?
- G: You mean like Houghton Mifflin?
- R: Yeah.
- G: Houghton Mifflin is good...I think...but not as a starting point, because usually the book is just way too high.
- R: Yeah, it is.
- G: But maybe if I were doing like a whole group mini lesson I would use it. Since there are copies for everyone...you know...it would be easy to use for that reason. But, I don't think I'd use it for a small group or anything like that...but maybe for whole class. That's what I have been doing this year...just using it as a whole group thing.

R: ...or to teach a skill. Since there are copies for everyone...you know...it would be easy to use for that reason. But, I don't think I'd use it for a small group.

G: Yeah, exactly.

R: Yeah, that's great. Well listen I really appreciate all your hard work.

Interview with S.  
4th grade teacher.

R: So, how...did your kids do on the QRI?

S: You know what? Some of the kids when up about like one grade level. The boys like Eric...

S: Yeah...at least one grade level.

R: Uh, huh.

S: And their writing was really good. I was really very surprised. I had them write something last week.

R: Uh, huh.

S: I compared to something they wrote at the first day of the school.

R: Yes.

S: And I was excited about that...because I thought...gosh...you know.

R: They really improved.

S: They really did better on their multi paragraph writing.

R: Good.

S: And they're...I mean... they're really good. And I looked at the scores I gave them in August and the score I gave them now...It was much better.

R: Great.

S: I think that had to do with the reading too.

R: Yeah, I think so too. So tell me...how do you think they benefited from meeting with you in a small group?

- S: They got more one on one time with me. When you work with a smaller group it's easier...the kids get more attention. I think they benefited that way. Like I noticed student #4 especially... he just seemed more interested in reading. He'd always ask questions, he was really into it. When we had discussions as a whole class, he wasn't as into it.
- R: He was kinda lost?
- S: Yeah, but individually... he was more engaged.
- R: So how do you think it helped your EL students? There were two that were low.
- S: I had two, but student #1 was a special Ed student too...so he had a special problem. Student #2 came late in the year. I wasn't doing as much TLC then. Now student #3...she did very well. She speaks English very well. She and student #4 are both EL students. But I think they did do better. It made it more exciting to teach reading...more interesting.
- R: So, are you going do small groups next year?
- S: I'm going to try to. In fact, over the summer, I'm going to re-evaluate what I would do. I think next year, I'm going to get a better group of kids. And...they can work on their own more easily...so I can take a small group. This year it was difficult to do things like that. I sure hope that I can do the reading...and rotate it more. I realize that I'd just got to the point, where I could only concentrate on that one group. But... they really liked doing the "I Wonder" questions...they loved that. They could do that all day long.
- R: That's their favorite strategy, then?
- S: For the questioning strategies, I had to make up the questions because they weren't coming up with very good questions.
- R: Did you feel that having them be able to talk more openly when they were with you in a small group increase their confidence to talk in a whole class setting?
- S: I'm not sure...I noticed that student #3 was very shy. And she didn't speak up more. Neither did student #4. Those were my two focus EL students. Student #5 spoke up but he always spoke up anyways. But I think it might have helped a little bit. Yeah.
- R: What about culturally? Did you see any benefit of talking about their culture and how it related to the book?
- S: I'm sure there was. I just didn't do it much.

- R: It increases their confidence when the teacher validates their culture. That might be something that you might want to work on for next year is to try to make that cultural connection between their background and what's going on.
- S: That would be something that I could add. I have done a unit on immigration when the kids made dolls and linked them with their culture. It's interesting; some kids have come back and said "We're American!" But, I do think the reading groups did help them. They got more attention. And they did make them feel...more confident.
- R: How did they benefit from the reciprocal teaching? What strategies do you think liked the most? What really increased their reading comprehension?
- S: I think they really liked the questioning. They really liked that. They liked where I asked them to figure out words that they didn't know. I think that's clarifying. I think those two they really liked. They liked summarizing at first...then I think they got a little bored with it. But they liked the SOS sheet you gave them.
- R: You did some small group reading instruction with the social studies book too...didn't you? How do you think that helped when they were working with you in a small group?
- S: I think that helped. I got to a point where I just read it to them and we just talked about it. I don't know if it was because of the fact that they just really liked social studies or if it was because I read it aloud and we discussed it in small groups. I didn't think they could read it individually. I didn't think they were getting what it was about. The reading was getting harder and harder. But then when I read it to them, I found that it benefited them better.
- R: Now, when they were with you in a small group, when they were doing their social studies, did they ask you a lot of questions? About what was going on in the pictures...or...what was happening in them?
- S: We talked about it. They really didn't ask the questions.
- R: You talked about it?
- S: I'd ask them "What's going in this picture?" I'd say "Look at the pictures...what do you think is happening?" And, "Look through the chapter and tell me what you think is going to happen in this?" They did respond to it. So...it was good. I liked using it with the social studies book.
- R: I think that's very important to use it with social studies. I mean...I think trade books are really important...but...I also think that using it with non-fiction, especially social studies and science increases their comprehension because they're able to talk about it.

S: It took me awhile to learn that these kids don't know even basic U.S. history...like Christopher Columbus. I mean...they just don't know this stuff. You know?

Interview with L.  
5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.

R: When you working with your students in small groups, how did you feel that the real small group...one on one instruction... worked?

L: I'm a totally believer in that. Before I didn't believe in that...you know. Like many years ago...when people were first starting to do it. I thought that there was no way you could retain the classroom control...everything like that. But when I tried it and saw, how much they loved it...how much they just want to be with you...it made me a total believer.

R: So, what kinds of things happened as a result of that?

L: I think the EL kids get lost, if you don't teach them in a small group. I've always had them in some kind of a group. You know, I've always tried to do that. But, the way my EL kids were this year...It wasn't so much that they couldn't read at all. You know they knew some English. So I just did really basic books. But, they still felt like they were like the other class because they were in the literature circle. They may have been reading second grade level books, but, they at least they still felt like they were reading.

R: Do you think that helped them? Being in a book that they really could read versus having them read a book that was too hard?

L: Yeah, I do. I do. I had varying results on the test. But I had a couple that went up two levels. And then, I had a couple that didn't do as well.

R: They stayed the same. Yeah.... Why...why do you think there was that difference?

L: I don't know. I don't know. The one I'm thinking of really needs to be tested. He just could...

R: have a learning disability?

L: Yeah, but probably they won't do it for another couple of years. Because he's

R: New.



- L: So yeah but he just didn't do well at all. Then there's another girl, she seemed to me like she really made great progress, but then when I tested her, I think you're right she was still third grade, but she was doing so much better. So I was really surprised.
- R: It will be really interesting to see their SAT9 scores.
- L: Sometimes on the QRI, I just wasn't sure. Because you'd use a different story even though it was the same...
- R: Genre.
- L: It would be a different story. Some of them were familiar like you know Martin Luther King. I wasn't sure if they really read the passage or just answered the questions because they were familiar. It was really hard to tell. You know, I think maybe teachers and the things we do in class might be a little bit more effective than we think, because I can see how much better one particular little girl could answer the comprehension questions.
- R: What did you do in a small group with her that you think really helped her reading comprehension the most?
- L: I don't know she suddenly started doing it...SURPRISE. I don't know what I did. But you know with the very lowest group, the ESL group, it wasn't until the very last literature circle session that we actually did the traditional literature circle roles. I just went through and did what you said where I actually let them lead their own literature circles. They were pretty responsive when I let them do it. So I think just really talking about the story with them and helping them go back in the book to where the questions were was beneficial. I started weaning them when they started asking their own questions along the way, and you know stuff like that. They liked it when they had some kind of say in it. They really loved being able to share the question they asked from home. They really love being able to talk about things like that.
- R: So give me some examples of some of the questions you gave and some of the connections they made from home.
- L: Let's see there were so many different cultural connections that they made. Like when we were in pets, I did an animal theme. The assignment was to talk to your parents about an animal they had when they were growing up and did they ever have a scary thing happen with an animal. Then we did a humor theme and they had to tell a joke from home. That was interesting with the ESL kids. It was very different.
- R: So the humor was very cultural?

- L: Yeah they would think it was very funny and I would think, “Huh?”
- R: It seemed so obvious.
- L: But they liked that.
- R: So did you get any input from the parents on that home /school connection?
- L: No.
- R: No? Did they indicate that they enjoyed doing that with their kids?
- L: A lot of them didn’t speak English. So I didn’t hear too much about that. Yeah I really thought I saw a lot of growth in my own personal observations. And some of them did go up on the QRI. There was just a few that didn’t.
- R: I know. I was just talking to; who was it that said, “How would you feel if the district said you couldn’t use trade books? And you had to teach just from Houghton Mifflin. I asked Teacher G and she said that would be devastating, that would be totally devastating for those children who can’t read that story. They would never have any practice reading at a level they can read at. So why would they do that?
- L: With the basal reading series...there are some good things in that.
- R: The skills lessons are good.
- L: But just reading a part of the story, it’s like they are picking it up in the middle and it’s like “what was this about?” And they have stories in there where I read the whole book and it’s like s-o-o-o what?
- R: To me it gives them the message “You can only read something partly. You can never read anything from beginning to end.” And...what does that do to their confidence? It makes them not want to read because they can’t read. They say to themselves: “I only am able to read this part.” So they never have mastery over a whole story from beginning to end that they know they can digest and can interact with. It’s just so disabling.
- L: Yes, you’ll start a story and they don’t get it. I mean I wouldn’t get it either if I hadn’t read the book. It’s like “where did this start?”
- R: It’s kind of like eating part of a meal. “Only take one bite. But that’s it... you can’t eat the whole thing.”
- L: And you know it’s going to be really hard if the district says that we have to use the basal series. There will be no time to fit in all this other stuff.

- R: If I were you I would just shut my door and just do what you need to do. Because you need to do what is best for the kids too. I mean morally you need to do what is best for the kids. I think that is what's important. Next year, when you think about planning, are you going to do anything differently than you did this year, with the small groups...or when you're...
- L: Not being forced to teach the basal? I don't know that I would want change it.
- R: No, no, I mean if the district doesn't say anything and you can do whatever you want to next year.
- L: I know that we are going to have to teach the EL students separately...that is what the district said. But if I had a choice I think I would do everything just like I did this year. I mean I was able to fit in so many books and they liked it and I have the experience now.
- R: What do you think the benefit was for the EL kids to be able to read a book? What could you see in them that was different maybe from other years when they couldn't read the whole story, or when you were either reading it to them, or they were partner reading, or they didn't have ownership of the story? What differences could you see?
- L: Confidence, enthusiasm. They were excited to come to the literature circle and talk about their book. Because they were in their own peer group they were talking more. I think if they were in a larger group they would have never raised their hand. It would have been beyond them. But in the small group they all contributed and all talked about things like that.
- R: I think they felt more equal to every one else because they were in a literature group too, like everyone else. So it wasn't that they were part of something...they were...a whole entity. I think you are right. I think it raises the reading esteem.
- L: Yeah. Now with the ones that didn't speak any English at all what do you recommend there because I didn't have any of those?
- R: During that period of time you would do ESL with them - just low level ESL that builds vocabulary.
- L: So you wouldn't worry about trying to fit in a book?
- R: Oh I wouldn't do a book, no. Although if you build vocabulary with them you could use the low readers with them. But you're not building text comprehension. You're building lexical comprehension. You really can't start building textual comprehension until they are on a second grade reading level. Don't worry about textual comprehension... worry about vocabulary development.

