

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

1-13-2020

Third grade students collaborate and construct meaning using new literacies

Amanda Marie Mazzella
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Recommended Citation

Mazzella, Amanda Marie, "Third grade students collaborate and construct meaning using new literacies" (2020). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2747.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2747>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.

**THIRD GRADE STUDENTS COLLABORATE AND CONSTRUCT MEANING
USING NEW LITERACIES**

by

Amanda Marie Mazzella

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

January 8, 2020

Thesis Advisor: Valarie Lee, Ph.D.

© 2019 Amanda Marie Mazzella

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Gerard and Donna Mazzella, my siblings Anthony and Justina Mazzella, and my boyfriend Michael Moore whose unwavering support has helped me to achieve the goals I set for myself. Thank you all for your love and encouragement throughout my entire Master's program.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Valarie Lee for her help and guidance throughout this research study. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues in the MA in Reading Program. The support and friendships we share made this experience achievable.

I would like to express my appreciation to the students and administration at the study site and school in which I teach for allowing this study to take place.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to my boyfriend Michael for his continued love, support, and for bringing me joy in the moments of frustration.

Abstract

Amanda Marie Mazzella
THIRD GRADE STUDENTS COLLABORATE AND CONSTRUCT MEANING
USING NEW LITERACIES
2018-2019
Valarie Lee, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this research was to study how students collaborate and construct learning using new literacies to understand literature. Specifically, this study investigated how responding to literature digitally shapes students' responses and what students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration. Surveys, interviews, students' constructed responses, anecdotal notes, and a teacher research journal were all analyzed and coded for emerging themes. The findings show that responding to literature digitally can increase classroom efficiency, student engagement, and student motivation. Online discussions also provided opportunities for students to effectively communicate and increased their ability to collaborate. As the study progressed, it was evident that students used new literacies to create a deeper meaning of their learning. Digital tools also caused a shift in traditional teacher and student roles as students used digital tools to redefine literary responses. Overall, the findings from this study support previous research which suggests that the Internet and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICTs) enhance and redefine literacy instruction and learning.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Purpose Statement	2
Statement of the Research Question and Problem.....	4
Story of the Question.....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	7
New Literacies Theory	8
Social Constructivism.....	10
Reader Response Theory.....	12
Reader Response in the Classroom	13
New Literacies and Reader Response	13
Virtual and Online Literature Discussions.....	15
Social Learning Community and Collaboration.....	15
Motivation and Engagement.....	17
Conclusion	19
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology	21
Procedure of the Study	21
Data Sources	22
Data Analysis.....	23
Context.....	25

Table of Contents (Continued)

Community	25
School	25
Classroom	27
Students	27
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings	29
Student Motivation and Engagement Increased	29
Effectively Communicate and Collaborate	32
Redefining Literary Responses	34
Enhanced Understanding of Stories	36
Greater Classroom Efficiency	39
Chapter 5: Conclusion	41
Summary	41
Conclusions of the Study	41
Limitations	44
Implications	44
References	47
Appendix A: Pre-Study Survey	50
Appendix B: Student Interview	51

List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Sample Discussion Post	38

Chapter 1

Introduction

“How much will I really learn in an online class? Will I be teaching myself? Will I make any friends? How involved will my professors be?” These are some of the many questions I asked myself when I applied to Rowan University’s Masters in Reading Education program in January 2017. The program is in an accelerated hybrid format with a total of ten courses. Three courses require some face-to-face meetings and the remaining courses take place 100% online. When I applied to the university I was concerned with taking a majority of the classes online. Still, since I was working full-time as a third-grade teacher online classes were a convenient option.

During my first course, I learned that one of the requirements was to participate in discussions. Kirk & Orr (2003) define a threaded discussion forum as, “An asynchronous (i.e., not live), web-based discussion that occurs under a number of different topics that are called ‘threads’ ” (p. 2). Every week I would read chapters of books or articles, then I would sign into my online course portal and respond to a question or questions posed by the professor. Since the discussion was not live I had time to reflect on my reading and gather references to support my ideas. After writing my own response a second requirement was to read the posts of my classmates and respond to them. At first, the idea of reading and responding to my classmates’ posts seemed daunting; however, it ended up being the time I learned the most. We would guide each other’s understanding of a text, offer clarification in areas of confusion, and politely agree

or disagree with each other. Together we created a learning community that was effective, comfortable, and collaborative.