Interview with A.  
5/6 grade teacher.

- R: Tell me how you think working with your target kids in a small group benefited them?
- A: Let me start with their verbal feedback because that was most powerful for me. The kids, who were in the small group, first of all they really enjoyed the one-on-one time with me, because the group was smaller and we met more often. And then because we did explicit vocabulary lessons and how to decode words, they felt like stronger readers. They felt successful. So regardless of whether or not their book had many fewer pages than the other groups they felt great about that because when we did character studies and vocabulary analysis, like I mentioned, we did comprehension strategies. We just really got into the book so they just really ended up loving reading. And they didn't before.
- R: It seems like in traditional reading programs these kids can only really read part of a story. The teacher either reads it to them or they only read part of it. And they never get this experience of reading a whole story, from the beginning to the end... one that they own... that they can read... that they themselves relating to. And so I think it does, I think it increases their reading esteem. Because you're right they are able to own that whole story from beginning to end. What about their interactions with you?
- T: At first they were somewhat stifled; they felt like I should be asking them everything...that I should be directing them. And then as it sort of evolved they felt more comfortable asking each other questions, and they would also ask me questions. They would come up with things they wanted to know about. Like when we read *Sarah Plain and Tall*, they wanted to know about the plains, or they wanted to know about old time living, you know just things like that. They wanted to know about the seashore because that is one thing Sarah loves. So that really sparked a way to partially tie it into Social Studies. Also we tied it into art; they did visual representations of what they thought it was like. Eventually we tied it into poetry, so I think that they felt like their interaction time with me was really special...and almost sacred. They really looked forward to the small group meeting. One time I had to change it to another day and they were actually disappointed. That was really cool because that doesn't normally happen... normally kids are relieved.
- R: I know you did a lot of trying to relate what was going on in the book to their lives. Can you talk a little about those kinds of connections that you made with them and what they said? Especially with the group that was reading *Esperanza Rising*.

- A: *Esperanza Rising* was a special connection because it had a dual language...Spanish and English. Those kids first of all felt like successes right off the bat because they could tell me things that I didn't know. They were the experts. So that was very important to them. Then there were a lot of family issues that come up in *Esperanza Rising*...things like the grandmother passing away, or the family struggling with finances, or moving from Mexico to the United States and feeling like outcasts. And so the kids really related to that. Especially with the population here at this school...they know it because they have lived it. And even kids who come from places like the Philippines or Vietnam, they were able to relate too because it is all about coming to a new country...starting over... and not maybe being accepted by other kids.
- R: So they probably saw themselves related in literature, maybe for the first time? How would you structure the way that you did it this year? Are you going to do it the same next year? Are you going to make some changes? How are you going to do that?
- A: Well, when I first started TLC, I didn't have a clear picture of what I wanted and so it evolved as the year went on. And I was really happy with the final product. One of the things I was really happy about was our literature celebration that we did at the end of each theme. It was exciting to see what the kids came up with. They did plays and they loved it. So I think I'm going to keep that and if I happen to find some new strategies for comprehension, I'll just incorporate those but keep the basis of it similar. One thing that I did that I wasn't sure of was traditional literature circle roles that were based on the Harvey Daniels literature circles program that other teachers had done.
- R: How did you like that?
- A: I liked the jobs, but only if they were done well. My kids didn't really do that for the most part. So what I'll change about that is I might have longer group sessions. This will give them time to reread the passage that they should have done for their book goal. Then do the job right there at the table, and then have sharing... that way it's meaningful. That way it's not done last minute or haphazardly, it's right there.
- R: Are you going to make any other changes in the student led groups?
- A: No! I was pretty happy. They were considerate; we practiced active listening skills before we ever got into group dynamics, so I think that is something I'll stick with because it is real important. I would give them a bookmark that showed them their reading goal for the week and their reading goal for the day that was met... so it was very explicit. Then they could circle the group job that they had so they had that little reminder. So... I'm going to keep that. I was really happy with what the final product was.

R: For 6th grade I thought it was really excellent

A: 5th and 6<sup>th</sup>... it was a combo class.

R: Oh that's right a combo. Do you think literature circle helped in a combo class? How did they help the teacher?

A: Yeah...because first of all... it differentiated instruction. Because it's on a whole different level, you can mix the grade levels. With a combo class oftentimes 5<sup>th</sup> grade readers are better than 6<sup>th</sup> grade readers. I had two in my target group and they could add life experiences, and the 5th graders really looked up to that, really enjoyed hearing about those personal connections.

There was a boy that told me one story made him weep. He said he cried and when we got to that part of the story, he cried again. The story talked about losing a mom and he just connected with that so personally, and when he shared that with the group, the group just got a whole new understanding of him as a kid because he had always put up this "tough guy" front. And yet here was a place where he felt safe enough to share that. And so for the kids...I think that the classroom community that was developed by the end of the year was just phenomenal. They looked out for each other, they listened to one another and they respected one another. And I think that had we not met in small literature groups and made those personal connections they would have never known any of that even with stuff like student of the week. I mean you just don't get in depth like you do in literature groups.

R: And they all seemed to be proud of the book they were reading. They didn't seem to really get that they were leveled. They didn't get that. They thought "Oh great this is my group and it is something that I can really read and identify with."

A: And I would always tell them "Oh I picked these randomly," even if I didn't. And they would say, "Oh Mrs. M. isn't it a coincidence that these same people are here? You know... my target group?", and I'd say, "Yeah it is a coincidence. That's great. Luckily you guys all know each other and you get along. This will be a really good decision." So I tried to make it positive.

R: So it's more about being together and talking about the book than the book itself or than the level itself. It's more than that. It kind of gives a whole new meaning to reading groups. It's not so much about the book...it's about the people and how they are relating to what is in the book...and developing the sense of community around the book. That's what the transactional part of Transactional Literature Circles is all about. They are transacting not just with the book, but with their own lives...and that is what happened with your class.

A: Yeah...As I think back in my mind now...I don't think I'd do group jobs next year, because there are so many things you can do aside from those.

R: It's a structure that if it works...great! If it doesn't work then don't do it. I've come to believe that there's so many things with teaching that we do that are really ineffective. They are just kind of part of what we think is supposed to work but when push comes to shove the kids talking about things that kids have read is just soooo important...so important that their voice gets heard and other people listen to what they have to say. And that just doesn't happen in a whole class with 33 kids. That can't happen with whole group instruction.

A: Yeah you inevitably have kids that are afraid to speak up in class. But in small group they will hear somebody say something and they will say "Wait a minute that happened to me too!" And then they will come out of their shell, and I've noticed that a lot. And they are really respectful about it, willing to hear each other out. It just builds on itself. We could've gotten lost in discussion for a good hour. The rest of the kids were able to learn that they got their own time. If it wasn't time for their group to meet, they had to be responsible for reading the book and doing activities that were language arts based. And they got a lot of personal responsibility.

R: I'm really excited to see how their CST scores turn out.

Interview with D.  
6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.

R: So tell me how do you think having a small group just meeting with you really increased their understanding of literature?

D: Part of it is in the beginning they got to choose what they read. So they were more interested. So about the small group...I don't know... you got 8 students, instead of 30 so you can interact with each one of them a little more.

R: So did you find that the kids talked more in a small group than they would have if you would have done, like, a whole class thing?

D: The ones that like to participate always talk a lot...no matter what. So it is easier to draw the ones out that need to be drawn out.

R: I noticed that you were able to ask more in-depth questions that related to just real deep, critical thinking skills. You also allowed your students time to really think about their answer before they would respond and that really seemed to help.

D: It was OK...

R: You were able to go in-depth in the vocabulary and you gave a lot of really great examples from your own life experiences. Do you feel like the groups jelled together like a community when they met with you? Did they feel like their own community with you?

- D: No. I mean not just because of that... there were times, when the whole group showed up and every one in the group had their work done, they got a prize. That's the only way the small group community was motivated...but not without that...not without that carrot.
- R: Was there ever a time where they would talk to each other in the group with out you?
- D: I never let them meet in a circle without me when they were doing their work during the week. They would meet with me in small groups one day a week. There was whole class instruction twice a week. So the other days that I was meeting with the other groups, they would get together and work in pair or threesomes on their reading assignments.
- R: And in what way do you think that was beneficial?
- D: Well, low kids go to high kids, and the high kids help them. Sometimes I'd get papers that looked almost identical and I'd ask them and they would say "Yeah we worked on it together. We did it together." Then I would question them to make sure they understood it. And the high kid understood it better than the low kid but, I think the low kid understood it better than if he done it just on their own.
- R: Yeah! So he got a model. How about as far as cultural connections with the reading? Did you ever see that happen in your small groups where they were connecting what was going on in their own lives with what was going on in the book?
- D: I think the only time is if there were Spanish words. Then some of the Hispanic kids would help us pronounce them. I'm trying to remember what book that was in though...not very many of them. In *Holes* they made up nicknames for each other...you know how every character had a nickname. Everyone in the group had a nickname.
- R: So are you going to continue doing literature circles? How are you going to change it next year?
- D: I think after me modeling leading it a couple of times, I'm going to take the sheet that they work on, and there's four strategies from reciprocal teaching that they pretty much worked on. So that would be like two kids, you're in charge of predictions; you're in charge of questioning. Then they have to lead that part of the discussion.
- R: So you would make it more where the students are the leaders?
- D: Yeah. We're going to move towards that.



- R: So with your target group particularly, did you see growth as far as their reading comprehension because they met with you?
- D: Some of them showed growth. Let me see if I can figure this out. Student #1 yeah. Student #2 yeah. No he didn't work. She was pretty good to start with. So I mean I'd like to say yeah, but she was a good student she probably would have done good no matter what...same with her. Student #3 was so high. He was so smart he just doesn't always work. But once I figured that out. Student #4 got kicked out but until he did he showed a little bit of growth. Student #5 showed the most growth out of anybody and he so excited that his reading grades were better he would always come and ask me what his last score was.
- R: So why do you think their QRI scores went up like this?
- D: Well I mean it was predictable every time they would read a book. It was the same kind of test. The reciprocal teaching strategy worksheet each week was exactly the same with a different book. So they got used to it.
- R: They really learned how to do that.
- D: They taught the first graders how to do it.
- R: Oh they did? That's great. How did your little Spanish speaker respond to the books that he was able to take home?
- D: I have no idea.
- R: He didn't say?
- D: His English improved.
- R: It did! Great!
- D: I wrote up citation after citation for him cursing in English and Spanish.
- R: So you had a bi-lingual curser... But you don't know if it was result of reading? Do you think he looked at the bilingual books I gave you?
- D: No I think it was more social language. With just the way they acquire language. They came from Mexico in August. So if he is following language acquisition he's not reading language yet.
- R: Did he ever have the chance to read stories that were about kids that come from Mexico...characters that came from Mexico...Other than the books I gave him?