My graduate school online discussions remind me of the in-person discussions my third-grade students participate in during guided reading. Every week I meet with my guided reading groups to read a text. Following the reading, I pose questions to the group that they respond to verbally in a discussion format. I started to wonder what it would look like if my students participated in these discussions online in an asynchronous format.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to study how students collaborate and construct learning using new literacies to understand literature. Specifically, this study will investigate how responding to literature digitally shapes students' responses and what students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration.

Recognizing that many teachers use “new technologies to simply replicate longstanding literacy practices” is what grew my curiosity about the incorporation of new literacies into the classroom (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 7). The third- grade students in my class have the knowledge of typical uses of a computer such as logging into websites and creating word documents, but they lack the ability to collaborate via the Internet and engage in social practices to build their understanding of the world they live in. This study will look beyond replicating literacy practices and examine how new literacies help to reimagine what discussions of literature look like in an online environment. Knobel and Lankshear (2014) explain how “participants in new literacy

practices value attending to the interests and knowledge of others, recognize that quality is judged by groups rather than appointed experts, welcome diversity of opinion in decision- making, and so on. This broad “ethos” of new literacies sets them apart from simply being conventional literacies in digital form” (p. 98).

Students today must be able to engage in 21st-century technologies. In order to become productive citizens, “they must be able to comprehend and construct information using print and nonprint materials in fixed and virtual platforms across disciplines” (International Literacy Association, 2012, p. 2). In order to reach the needs of our 21st- century learners literacy instruction must evolve. Educators can make sure that students are prepared for their literacy future by utilizing new instructional strategies and resources that effectively use information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the classroom (International Reading Association, 2009). Although technology is used in some of today’s classrooms it is my belief that many teachers are still not effectively integrating the Internet and other ICTs into the curriculum. According to Cammack, Coiro, Kinzer, & Leu (2004), new literacies require teachers to be “(a) aware of emerging technologies for information and communication, (b) capable of identifying the most important new literacies that each requires, and (c) proficient in knowing how to support their development in the classroom” (p. 1599). In addition, the increase of the Internet and other ICTs in the classroom change the central role that teachers play. Since teachers are no longer the most literate person in the classroom, teachers will increasingly need to orchestrate complex contexts for literacy and learning rather than simply dispense literacy skills (Leu et al., 2004, p. 1599). The significant role change and challenging

requirements could be why many teachers are hesitant to integrate new technologies in their classrooms.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The purpose of this research is to study how students collaborate and construct learning using new literacies to understand literature. Specifically, this study will investigate how responding to literature digitally shapes students' responses and what students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration. What happens when students use new literacies to collaborate and construct meaning when reading literature? How do students use these digital spaces to construct environments that enhance their discussions and their understanding of stories? What do students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration?

Story of the Question

I began this school year with a conscious effort to effectively integrate new literacies into the curriculum to prepare my students for successful civic participation in a global environment (International Reading Association, 2009). This decision came about as a result of my online course discussions and what I learned about New Literacy theory during my graduate course. The majority of my graduate school experience has included time spent using online discussions to socially collaborate. In my graduate school studies, I learned that an online discussion is an example of engaging in new literacies, which are more “participatory, collaborative, and distributed in nature than conventional literacies” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 9). Yet, these forms of literacies are lacking in my third-grade classroom.

I have been working as a third-grade teacher in my current school district for four years. Over those four years, I have used guided reading groups to teach literacy skills to small groups of students at their instructional reading level. In guided reading groups, students read a variety of texts and respond through traditional verbal discussions or written responses. In assessing my classroom practices, I recognized a lack of technology utilization that includes new literacies of the 21st-century. Every student in my class has access to a computer; however, they mostly used them to play math games, create word documents, and complete assignments on a district required standard based program. This made me reflect on my graduate school experience and think of how I could incorporate more opportunities for online literature responses and discussions. I wanted students to be immersed in the use of new literacies and broaden their experiences utilizing technology to collaborate and socialize with peers. Cammack, Coiro, Kinzer, & Leu (2004) explain, “the new technologies of literacy allow us to take advantage of the intellectual capital that resides in others, enabling us to collaboratively construct solutions by drawing from the expertise that lies outside ourselves” (p. 1598). As I got to know my students I learned that they regularly use technology outside of school, particularly to communicate. Despite their use of technology at home, students do not use technology to express their ideas, opinions, and interpretations in the classroom. The International Reading Association (2009) recommends that teachers should “provide equal opportunity and access for all students to use ICTs that foster and improve learning.” Therefore, students should have the opportunity to use new literacies in the classroom to enhance motivation and learning.