- D: No. We didn't ever read any. There is one called *Esperanza Rising* but I never got a class set of that.
- R: If you were thinking about changing books next year, would you do different books than you did this year?
- D: I'm always adding to my collection. I only did one that was kind of a bomb that I won't do again. So other than that...
- R: So if you were to choose books that you think would be good for literature circles what do you think would be the characteristics of those books?
- D: The kids have to like them. I mean what else can I say?
- R: And it seems to me that it has to have something in the story that is worth talking about.
- D: Well usually it is about kids.
- R: Something they can relate their life to.
- D: WEIRD
- R: Yeah I know. But some books are just like *Charlotte's Web*, I mean it's like OK, but you know they just can't get into that book.
- D: I'm trying to think about what they like.
- R: Have they read *Maniac McGee*?
- D: No not yet.
- R: That is a really cute one they'll like that one.
- D: I read part of it. We read an excerpt on it when I taught 6th grade and they weren't really in to it. I might do *The Bad Beginning*, I don't know if you know those *The Series of Unfortunate Events* books? They're new.
- R: You know what works well for low readers is *Sideways Stories From Wayside School*. They love those. They are fun, for like to 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade level readers.
- D: The movies that are coming out usually spark interest. Like *Elle Enchanted*. I'm looking for one more I got one called *The Tales of the Trojan Horse*; it's like a comic book.
- R: It helps when they see the movie.

D: If the movie is coming out they are interested.

R: They like it for sure.

Pilot School #2

R = Researcher

Interview with C

5<sup>th</sup> grade Sheltered English Immersion teacher

R: What I would like to do is have you share some of the things that you can remember throughout the year about your targets students that you feel were kind of AH HA moments. You know...that either if they surprised you or WOWED you. You know like "I didn't know this kid was really getting this!" I really saw that your kids learned something. Maybe it was in a small group...as you work with them in a small group...or...it could be improvement that you saw just in general in their reading. But, give me some examples.

It could be that you want to talk either about the improvement that you saw...or it could be that you really thought a combination of strategy instruction worked. Strategies that you thought...as you taught them...that you saw that your students were really able to pick them up and transfer them to their own reading. Or maybe even that they transferred them to content area reading...that you saw them transferring them to the Social Studies book...or...you know...other kinds of reading in your classroom.

Culture things that were brought up...share those. I'd love to hear about those. Culture connections either that the children made or that you were trying to emphasize in a book...that the kids really picked up. So, anybody can start.

C: Well, I was really surprised with the choices they made when we did the book clubs...and they were given an opportunity to walk through three or four books. And then their own self selection...it was interesting...it seemed that the children who had the most problem with comprehension...seemed to deliberately choose the simplest text. And the children who were obviously on a higher level chose those higher books. I mean...I didn't have a problem so much. At the very beginning of the year...we did. We had kids choosing books that were maybe too simple for them but, the subject was exciting to them because they were interested in *Squanto*. They became real experts. I think they'll run off into life knowing about *Squanto* books. But it was fascinating, for example, my little student #1. He is probably my most interesting kid of all. Because you never know what is going to come out of his mouth. Yet when I taught him in third grade, I thought I was dealing with a retarded child, and then a mentally ill child, and then.... I was always trying to figure him out. And I saw that he was really quite bright and managed to grab onto a lot of details and nuances that I wasn't realizing he was

getting when he was in a large group. But when you get him with the small group, then it all comes out. And you know, he's kind of shy and you figure that out. I looked at him and thought "That's part of it...isn't it...that you're just shy".

R: Can you give me an example of a nuance that he got? That you were kind of surprised? That you thought, "Wow...I can't believe he understood that!"

C: Well...when they were reading *Pheobe the Spy*. He could see that the way that she was trained to be a spy was just by observing her father and following him around and learning to just be invisible and that it wasn't structured thing...like you would do in school. But it was more like a casual kind of learning.

R: Hmm. And that's a pretty high level book. What reading level is that?

C: I think that's fifth grade level.

R: Yeah

C: And I was surprised. His last testing, it looks like he is at fifth grade level.

R: Wow! Incredible.

C: And...with writing. He wrote so much more this year than last.

R: Wonderful. I hope it translates to the testing.

C: Me too. He freezes up, when there's testing.

R: I know. It's unfortunate. Okay...who else wants to share things about their kids?

Interview with P  
6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

P: I'll go next. Hum...one of things that was really neat is that...of course, in a large classroom setting, you have a number of students who generally...always speak up. And what was really neat about the target students is that once you started reading...and we talked about the book...I couldn't get them to shut up.

Laughter by the group.

P: It was...just amazing because...you know...I just wanted to talk about a few key words or something. Next thing you know...they're talking about this or that...or how this would work or how that would work or how this would be.... As you observed a few times...what this would be like in Mexico. Or...or what would women do with this situation? All these roles...and...you know...I tried...I

mean, I didn't really want to push them along in the book. But, I wanted to get thru at least a page...sometimes. And they would be just jabbering away. And so...it was really neat because I knew that of course...they're in sixth grade...they have something to say...but they don't usually say it.

R: I know.

P: And so they felt very comfortable just speaking out in a small group setting. That was really nice. And uh...it did take a little time to work with vocabulary. But, with the concepts of the story...they caught on .... And...at least with my target students in the lower groups...nobody ever said, "Oh, you don't know what that is." You know it's like they were always explaining to each other...what it was that they understood in the book. So that was really nice to see. Actually...to be honest...not in a negative way so much....but the higher groups who could just read the book on their own...they were less prone to want to talk about it. It was actually...them that I wanted to discuss more with each other than the lower groups who were just said, "Okay...let's talk about the book."

R: So...then you're saying that the lower groups really wanted to talk more about the book than the higher groups. That's really interesting because you would expect the higher groups to have the higher comprehension...so they could have more to talk about.

P: But they just were very good readers...sixth grade or beyond...who just wanted to read and do the assignment. They didn't necessarily want to talk about all the nuances of the book because for them, it was considered a waste of time.

R: I thought it was fun...when I observed you with your EL students...how much vocabulary we take for granted. We assume they understand most simple words, but they don't.

P: There were all kinds of things like *village well*...or something like that.

R: Yes, Yes.

P: They would ask, "What is a *well*?"

R: Yes. You were trying to explain to them what a well was...and then they finally got it...what a well was. Then there was a word...was it *pampas grass*?

P: There was one story that talked about *pampas grass*. Right.

R: And they didn't understand....

P: They couldn't imagine...the idea that the grass could grow high. You know...I used the illustrations in the book and everything...but they just couldn't get it.

R: But then...a kid said, in Mexico on his ranch that he had seen that kind of grass. He said he had seen fields of this grass. And he was trying to explain that in his limited English to the other students. It was really exciting. You could just see those connections going on between what they were reading and their real life experiences. It was a lot of fun.

P: It was a lot of fun.

R: So...who else would like to share?

Interview with S  
4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

S: Well...I agree with teacher P. You know...in their small groups...they got really enthusiastic...and they did talk. Whereas, you know...most of the time in your large group...they're like...you know...elsewhere...they just don't always volunteer to speak. But they got into the subject...there was a lot of enthusiasm. They wanted to answer the questions or ask questions or just interact with me and each other with the text. So...that was great.

R: I remember when I was in your class in the fall doing that. And it's almost like they were so excited about talking in a small group that they were interrupting each other. I mean...the kids were so excited to sit down and talk about...you know...things in the book with you. You're right ... before in the whole class setting, they just sat and stared at you.

S: I think some of it will show growth...it might not be in standardized testing.

R: To me...just getting them to like to read is the objective.

S: Yeah...two girls, in particular that I remember...they just got hooked on the reading. They would be just sitting together...and be...just very enthusiastic. Whereas before they were just kind of reading, it was kind of a chore. The enthusiasm just picked up and there was a little competition in a positive sense that they wanted to read each other's books. So it kind of kept them involved.

R: I think the interesting thing about your class is that you had this huge range of readability, and at first we thought "We'll just try one novel...we'll just try *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*." I even read it aloud to them. You know they didn't have to decode it they just had to sit there and listen. Well... at the end of the session we talked and a lot of hands went up. Kids were saying, "I don't like this book. I don't understand it." I mean they didn't even have to read it they just had to listen. "I don't understand it. It's boring. It's too hard. I don't understand it." And so I asked them, "Well would you like to read a book that is a little easier?" They all said, "Yes we would like to read a book that is easier."

“Well what if that book isn’t a chapter book? What if it is just a picture book?” Some of them were so low...they needed a picture book. They all said, “That is fine we want a picture book.” And I was surprised that they didn’t feel like it was a baby thing. The other kids didn’t even think it was a baby thing.

S: Yeah...but the subject matter of those picture books were adult. That’s why they liked it.

R: They were also themed. In fact it was great because everyone was reading a book on the same theme. Some students read *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, some read *Baseball Saved Us*, and others read *I Hate English*. But they were all the same theme of immigration...which also tied into what you were doing in Social Studies. It kind of dispels the myth that if you have older kids in different books and some are in harder books than others then the other ones will feel like they’re not as good a reader. Those low readers actually wanted to read...and they liked those picture books.

Ok does anyone else want to share?

Interview with V  
5<sup>th</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> grade combination teacher

V: I had something interesting happen with my higher group. They had a little bit thicker book and one of the other kids in one of the other groups said, “Oh that’s the smart group.” Just because the book was a little bit fatter. The words weren’t necessarily any more difficult than the one they had, in fact they were probably harder than the ones that they had. But because it was fatter they thought it was better.

R: So the more pages the better?

V: Yeah, so then when it came time to trade books, and they thought, “Oh we can’t get through this!” Then once they did get through it they were like “Oh we’re the smart ones now.”

R: What a change! That’s amazing.

V: What I like too is that TLC has a lot of flexibility. We did a lot of social studies with trade books. It is really hard to do a combo class and fit in all of the standards of social studies for two grade levels. You are going from the ancient world all the way to colonialism...and everything in-between. So it is just impossible to fit it all in and so if we have the trade books they can get the bits and pieces of what they need for their curriculum. So that worked out really well. I liked that.

R: They loved that too. On their surveys they said that they really liked reading and learning a lot about Indians. I think they learned a lot too...they mentioned some facts they learned.

V: And the kids that told me on the survey that they got to speak more, they're the ones in class I hardly ever hear them say any thing and I think they are really shy and they don't want to speak. But when they are in that small group it opens them up and they have to speak. And so that was really good for them to have to practice their English. I thought it was interesting that they shared that.

R: Yeah. It was and they enjoyed it. Any one else want to share?

Interview with G

4<sup>th</sup> grade Sheltered English Immersion teacher

G: I was surprised also in the surveys it came across that they like working with everyone at the same level.

R: Yeah! I was surprised too.

G: I think like teacher P was saying, I think that they are able to talk more. Like sometimes they may be intimidated by what they think are the smarter kids... the ones that are always answering the questions. And they felt more comfortable working at their own level. And I realized, usually we split a group up if it is not in TLC and we say it is either that table or this table or mixed levels. At primary we used to do a lot of leveling but we don't do that much at intermediate. Perhaps they had memories back to primary when they could do guided reading with the same level kids. So I was impressed when a lot of them said, "You know, I like working with the same level kids." That is probably because, like I said, they may feel intimidated because somebody always has the answer ready before they even know it. I think that is interesting. The other thing that was interesting to me was I looked at all the strategies that we were supposed to learn and you know, and I used those not only in TLC but throughout in social studies too...being able to summarize, being able to ask questions. They transferred real well into each other. I thought, "I'm satisfied with the progress of the kids."

R: Your kids really went up. I just couldn't believe on the QRI just from the first to the second test. They really improved.

Interview with T

4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

T: I think that the kids that benefited the most from TLC were my 3 lowest kids especially student #1. Because he came into this year I think at a high first maybe second grade level. And thanks to having a small group, he was able first of all, to be with students on his level, so he was able to read the book at his own level.



There was never a problem of having to wait for student #1 to finish reading a page, while 29 other kids are painstaking waiting for him to just read one sentence. So he was able to have like more time...he was free to take his time and go at his own pace. That helped him a lot and thankfully he was able to move up to third grade.

R: Wow! That is amazing! In one year...two years worth of growth.

T: And his comprehension is just amazing. Based on the QRI, he can recall as well as some of my high kids. So definitely this has benefited him in so many ways. I mean small groups in general with anything has helped him...and the two other kids, they have come a long way too. And so they're just moving forward now. And he is always asking questions. Even in whole group instruction, he is not afraid to ask questions or give answers even if it is wrong. So yeah he has enthusiasm.

R: The last question I wanted to talk about is what parts of the program you are going to keep next year. And if you are going to keep any parts of the program, how do you think you are going to use it? Or tweak it or work on it or what ever?

#### Interview with C 5<sup>th</sup> grade Sheltered English Immersion teacher

C: Well I'm going to be changing over to 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> so I intend to use the trade books pretty heavily from both grade levels and integrate that with my social studies. Because that was one thing that was attractive to me...I could do that and the TLC would make it work. I like the idea of having them work in small groups. Independently as well as having them come to work with me. I realize that as much as I love some of the novels that I've been reading to them, there is probably just a huge group of children out there that is totally lost at some points. So I think I may still do my read alouds but choose things that might be a little bit on a lower level. Or just do portions of a large read aloud but spend more of my time on the trade books.

R: In the beginning of the year how did you do the books, in other words did you assign the trade books to the kids or did they choose. And how is that different? Did it change at the end of the year? Explain to me how that worked?

C: Yes in the beginning I just decided, "Ok this looks like it's the right level for you", and that is how I did it, I looked at their scores on the CAT6 and the CST and I decided to set things up in that manner. And then as I became more confident with their ability to choose and we went through a lot of instruction where we talked about methods of choosing a book that is appropriate for their reading level, they were able to choose books themselves. And I think some of them made mistakes but they learned from their mistakes. And the next time around they would choose better. And so it improved in that way.

R: So another positive thing about the TLC program is that it teaches kids how to choose books that they can really read. And so many times kids come out of a basal reading program not ever being able to really read or understand a story by themselves...and not knowing how to pick a book that they can read independently. That is something that this program adds...an element that I think is so important. So we are moving kids towards becoming independent readers. Teacher T, tell me how your language arts center program worked with TLC?

Interview with T  
4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

T: The kids loved it. When we were preparing for testing they were really sad. They kept asking “When are we going to have centers? When are we going to have centers?” Then I would have to tell them “Not until after testing...sorry.” And then when testing was finally done they were in tears they were so happy. I mean they had such a variety of thing to do and different methods of learning through centers. They fought over the listening center. I had to remind them their group had to decide who was going to go first because there weren’t enough headphones...so some had to write in their journal while they were waiting. I mean they liked it even though it involved a lot of writing. They had to do a listening journal. One group worked on a lot of grammar and then they would rotate into working with me. Other kids were doing a book project so they used the vocabulary strategy worksheet. Some students were reading their book of choice. They got to use the computer so they were reinforcing their vocabulary and grammar there too. They really seemed to enjoy the fact that they didn’t have to deal with more than just five people. So there was less conflict and more students were engaged than when I was trying to just stand up in front of the classroom and teach the whole group. I totally loved it. I’ve been mainly in the primary grades with a 20:1 teacher ratio. But despite being in 4<sup>th</sup> grade with 33:1, I incorporated centers and they worked. The kids had just got out of primary so why should I just try to cut it off? It’s hard enough that they are transitioning into being with 33 kids you know! So I think the small group instruction has helped them a lot.

R: The other thing that you did that was a little different was you had the kids learn TLC roles for their small group time with you. Explain what that was.

T: When I was in school we watched this video about how this one class had small groups, it was like guided reading or something. And the teacher had the students take on jobs or roles, in hopes that eventually they were responsible enough to get the hang of it and the teacher kind of let them go on their own so that she could tend to another group. I just tried to incorporate that even though they weren’t able to do it on their own. There were at least four cooperative learning roles: there was a monitor person who was kind of like a teacher, and they would say “Ok who would like to read the next page, does anyone have any questions?”

There was a recorder so when they had to summarize something the recorder would have to write down what all of the other students would think of from that chapter or predictions they had made. Then there was a timekeeper, who made sure the group stayed on task. And they really got into it because they would start to mimic me; the monitor would say, "Ok who wants to read the next page? Ok we are on page 45; we are going to start on this page. Anyone have any questions?" Actually before they would get started on person would get up and get the dictionary to get it ready just in case someone had a question about a word. Even when I'm tending to the other students, while they're coming to the group, they automatically got their binder out and started assigning the jobs. They would say, "Ok who want to be this, oh you have already been this you can be this." So they really got into the routine and after a while I could step away and wander around to the other groups - still keeping an eye on them... so it wasn't completely independent but it was close enough.

R: Especially for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. That is really not bad. That is excellent!

## Appendix B

### Recommended Children's Literature for Transactional Literature Circles

#### Annotated Bibliography

##### Introduction

In a literate and multicultural society such as exists in the United States, books are powerful vehicles for conveying images of diversity. Because multicultural education has helped bring about a “heightened sensitivity to the needs of all people in American society” (Norton, 1987, p. 502), and because we are “increasingly recognizing the role of children’s literature in shaping attitudes” (Norton, 1985, p. 103), we are seeing an increasing emphasis placed on including multicultural literature for children and young adults in the language arts curriculum. This is because multicultural literature can be seen metaphorically as a *mirror* to validate the realities of culturally diverse children, as a *window* to understand those realities, and as a *bridge* to find similarities in diverse life experiences. The teaching of multicultural literature within a classroom community must include the ability to understand oneself and one’s relationship to the world (Willis, 1997).

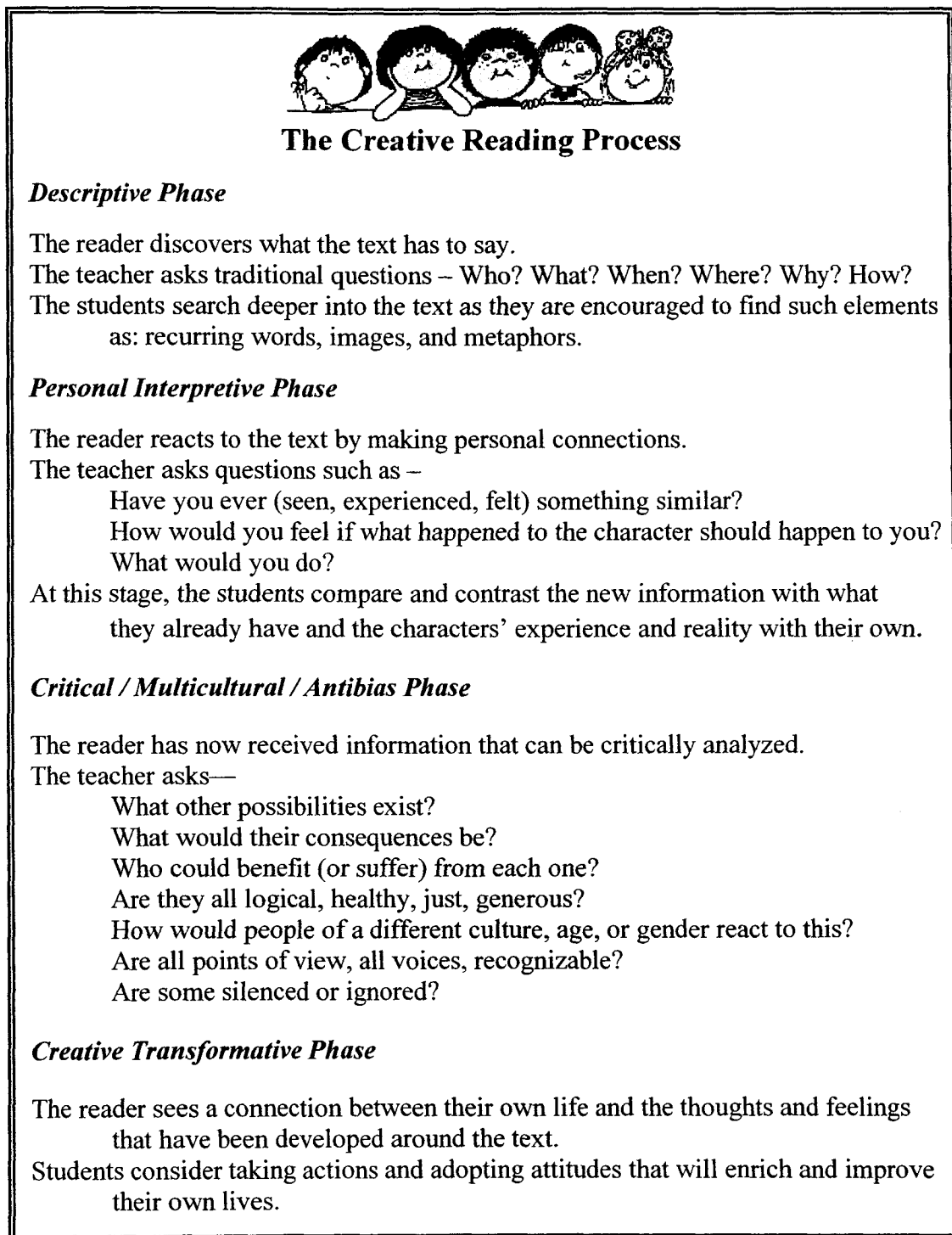
In a Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) classroom, children are encouraged to connect their lives and cultural identities into books that reflect real life experiences. Prompting them to share their reading responses in small groups, the teacher facilitates positive interaction among the students thus increasing their ability to think both reflectively and critically. The teacher’s role is to promote open discussion that challenges the status quo. More than simply learning to read symbols, the teacher

envisions literacy as “the construction of meaning within a sociocultural context” (Perez, 1998, p. 4).