The following chapters are a qualitative exploration of the research question. Chapter Two provides the theoretical background of new literacies, social constructivism, and reader response. It also presents a review of the literature in the areas of new literacies and reader response, online literature discussions, and virtual learning spaces. Chapter Three supplies the context for the study site and participants and also outlines the research design and methodology used. Chapter Four will be a review and analysis of the data collected during the study. Chapter Five will summarize conclusions, the study's limitations, and implications for the educational field.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. (NCTE Definition, 2013)

The integration of New Literacies addresses the challenge of preparing students for the skills and practices needed in the 21st-century. This can be intimidating for educators since the Internet and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are emerging rapidly. Literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate new literacies into the curriculum to prepare students in becoming effective communicators and increase their ability to collaborate (International Reading Association, 2009).

The growth of digital tools used for discussing literature has created a new area for research on how teachers are using new literacies to support student learning. Mills (2010) explains that in the current work in the New Literacy Studies, a number of studies have examined the successful integration of digital practices among literacy programs for multilingual, bilingual, and low socioeconomic communities. However, according to Mills (2010), there are relatively few studies of informal, digitally rich literacies of middle-class youth. Thus it is important to determine the successful integration of digital practices among literacy programs of middle-class students.

Chapter two provides the theoretical background of new literacies, social constructivism, and reader response. It also presents a review of the literature in the areas of new literacies and reader response, online literature discussions, and virtual learning spaces.

New Literacies Theory

New literacies refer to ways in which practices of teaching and learning are evolving as technology changes. Cammack, Coiro, Kinzer, & Leu (2004), define new literacies as use of the “Internet and other ICTs to develop the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives” (p. 1572). Knobel and Lankshear (2007) believe that new literacies go beyond being able to use new digital technologies to type an essay or look up information on the internet. Rather, they “enable people to build and participate in literacy practices that involve different kinds of values, sensibilities, norms and procedures and so on from those that characterize conventional literacies” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 7). In order to prepare students to become successful and productive citizens, classroom instruction must include new literacies practices.

All literacies (new and old) include blending technology, knowledge, and skills together for a social purpose. From a theoretical perspective, Knobel and Lankshear (2007) recognize paradigm cases of new literacies which include both new “technical

stuff” and new “ethos stuff.” The significance of new literacies is that they involve very different values and socio-cultural relations than conventional literacies.

The new “technical stuff” of new literacies is generating, communicating, and negotiating encoded meanings by providing new and more accessible resource possibilities for making meaning (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011, p. 56). Twitter practices, creating memes, email applications, discussion boards, and social news sites are some of the many examples of digital technologies that have expanded possibilities of conventional literacies.

New “ethos stuff” according to Knobel and Lankshear (2014), characterize new literacies as more participatory, collaborative, and distributed, and less “published,” less “author-centric,” and less “individual” than conventional literacies (p. 98). Engaging in social media sites and other online environments of participation involve opportunities for collaboration beyond those available from conventional literacy practices. Students are growing up in a world that revolves around this form of interaction, therefore it is essential that classroom practices include both new “technical stuff” and new “ethos stuff.”

Glister (1997) emphasizes the importance of becoming digitally literate and how digital literacy is different from the traditional concept of literacy. Glister defines digital literacy as, “the ability to understand information and to evaluate and integrate information in multiple formats that the computer can deliver” (In Pool, 1997). Digital literacy is different from traditional literacy for multiple reasons. First, digital literacy is interacting with more than just text. Multimedia computers enable students and teachers

to interact with photos, video, and audio. Second, locating information on the Internet is different since it requires a person to construct and evaluate information available from around the world. Lastly, it is multidimensional and interactive. People can search for information on a topic then communicate that information around the world instantly. While not everything on the Internet is beneficial for education, Glistter believes the integration of knowledge and the emphasis on communication are powerful tools. Glistter explains that “teachers can use these resources to present new kinds of experiences to their students” (In Pool, 1997).