This recommended book list reflects a culturally relevant perspective that encourages critical discussions of social justice issues. It is suggested that teachers use Ada’s (1991) *Creative Reading* outlined in Figure 1, to encourage meaningful talk that will lead children toward cultural awareness and understanding. Through this discussion, the book becomes a lens through which to examine the world, a tool for thinking about and solving problems in children’s everyday lives. Hammerberg (2004) suggests that interactive discussion is a key element to increasing comprehension beyond decoding the words. Opening up educational notions of text allows teachers to think in terms of critical literacy or literacy for social change, because the author’s meaning is situated in readers’ heads in such a way that the message can be questioned, critiqued, and used in socially empowering ways. The researcher strongly believes that whatever efforts teachers can make to create spaces for extended discussions about literature will be richly rewarded as children begin to forge deep connections to books.

The following recommended book titles are arranged by theme and grade level so that children can feel empowered by reading a book at an independent reading level while participating in age appropriate discussions. The independent reading of culturally relevant books enable at-risk students to deeply read, write about, and discuss texts that contain thoughtful ideas thus scaffolding children from diverse backgrounds to higher levels of literacy (Kong and Fitch, 2002-2003).

Figure 1B. The creative reading process



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### Journeys of Self-Discovery

1. Ada, A. (1991). *The Gold Coin*. New York: Atheneum.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Juan has been a thief for many years. He is pale and bent from creeping about at night, and that's what he's doing the night he peeks into Dona Josefa's hut. She is holding a gold coin and says that she must be the richest woman in the world. Then and there, Juan determines to steal that coin, and any others she may have. It is a decision that changes Juan's life forever.

2. Curtis, C. (1999). *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

A 10-year-old boy in Depression-era Michigan sets out to find the man he believes to be his father. While the harshness of Bud's circumstances are authentically depicted, Curtis imbues them with an aura of hope, and he makes readers laugh even when he sets up the most daunting scenarios.

3. Curtis, C. (1995). *The Watsons Go to Birmingham- 1963*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

The year is 1963, and self-important Byron Watson is the bane of his younger brother Kenny's existence. Constantly in trouble for one thing or another, from straightening his hair into a "conk" to lighting fires to freezing his lips to the mirror of the new family car, Byron finally pushes his family too far. Before this "official juvenile delinquent" can cut school or steal change one more time, Momma and Dad finally make good on their threat to send him to the deep south to spend the summer with his tiny, strict grandmother. Soon the whole family is packed up, ready to make the drive from Flint, Michigan, straight into one of the most chilling moments in America's history: the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church with four little girls inside.

Christopher Paul Curtis's alternately hilarious and deeply moving novel, winner of the Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Honor, blends the fictional account of an African American family with the factual events of the violent summer of 1963. Fourth grader Kenny is an innocent and sincere narrator; his ingenuousness lends authenticity to the story and invites readers of all ages into his world, even as it changes before his eyes.



4. Goble, P. (1983). *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses: A Native American Tale*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

For most people, being swept away in a horse stampede during a raging thunderstorm would be a terrifying disaster. For the young Native American girl in Paul Goble's 1979 Caldecott-winning masterpiece, *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*, it is a blessing. Although she loves her people, this girl has a much deeper, almost sacred connection to her equine friends. The storm gives her the opportunity to fulfill her dream--to live in a beautiful land among the wild horses she loves.

With brilliant, stylized illustrations and simple text, Paul Goble tells the story of a young woman who follows her heart, and the family that respects and accepts her uniqueness. Considering how difficult it is for some communities to allow friendships to grow between people of different cultures, this village's support for the girl's companions of choice is admirable. Goble's bold paintings reflect this noble open-mindedness. The young horse fanatic of the house will joyfully add this book to his or her collection. Children are passionate people; they will relate.

5. Myers, W.D. (2000). *The Blues of Flats Brown*. New York: Holiday House.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

An exceptionally talented junkyard dog gets his due in Myers' (Monster; Harlem) picture-book tribute to the blues. Though Flats would love to just play the blues on his guitar and sing all day, his owner, A.J. Grubbs, plans to throw Flats and his other dog, Caleb, into the vicious fighting ring. The two pooches flee and eventually land in Memphis, where Flats records a hit record. All the fame and attention paid to his dog gets Grubbs angry and he's soon on Flats' trail. Grubbs tracks Flats to a New York City blues club where, finally, the dog's music reaches the bitter man's heart. Myers' shaggy fantasy has the slow-and-easy pacing of a lazy Southern afternoon. His colorful phrases and dialect (Flats in New York City is "as out of place as a three-legged skunk at a Georgia hoedown") evoke the Mississippi and Tennessee settings.

6. Say, A. (1993). *Grandfather's Journey*. Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

Through compelling reminiscences of his grandfather's life in America and Japan, Allen Say gives us a poignant account of a family's unique cross-cultural experience. He warmly conveys his own love for his two countries, and the strong and constant desire to be in both places at once.

7. Soto, G. (1995). *Summer on Wheels*. New York: Scholastic.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

Hector and his best friend Mondo enjoy many exciting adventures when they take a six-day bike trip from their East Los Angeles neighborhood to the Santa Monica beach during summer vacation.

8. Soto, G. (1992). *Pacific Crossing*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

Fourteen-year-old Mexican American Lincoln Mendoza spends a summer with a host family in Japan, encountering new experiences and making new friends.

9. Soto, G. (2003). *Taking Sides*. New York: Harcourt Paperbacks.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

This touchingly realistic story explores the divided loyalties of a Hispanic basketball player who has recently moved from a poor neighborhood to a more affluent one. Initially, eighth grader Lincoln feels like a traitor when he plays ball for the predominantly white school he now attends. To make matters worse, his new coach seems to hold a grudge against both Lincoln and his former school, Franklin Junior High. As a game against Franklin approaches, tension mounts and Lincoln experiences clashes with several people, including some teammates. But he manages to have fun on the night of the big game and eventually makes peace with his friends.

Once again, Soto masterfully conveys the Hispanic-American experience, and readers will respect Lincoln's values and good sportsmanship. Ultimately, the boy learns to adjust to a new situation and accept new challenges without compromising his individuality.

10. Steptoe, J. (1984). *The Story of Jumping Mouse: A Native American Legend*. New York: Lathrop.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Magic Frog gives words of encouragement to the young mouse as he heads out on the long and perilous journey to reach the wonderful land of legend. He faces many obstacles on his quest and sacrifices much to help others in need. But the mouse's compassion and faith in himself prove to be a source of great power, and bring him rewards beyond his dreams.

## Survival

1. Ada, A. (1993). *My Name is Maria Isabel*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

This gentle story tells of Maria Isabel Salazar Lopez, who finds herself dubbed "Mary Lopez" when her family moves and she is placed in a class with two other Marias. Maria Isabel finds it hard to respond to a name that does not seem like hers. Her teacher doesn't understand why it is so difficult for her to answer to "Mary" until the child is inspired to address her paper on "My Greatest Wish" to the topic of her name. The result is not only a happy ending, but also an affirming study of heritage and how it is integrally bound up in an individual's sense of self.

2. Bruchac, J. (1985). *Iroquois Stories: Heroes and Heroines, Monsters and Magic*. Santa Cruz, CA: Crossing Press Inc.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

Bruchac presents a melange of creation stories, "why" stories and stories of magic and monsters which give a picture of Indian life in the Eastern woodlands.

3. Cohen, C. (1988). *The Mud Pony: A Traditional Skidi Pawnee Tale*. New York: Scholastic.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

From the Skidi branch of the Pawnee Indians of the Plains comes this tale of a boy who achieves greatness in his tribe with the guidance of a pony he made out of mud. Too poor to own a pony like the other boys, he fashions a small mud pony and goes to see it every day. It is during one of these visits that the rest of the tribe moves west in search of buffalo, and the boy is left behind. Not only does the mud pony become a living, breathing horse, but she takes him to his tribe; later, she helps him become the chief of his tribe by giving him great power in battles. "I am here, your Mother Earth. You are not alone!" are the words he hears when the mud pony has once again gone back to the earth. Cohen retells this story with grace; Begay, a Native American artist, provides evocative paintings that derive strength and impact from the suggestion of action rather than fully detailed scenes.

4. Demi (1997). *One Grain of Rice: A mathematical Folktale*. New York: Scholastic.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

A resourceful village girl outsmarts a greedy raja, turning a reward of one grain of rice into a feast for a hungry nation. Delicate paintings emblazoned with touches of gold give this Indian folktale an exotic air.

5. Jimenez, F. (1997). *The Circuit*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Reading Level: grades 5-6

Jimenez has created a moving autobiography that some critics have compared to John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. The story, originally published in English as *The Circuit*, begins in Mexico when the author is very young and his parents inform him that they are going on a very long trip to "El Norte." What follows is a series of stories of the family's unending migration from one farm to another as they search for the next harvesting job. Each story is told from the point of view of the author as a young child.

The simple and direct narrative stays true to this perspective, never falling into moralistic or cliched patterns. The backbreaking work and the soul-crushing effect of the endless packing and moving are portrayed through a child's dismay at having to leave a school where he has just gotten comfortable or, worse, having to miss several months of a school year in order to work. Panchito's desire to help his family by working in the fields often clashes with his academic yearning. In this case, as in the case of many Mexican migrant farm workers, the American dream never comes to fruition.

Lifting the story up from the mundane, Jimenez deftly portrays the strong bonds of love that hold this family together. An afterward recorded by the author gives even more background on his family. Vargas's narration offers an authentic and strong Mexican voice.

6. Jimenez, F. (2002). *Breaking Through*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Reading Level: grades 5-6

Francisco Jimenez continues the moving tale of his early youth begun with a dozen autobiographical short stories in *The Circuit*. *Breaking Through* chronicles the author's teenage years. At the age of 14, Francisco and his family are caught by *la migra* (immigration officers) and forced to leave their California home, but soon find their way back. The author explores the prejudice and challenges they face while also relaying universal adolescent experiences of school, dances and romances.

7. Lester, J. (1996). *Sam and the Tigers: A New Telling of Little Black Sambo*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

In the original story Little Black Sambo must tread carefully, lest his clothes be stolen from him by a gang of tigers. Today, it is the teller of the tale who must tread carefully, lest the forces of political correctness attack, charging racism. Because of the names she chose for her characters, the book has become a symbol of intolerance in the century since it was written. Strip away race, however, and the tale underneath is both simple and affecting. To make it more palatable to modern readers, Julius Lester has recast the tale in a "Southern black storytelling voice."

8. Lord, B. (1987). *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. New York: Harper Collins.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

Shirley Temple Wong sails from China to America with a heart full of dreams. Her new home is Brooklyn, New York. America is indeed a land full of wonders, but Shirley doesn't know any English, so it's hard to make friends. Then a miracle-baseball-happens. It is 1947, and Jackie Robinson, star of the Brooklyn Dodgers, is everyone's hero. Jackie Robinson is proving that a black man, the grandson of a slave, can make a difference in America and for Shirley as well, on the ball field and off, America becomes the land of opportunity.

9. Orlev, U. (1984). *The Island on Bird Street*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

During World War II a Jewish boy is left on his own for months in a ruined house in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he must learn all the tricks of survival under constantly life-threatening conditions.

10. Soto, G. (1995). *Chato's Kitchen*. New York: Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Chato thinks he's the cool cat of East Los Angeles, and when a family of small mice moves next door to him in the *barrio*, invites them over for dinner--to be his dinner. With his flashy pal Novio Boy, Chato cooks a delicious spread to go with the tasty morsels of mice. But when his guests arrive with their friend from the old neighborhood, the tables are turned: Sausage turns out to be a long, low-riding, skinny dog, and it's the cats who quake in fear. Kids will get a lot of fun out of the sweet reversal and the comic storytelling. There's a glossary of Spanish words, but it's the characters and their talk that give the story its special flavor.

11. Temple, F. (1995). *Grab Hands and Run*. New York: Harper Trophy.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

An El Salvadorian family flees political oppression in their homeland and takes a perilous journey north, through Mexico to America, where they hope they will find a better life. This is a compelling, provocative, and exciting novel. Details of the brutal realities in El Salvador are dexterously woven into the story of one family's struggle to beat the odds.

#### Fantasies, Dreams, and Changes

1. Casler, L. ((1994). *The Boy Who Dreamed of An Acorn*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

When a young Chinook boy goes with two friends on a spirit quest, he dreams only of an acorn, while the others dream of powerful totem-animals, a bear and an eagle. The wisest man in the village assures the boy that his dream has just as much to teach him and gives him an acorn to plant. For a few years, he is content with his growing tree, but when his friends are praised for their bear-and eagle-like qualities, he grows envious. The wise man repeats his counsel, and the boy begins to see that as the tree grows (unrealistically fast for an oak), it offers shelter and sustenance. He grows into a man whose heart branched out wide like an oak tree, giving kindness and shelter to all who came his way. Ambition and envy give way to acceptance.

2. Davis-Pinkney, A. (1995). *Hold Fast to Dreams*. New York: William Morrow & Co.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

*Hold Fast to Dreams*, by Andrea Pinkney, is about a 12-year-old black girl and her family; her sister, mother and father. The family moves from an all black neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland, to an all white neighborhood in Wexford, Connecticut. Deirdre, the main character, is very nervous about going to a school where she will be the only black person in the entire school. She is a very smart girl and loves photography and the poetry of Langston Hughes, a poet whom no white student knows anything about. The book focuses on the dreams of each character and how those dreams were affected by changes in life's situations. The book touches on racism, blind prejudices, and stereotyping while teaching acceptance, friendship, trust, and recognition.

3. Goble, P. (1992). *Love Flute*. New York: Bradbury.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

In love with a beautiful girl, but too shy to tell her, a young man leaves his camp in frustration. One night he receives mystical visitors who offer him a special gift -- a love flute. A gift from the birds and animals, it tells the girl of his love where words have failed.

4. Hoffman, M. (1991). *Amazing Grace*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

"Grace was a girl who loved stories." Empowered by the strength of her imagination and the love of her mother and Nana, this dramatic, creative girl constantly adopts roles and identities: Joan of Arc, Anansi the Spider, Hiawatha, Mowgli, Aladdin. When her class plans a presentation of Peter Pan, "Grace knew who she wanted to be." She holds fast despite her classmates' demurrals; Nana, meanwhile, reminds her granddaughter that she can do anything she imagines. When Nana takes Grace to see a famous black ballerina--"from back home in Trinidad"--the determined youngster is aroused by the performance, and wins the role of her dreams.

5. Hoffman, M. (1991). *Boundless Grace: Sequel to Amazing Grace*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Irrepressible, plucky Grace charmed a multitude of readers when she debuted in *Amazing Grace*, defying the narrow-mindedness of her classmates to land the plum role of Peter Pan in the school play. In this message-oriented sequel, Grace is older, but still brimming with stories and dreams. Here she must overcome her own preconceptions and fears to accept and find acceptance with her divorced and remarried father's "other" family in Africa.

Traveling to Gambia with her grandmother, Grace frets about the horrible stepmothers found in fairy tales and worries that her hosts won't need or love her. Unlike the first book, where the spunkiness of the heroine was the heart of the story, this tale revolves around the lesson that "families are what you make them."

6. Lester, J. (2000). *Albidaro and the Mischievous Dream*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial Press for Young Readers.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

The children of the world are tired of doing what they're told. A mischievous dream whispers to them that they should stop listening to their parents, and adults

everywhere are in for a whole heap of trouble. But it doesn't end there. Next the dream visits all the animals, and tells them they should do whatever they want, too. Soon animals are invading fine restaurants, taking up all the space on the couch, and leaving the water on when they get out of the shower.

7. Polacco, P. (1999). *Appелеmando's Dream*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

Appелеmando is a little boy who loves to dream. A little boy who keeps a very unique secret with his friends... whenever Appелеmando dreams, they can see his visions floating through the sky above their heads. Fascinated by the beautiful colors and the visions of his daydreams, Appелеmando's friends attempt to catch them on a piece of paper.

One day, as Appелеmando's dream is escaping his mind it begins to rain. The bright colors cover the walls of the village, angering the elders who do not believe the "paintings" are indeed, the little boy's dreams. Sentenced to scrub the village walls, the children, upset and afraid, wander home. However, soon they discover they are lost. Hours pass and the children cannot find their way through the dark woods.

"You can help, Appелеmando," Lark proclaims.

Appелеmando's friends encourage him to dream a dream "big and bright enough" to reach their families in the village. But alas, Appелеmando, upset by the day's events, can no longer dream...

In the story's surprising but happy ending, the message of "the importance of dreams" is revealed. A book for children and adults alike, *Appелеmando's Dreams* teaches the reader not to let go of his dreams, unless it is for the world to see.

8. Say, A. (1988). *A River Dream*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

A little boy takes a fantasy trip up the river by his house to fly-fish with his uncle.

9. Uchida, Y. (1981). *Jar of Dreams*. New York: Atheneum.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

An ingenious simplicity and grace mark the first-person telling of the story of eleven-year-old Rinko and her Japanese family in Berkeley, California. Times are hard for everyone in 1935, but being Japanese is for Rinko an added burden. . . . Compared with the many worldly-wise contemporary book heroines, Rinko is genuine and refreshing, and her worries and concerns seem wholly natural, honest and convincing.



10. Yep, L. (1993). *The Butterfly Boy*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

In a tale inspired by the fourth century B.C. writings of Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu, a boy dreams that he is a butterfly, and as a butterfly, he dreams that he is a boy.

11. Yep, L. (1997). *Tree of Dreams: Ten Tales from the Garden of Night*. Mahwah, N.J.: Bridgewater Books.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

A master storyteller offers a collection of folktales, from Brazil, China, India, Japan, and other countries, that involve dreams and dreaming.

12. Young, E. (1995). *Night Visitors*. New York: Harper Collins.

Reading Level: grades 3-5

This story is a retelling of a Chinese folktale in which a young scholar learns respect for all forms of life when he becomes part of an ant colony in a dream.

#### Family Relationships

1. Castaneda, Omar (1993). *Abuela's Weave*. Lee and Low.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

A 1993 Parent's Choice Award honoree, this story about the importance of family pride and personal endurance introduces children to the culture of Guatemala through the eyes of little Esperanza, who works with her *abuela*--her grandmother--on weavings to sell at the public market.

2. Choi, S.N. (1997). *Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Yunmi and her grandmother, Hal-moni, are going to Korea, where Halmoni lived before she moved to New York City. While Yunmi enjoys seeing Korea and meeting her relatives, she feels like an outsider and longs to have Halmoni to herself again. She also fears that Halmoni will not return home to New York with her. Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip vividly and gracefully crosses cultural and generational boundaries. This book transcends Korean or English, speaking the universal language of the heart.

3. Choi, S.N. (1997). *The Best Older Sister*. New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

Sunhi struggles with jealousy toward her young brother just before his first birthday. However, her sensitive grandmother helps the child understand more about the demands of babies and gives Sunhi some special attention. Choi tells a balanced, sensitive story that incorporates some Korean family traditions. The important first-birthday celebration with a traditional outfit for the baby and silk dresses for Sunhi and her two best friends showcases multicultural understanding as a natural part of life.

4. Gonzalez-Jensen, M. (1997). *The Butterfly Pyramid*. Bothell, WA: The Wright Group.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

A boy discovers the secret of the butterfly pyramid and the joy of giving.

5. Guback, G. (1994). *Luka's Quilt*. New York: Greenwillow.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

When Luka's tutu (grandmother) makes her a traditional Hawaiian quilt, the child is disappointed because it doesn't have the colorful flowers that she envisioned. The two of them quarrel about it, and both are hurt. When Lei Day arrives, however, Tutu suggests a truce so that they can celebrate together. Inspired by her granddaughter's lei-making at the festival, Tutu creates a colorful fabric lei to accent the plain quilt, which restores her relationship with the child.

6. Hurmence, B. (1990). *A Girl Called Boy*. New York: Clarion Books.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

The story is about a young eleven-year-old black girl that hates her name. She dislikes her name because its initials spell "BOY" (Blanche Overtha Yancey). She also dislikes her name on the account that it is a direct connection with traditional names that her ancestors, whom were bonded in slavery, had. She thinks that her family's traditional past is a weakness for her.

One day, though her entire world changes; she gets lost in the mountain forest of North Carolina. While wandering around she gets caught in the space-time continuum and is sent back to the 1850's. It's a story about embracing who you are by respecting the heritage of which you are made.

7. Myers, W. (1982). *Won't Know Until I Get There*. New York: Viking Press.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

A realistic look at foster care from a child's perspective.

8. Nye, N. (1997). *Sitti's Secrets*. New York: Aladdin.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

When Mona travels from her home in the U.S. to visit her grandmother's small Palestinian village on the West Bank, she must rely on her father to translate at first, but soon she and Sitti are communicating perfectly. With a childlike sense of wonder, Mona relates some of the sights, sounds, and tastes she is introduced to as well as "the secrets" she learns from spending time in the wise, elderly woman's company.

Upon her return home, Mona writes to the president describing the woman and expressing her concerns about the situation in her homeland. "I vote for peace. My grandmother votes with me." says Mona. This is a story about connections that serves as a thoughtful, loving affirmation of the bonds that transcend language barriers, time zones, and national borders.

9. Orlev, Uri (1995). *Lydia, Queen of Palestine*. New York: Puffin Reprint.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Lydia, a typically self-centered and unusually spirited child caught up in the dissolution of her personal and societal worlds, narrates her story. Her parents separate, divorce, and ultimately remarry-both to people she considers to be her enemies. World War II Romania becomes an increasingly dangerous place for Jews, and Lydia's mother sends her to a kibbutz in Israel, promising to follow soon.

Adjustment to communal life is difficult for an individualist like Lydia, and when her mother neither arrives nor writes, she seeks out her father, already in Israel. Reluctantly, she comes to realize that "That Woman" to whom he is now married is not really an adversary. When her mother arrives married to the man Lydia had tried to get rid of, she is also able to accept him.

10. Ortega, C. (1997). *Los Ojos Del Tejedor: The Eyes of the Weaver*. New York: Sagebrush Bound Books.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

This book beautifully describes Hispanic traditions and the importance of teaching the children these skills. Ten-year-old Cristina loves going to her grandparents' house, but she is particularly nervous about this trip. She knows that she is going to spend a

week there to learn how to weave and is filled with anxiety over weaving as well as her grandfather, and she doesn't speak Spanish as well as she'd like. Her mother suggests that her cousin, who speaks better Spanish, should join her and their grandparents, and that makes Cristina feel more confident about her visit.

11. Salisbury, Graham. (1998). *Jungle Dogs*. New York: Delacorte.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Boy Regis, a sixth grader in a Hawaiian village, is extremely fearful of the jungle dogs that supposedly inhabit the area. With the help of his father, an old man he meets, and some deep introspection, Boy must overcome this fear and try to save his brother from his gang activities. Along the way, Boy learns to respect his family, his friends, strangers, and even his "enemy" at school.

12. Say, Allen (1989). *The Lost Lake*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

A boy spends a lonely summer with his father, who is so engrossed in work he scarcely notices or talks to his son. Early one Saturday Dad wakes the boy with a surprise: they are going camping, in search of a special lake Dad had visited as a boy.

When the Lost Lake is rediscovered, it is overrun with families camping and swimming; Dad is determined they will find another. Through a bleak rainstorm and dangerous bear country father and son press on, and the boy is happy to see Dad gradually become more animated and talkative. The father's perseverance finally pays off: a brand-new special lake, all to themselves, to enjoy and remember. There is a sense of melancholy pervading Say's narrative, yet the story is far from depressing. The reader is drawn into the frustration felt--for different reasons--by both father and son, and rejoices with them in their final glorious discovery.

13. Soto, G. (1992). *Skirt*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Miata is proud of her family's Mexican heritage. Lately, she has been practicing with her folklorico dance troupe for a performance, and she has even brought her costume to school to show her classmates. But on the Friday before the show Miata forgets her decorative skirt on the school bus. Afraid to tell her parents about her mistake, the girl enlists her friend Ana to retrieve the garment.

Soto's tale offers a pleasant blend of family ties, friendship and ethnic pride. Readers will be introduced to a few words, foods and customs that may be new to them, but will also relate to Miata's true-to-life, universal experiences and relationships.

14. Steptoe, J. (1980). *Daddy Is a Monster...Sometimes*. New York: Lippincott.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

The story is about why two little African American children think their Daddy is a Monster at times. The kids are African American, but they could be any race. Daddys just sometimes lose their cool, but this is the story told through the children's perspective.

15. Taylor, M. (1991). *Let the Circle be Unbroken*. New York: Puffin Books.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

Tells the story of the black Logan family in Mississippi during the Depression. The children are happy in their stable family, but outside is fear and tension. Much of the book focuses on the plight of Cassie's elder brother, Stacey. This is the sequel to "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry".

16. Taylor, M.(1990). *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World*. New York: Yearling Books.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Sure, he can catch a greased pig at a local rodeo, but can he bake biscuits? Ten-year-old Justin struggles to "feel like a guy" in a family dominated by females. When he goes to spend a week at his grandfather's ranch, he discovers there's more to being a man than riding horses and tending to livestock. There's also cleaning up messes, making beds and, from time to time, baking biscuits--good biscuits.

Along with its lighthearted treatment of gender conflict, this story, which won the 1987 Coretta Scott King Award, provides a look at the little-known history of the black cowboys who helped settle the West and create rodeos.

17. Yep, L. (1977). *Child of the Owl*. New York: Harper Collins.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

Twelve-year-old Casey is waiting for the day that Barney, her father, hits it big -- 'cause when that horse comes in, he tells her, it's the penthouse suite. But then he ends up in the hospital, and Casey is sent to Chinatown to live with her grandmother, Paw-Paw. Now the waiting seems longer than ever. Casey feels lost in Chinatown. She's not prepared for the Chinese school, the noisy crowds, missing her father. But Paw-Paw tells her about the mother Casey never knew, and about her family's owl charm and her true Chinese name. And Casey at last begins to understand that this -- Paw-Paw's Chinatown home, her parents' home -- is her home, too.

18. Yep, L. (1996). *Ribbons*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

A Eurasian girl named Robin Lee is forced to give up her beloved ballet lessons because her parents need the money to bring her grandmother to America from China. Robin finds herself resenting this difficult--and different--elderly foreign woman, crippled by years of having her feet bound.

19. Yep, L. (1999). *The Amah*. New York: Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

Things have been tough in the Chin household since Amy's father died, but her mother's new job as an *amah* (nanny) for 12-year-old Stephanie, who is just Amy's age, may help. Unfortunately, it means that Amy must take on more responsibility for the house and her four younger siblings, and that she will have less time to prepare for her role as a wicked stepsister in her ballet school's performance of Cinderella.

As it turns out, Amy begins to feel and act like the role she's getting ready for when it appears that sweet, "perfect" Stephanie is trying to take over the Chin family. The strained relationship between Amy and her "old world" mother is one of the strongest elements in this story, which clearly delineates the sort of struggle that can occur between generations in an immigrant family as well as what it feels like to be an outsider, even in your own home.

#### Friendship or Coping with Losses

1. Ada, A. (2000). *Friend Frog*. New York: Harcourt.

Reading Level: grades: 2-3

When he finds that he cannot croak, jump, or swim like the frog he meets at the pond, Field Mouse wonders if they can be friends.

2. Bruchac, J. (1993). *The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story*. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

A gentle story of the Sun's healing of marital discord by a gift of ripe strawberries that magically grow at the feet of an angry woman as she flees her husband's harsh words, thus halting her departure long enough for him to catch up and make amends. Thereafter, the story concludes, whenever the Cherokee eat strawberries, they are reminded to be kind to one another.

3. Carmi, D. (2000). *Samir and Yonatan*. New York: Arthur A. Levine/Scholastic Press.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

Nothing could be more frightening to Samir, a Palestinian boy, than to be where he is now: an Israeli hospital ward, trapped among the very people he blames for his brother's death. Amid this explosive atmosphere, Samir begins to learn about the Israeli kids around him. He discovers their hurts and conflicts - and hesitantly begins to share his own. This is a story of violence and healing - the story of a boy facing the enemy he has been taught to fear.

4. Erdrich, L. (2002). *The Birchbark House*. New York: Hyperion Books.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

With *The Birchbark House*, award-winning author Louise Erdrich's first novel for young readers, a slice of history is seen through the eyes of the spirited, 7-year-old Ojibwa girl Omakayas, or Little Frog, so named because her first step was a hop. The sole survivor of a smallpox epidemic on Spirit Island, Omakayas, then only a baby girl, was rescued by a fearless woman named Tallow and welcomed into an Ojibwa family on Lake Superior's Madeline Island, the Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker. We follow Omakayas and her adopted family through a cycle of four seasons in 1847, including the winter, when a historically documented outbreak of smallpox overtook the island.

5. Fogelman, A. (2003) *Crossing Jordan*. New York: Peachtree Jr. Publishers.

Reading Level: grades 5-8

A contemporary story set in Tallahassee, Florida, of interracial friendship despite parental opposition, with a clear purpose and predictable outcome. Twelve-year-old Cass befriends African-American Jemmie when her family moves into the house next door. The girls both love to run and become instant friends, racing each morning. They also read *Jane Eyre* together, analyzing and alternating chapters.

Calling themselves "Chocolate Milk," the girls derive inspiration from Jemmie's wise, gospel-singing grandmother and set an example of understanding for both families. Cass, however, must keep their friendship a secret from her racist father until her baby sister's heatstroke compels Jemmie's indignant mother to volunteer her nursing skills. From then on, Cass's grateful parents are solicitous of their new neighbors and both families cheer the girls to a dramatic finish in a fund-raiser race. Jemmie is wisecracking and confident, challenging her responsible and reflective friend to be the first in her family to aspire to a college degree. Some of the parental reasons for racial mistrust are exposed, civil rights history is touched on.

6. Goble, P. (1994). *Adopted by the Eagles: A Plains Indian Story of Friendship and Treachery*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

In this sophisticated picture book, Goble retells a Lakota legend of betrayal and love. Two young warriors swear friendship, but when they become rivals for the same maiden, one abandons the other on a rocky ledge. Saved by eagles, the abandoned warrior returns to his village and shames his former friend into leaving, then marries the girl. The illustrations are vintage Goble--stylized figures in historically accurate clothing, outlined in white and set against landscapes of vast sky or dark, slanting rock. The text includes some terms in Lakota language (in boldface type), and there's an introductory note on the tale's source.

7. Hamilton, V. (1993). *Zeely*. New York: Aladdin Books.

Reading Level: grades 5-7

Geeder's summer at her uncle's farm is made special because of her friendship with a very tall, composed woman who raises hogs and who closely resembles the magazine photograph of a Watutsi queen.

8. Medearis, A. (1995). *The Adventures of Sugar and Junior*. New York: Holiday House.

Reading Level: grades 2-3

In four chapters, Medearis relates the friendship and adventures of Sugar Johnson, a black girl, and Santiago Ramirez, a Hispanic boy known as Junior. The first story is the best as the two new neighbors meet and Sugar relates how she got her name. The other chapters cover cookie baking, a scary movie, and buying ice-cream cones.

One of book's strengths is the easy and open friendship between the two children. Poydar introduces each chapter with a large watercolor painting and then sprinkles the text with smaller pictures that capture the expressions and action of the characters. The school-age children, large-print type, easy vocabulary, and chapter format make the book most appropriate for beginning readers.

9. Nhuong, Q. (1986). *The Land I Lost*. New York: Harper Trophy.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

The author grew up in a hamlet in the central highlands of Vietnam, and these are his stories of that childhood. It is a collection of beautifully written, true stories of growing up, of earthy humorous happenings and memories.



10. Paterson, K. (1978). *The Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Harper Collins.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

The story starts out simply enough: Jess Aarons wants to be the fastest boy in the fifth grade--he wants it so bad he can taste it. He's been practicing all summer, running in the fields around his farmhouse until he collapses in a sweat. Then a tomboy named Leslie Burke moves into the farmhouse next door and changes his life forever. Not only does Leslie not look or act like any girls Jess knows, but she also turns out to be the fastest runner in the fifth grade. After getting over the shock and humiliation of being beaten by a girl, Jess begins to think Leslie might be okay.

Despite their superficial differences, it's clear that Jess and Leslie are soul mates. The two create a secret kingdom in the woods named Terabithia, where the only way to get into the castle is by swinging out over a gully on an enchanted rope. Here they reign as king and queen, fighting off imaginary giants and the walking dead, sharing stories and dreams, and plotting against the schoolmates who tease them. Jess and Leslie find solace in the sanctuary of Terabithia until a tragedy strikes and the two are separated forever.

11. Say, A. (1995). *Stranger in the Mirror*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

This haunting story exposes the agony caused by American attitudes toward aging and differences. Sam enters an empty house after school and instantly pictures his grandfather's final wave good-bye (presumably off to a nursing home). Sam dreads getting old. The next morning, his entrance into the kitchen causes a family commotion; when he turns to look in the mirror, his face is wrinkled, his hair gray. His mother, the epitome of calmness, marches him off to the doctor who diagnoses an unspecified skin condition and sends him to school. There, as in the kitchen and examining room scenes, the onlookers face Sam and readers registering horror and repulsion.

After a second day of taunting and teasing at school, he prepares to run away, but a skateboard rolls by and Sam hops on, losing himself in the experience. That night he comes to terms with the difference between his inner and outer selves. Upon awakening, he again sees a stranger in the mirror. This time it is Sam the boy. Was this a dream or did it really happen? Say leaves that question unanswered; there are details that could support either conclusion. But all the elements from the abundance of gray, undecorated backgrounds to the utter pain in Sam's eyes; from the disturbing incongruity of the aged face on the small, sneakered body, to the spare, matter-of-fact telling contribute to a book that is uncomfortable, unsettling, and oh-so-necessary. Use it to probe issues of appearance in the classroom or with individuals.

12. Soto, G. (1998). *Big Bushy Mustache*. New York: Knopf.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

For his class's Cinco de Mayo play, Ricky, about six years old, turns down swords, pistols, a cape, a serape, a sombrero, and other accoutrements for a fake mustache so he can play the role of a victorious Mexican soldier. With the bigot, the boy feels that he looks just like his father. Disobeying his teacher, Ricky sneaks the prop out of school and loses it on the way home. After spending an anxious evening trying to make another one, he prepares to face the music. It is then that his father delivers a clever solution. Soto sprinkles a few Spanish words into the English text.

13. Soto, G. (1996). *Off and Running*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Miata Ramirez, is running for student-body president on a platform of school beautification. Unfortunately, her opponent, the irrepressible Rudy Herrera is promising longer recesses and Ice-Cream Day every day. How can Miata and her shy running mate, Ana, hope to compete with the popular Rudy and his cut-up friend, Alex.

Miata works hard on her campaign, trying to rouse enthusiasm for graffiti cleanup and planting projects. Rudy gets attention and goofs off. Sometimes he even gets Miata into trouble. In spite of various mishaps, Miata and her goals triumph. The tie-breaking votes come from Rudy and Alex, who would rather go out for soccer and who think the girls would do a better job.

This book offers an engaging look at student politics. But, more importantly, it is a realistic, warm portrayal of a Latino school in California - the kids, their families, and traditions. It is a humorous, light, good-natured story about everyday life in one community that will have great appeal for kids everywhere.

14. Taylor, M. (1998). *The Friendship*. New York: Puffin Books.

Reading Level: grades 3-5

A hot, humid afternoon in Mississippi in 1933 is the setting for a tense drama and tragic confrontation between Mr. Tom Bee, an elderly black man, and a white store owner, John Wallace. The interaction between the two men portrays how severely the bonds of friendship can be tested against a backdrop of racism, peer pressure, and individual rights. This novella is narrated by Cassie Logan from *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Dial, 1976).

She and her brothers go to the country store for some medicine for a neighbor. At the store, they are hassled by Wallace's sons. They run into Mr. Bee, who addresses John

Wallace by his first name. Blacks are forbidden to do so, but Mr. Bee had saved John's life on more than one occasion, and John had given him permission to call him by his first name. Under pressure and taunting by the men in his store, John reneges on his promise in an explosive and devastating outburst. This book lends itself well to discussions on various topics pertaining to human relations

15. Woodson, J. (2001). *The Other Side*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

Clover has always wondered why a fence separates the black side of town from the white side. But this summer when Annie, a white girl from the other side, begins to sit on the fence, Clover grows more curious about the reason why the fence is there and about the daring girl who sits on it, rain or shine. And one day, feeling very brave, Clover approaches Annie. After all, why should a fence stand in the way of friendship?

Beautifully rendered in Earl B. Lewis's striking, lifelike watercolor illustrations, Jacqueline Woodson gives us a moving, lyrical narrative told in the hopeful voice of a child confused about the fence someone else has built in her yard and the racial tension that divides her world.

#### Coping with Fears and Courage

1. Flake, S. (1998). *The Skin I'm In*. New York: Jump At The Sun Publishers.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

Seventh-grader Maleeka Madison is miserable when a new teacher comes to her depressed inner-city school. Miss Saunders evidently is rich, self-assured in spite of the white birthmark across her black skin, and prone to getting into kids' faces about both their behavior and their academic potential. Black and bright, Maleeka is so swamped by her immediate problems that Miss Saunders's attentions nearly capsize her stability. The girl's mother has just emerged from a two-year period of intense mourning for her dead husband, during which time her daughter has provided her with physical and moral support with no adult assistance. At school, Maleeka endures mean-spirited teasing about the darkness of her skin and her unstylish clothing. She seeks solace in writing an extended creative piece, at Miss Saunders's instigation, and also in the company of powerful clique of nasty girls.

Told in Maleeka's voice, this first novel bristles with attitude that is both genuine and alarming. The young teen understands too well that her brains aren't as valuable as the social standing that she doesn't have. In the end, she is able to respond positively to Miss Saunders; she also becomes socially anointed through the affections of the most popular boy in the school. This message rings true in spite of the fact that Maleeka's salvation isn't exactly politically correct.

2. Goble, P. (1980). *The Gift of the Sacred Dog: Story and Illustrations*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

A brave boy goes into the hills and prays for help for his people. A rider on a magnificent animal comes to him and says: "This animal is called the Sacred Dog. He can do many things your dogs can do and also more...He is as the wind: gentle but sometimes frightening." The clouds close and suddenly one by one countless Sacred Dogs course down from the sky. And so the courage of one determined boy is rewarded by the Great Spirit: The horse, or Sacred Dog, is given to his tribe.

3. Houston, J. (1993). *Farewell to Manzanar*. New York: Laurel Leaf Books.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

This is a wonderful story of courage. The courage of a child and the courage of an adult who learns to forgive and not hold in bitterness - to learn how to love herself and to fall in love despite the turmoils of her life.

4. Neuberger, A. (1997) *The Girl-Son*, New York: Carol Rhoda Books.

Reading Level: grades 4-6

Induk Pakh was born in a Korean peasant cottage in 1896 under the powerful signs of the dragon and tiger, but unfortunately, she was female. Her father was a scholar who died when she was six, and since women could not own property, their house and farm went to a male cousin. Although Induk's mother was illiterate, she wanted a better life for her daughter so she schemed and conspired to educate her.

Since Korean schools did not admit girls, Induk received her early schooling disguised as a boy. Later she attended a mission high school for girls that opened in Seoul and finally graduated from Ewha College for Women. Induk's education required enormous sacrifices, but she became an educator and a lecturer who traveled widely and advanced the cause of women in Korea. Part of the Adventures in Time series, this novel, which is based on Pakh's life, will be a good addition to multicultural and feminist collections.

5. Orlev, U. (1984). *The Island on Bird Street*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Reading Level: grades 5-6

During World War II a Jewish boy is left on his own for months in a ruined house in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he must learn all the tricks of survival under constantly life-threatening conditions.

6. Rinaldi, Ann (1996). *Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons*. New York: Gulliver Books.

Reading Level: grades 6-8

Phillis Wheatley, America's first black poet, was a child when purchased by John Wheatley in 1761, and her entrance into his Boston household marked the beginning of her unique position. She was educated, nurtured, and encouraged to write by the prominent Wheatleys, but was never considered an equal because of her color.

It is Phillis' dilemma of belonging to neither the white nor the slave society that Rinaldi so well delineates. Obviously deeply researched, the novel abounds with details of colonial life--encounters the Wheatleys had with America's early historical figures as well as the effects of the day's politics on Mrs. Wheatley's campaign to get Phillis' poetry published. The poet's circumstances deteriorated after the deaths of the Wheatleys, and she died at age 30, in severe poverty, her husband in debtor's prison.

7. Yoshiko, U. (1993). *The Bracelet*. New York: Philomel Books.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

It is 1942, and seven-year-old Emi is being sent from her home in Berkeley, California, to an internment camp with her mother and older sister. Her father was arrested earlier and incarcerated in a camp in Montana.

Temporarily herded into stables at a race track with other Japanese-American families, Emi realizes that she has lost the bracelet that her best friend, Laurie Madison, gave her as a parting keepsake. At first desolate, she soon realizes that she does not need the token after all, as she will always carry Laurie in her heart and mind.

8. Yoshiko, U. (1985). *Journey to Topaz*. Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts.

Reading Level: grades 3-4

Like any 11-year-old, Yuki Sakane is looking forward to Christmas when her peaceful world is suddenly shattered by the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Uprooted from her home and shipped with thousands of West Coast Japanese Americans to a desert concentration camp called Topaz, Yuki and her family face new hardships daily.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Transactional Literature Circles and the Reading Comprehension of At-Risk English Learners in the Mainstream Classroom

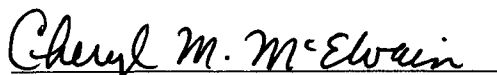
This study examined a problem that many mainstream elementary teachers face today – how to successfully improve second language reading comprehension skills for English learners in an English only environment. The researcher used a mixed methods approach to examine both the academic and psychosocial effects of the Transactional Literature Circles Program (TLC) on 75, 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade, *at-risk*, English learners in 13 mainstream classrooms over 9 months. A control group of 75 *at-risk*, English learner students was used as a comparison. Multiple sources of evidence were used to provide the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the program's impact.

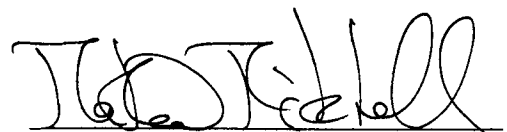
The results of this study indicated that the TLC program positively impacted the reading comprehension of the *at-risk* English learners who participated in the study. The TLC students outperformed the students in the control group on the 2004 CAT 6 Reading Test, and the 2004 Reading and Writing CELDT Tests. In 7 months, the TLC students increased one grade level of reading. This achievement gain is in stark contrast to the Collier and Thomas (1999) research findings that indicate English learners normally make one year's reading growth in 15 months. These findings suggest that mainstream classroom instruction can work when culturally relevant constructivist pedagogy is used.

Teacher surveys and interviews reported an increase in student reading engagement and motivation that positively affected reading self efficacy, confidence, and a willingness to participate in whole class discussions. Student survey results noted an

increase in the use of reading comprehension strategies, which increased understanding and retention of important ideas in the text.

All program participants agreed that increased reading motivation and engagement was a significant by product of consistent small group interaction that employed a direct teaching of reading comprehension strategies. Instructing students in small group settings helped the teachers acknowledge and respond to their students' unique cultural orientations, values, and learning styles, thus positively affecting achievement outcomes.

  
Cheryl M. McElvain, Author

  
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