The importance of 21st century learning in school is crucial especially since it is continuously growing and changing. Students need the skills to participate and adapt to these changes to become productive and engaged citizens in the 21st century. Literacies require knowledge of how to use information skills in effective collaboration with others (Rheingold, 2012). Today’s students need to know how to participate in an online community and thoughtfully design and share information. Teachers have the responsibility to scaffold their students’ ability to learn and produce knowledge together online.

Social Constructivism

Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) believe that learning is often socially constructed within new literacies. The theoretical framework of constructivism indicates that learning occurs when individuals integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge. Vygotsky’s (1978) Social Constructivist Theory emphasizes that children learn as a result of social interactions with others. Thus, Social Constructivism will be applied to this

study of responding to literature digitally. Students' online responses to the text will propose their personal meaning-making and prior experiences. The digital space will then provide an opportunity for students to engage in discussion.

Oldfather and Dahl (1995) propose a reconceptualization of motivation for literacy that centers on the learner as an operative in the social construction of meaning. In their work, they explain three domains of intrinsic motivation for literacy learning: classroom culture domain, interpersonal domain, and intrapersonal domain. The interpersonal domain addresses the relationship among learners as they engage in literacy learning together. The authors explain three key elements that occur in the learning process including: "*constructing meaning* as clusters of students engage with the literacy curriculum, *self-expression* as individuals discover and share personal interpretations, and *learning from and with others* as learners work collaboratively" (p. 9). Online discussions create a space where learners can engage in literacy learning together. Therefore, the three key elements that occur in the learning process specifically relate to this research of students' responses to literature using online discussions.

Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004), "expect that social learning strategies will be central to literacy instruction in the future" (p. 1597). They emphasize two dimensions in their framework of a New Literacies Perspective. First, social learning is essential in the exchange of new skills and strategies needed to interact with complex and continually changing technologies for information and communication. In a world of multiple new literacies, instruction must include the knowledge and communication of both the teacher and students. Second, social learning plays a critical role in how

information is constructed within technologies. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) explain, “the new technologies of literacy allow us to take advantage of the intellectual capital that resides in others, enabling us to collaboratively construct solutions to important problems by drawing from the expertise that lies outside ourselves” (p. 1598). Therefore, the construction of knowledge will progressively be a collaborative effort within the Internet and ICTs learning environments.

Reader Response Theory

Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reader response is the final theoretical underpinning of this study. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that every reading experience is unique to each individual. The interaction between the reader and the text is a result of the reader’s prior experience and personal meaning making. According to Rosenblatt (1978) all readers have two kinds of responses to text, known as “efferent responses” and “aesthetic responses”. Efferent responses include facts the reader took away from the reading. Aesthetic responses include personal or emotional connections to the reading. Leu et al. (2004), explains that new literacies almost always build on foundational literacies rather than replace them. Thus, foundational literacies such as response to literature will continue to be important within the new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs. In fact, with increasing access to the Internet, people redefine literacy practices while they respond to literature and communicate using online discussions. New literacies change regularly as technology opens new possibilities for communication and information (Leu et al., 2004). Leu et al. (2004) explains, “We see this happening today

when people redefine literacy practices when they communicate on a chatboard associated with a website or talk to one another using a video cam” (p. 1570).

Reader response in the classroom. Delony, Morgan, and Howell (2013) examined reading response in two elementary school classrooms. They discovered four major conclusions regarding the role of reader response in the classroom, two of which are relevant to this research study. First, a sense of classroom community fostered authentic, aesthetic responses to text. Reader response allows for multiple answers and perspectives, allowing all students the opportunity to contribute to the classroom community. Next, reader response was used for assessment and accountability. Reading responses help teachers monitor student understanding and determine if they are meeting the state’s standards (Delony, Morgan, & Howell, 2013, p. 9). According to the authors, teachers need to continue using written responses and oral discussions to assess their students, promote critical thinking and inform their instruction (p. 11).

New literacies and reader response. Today many educators and researchers have found ways to integrate new literacies and reader response. There are numerous benefits to a more integrated approach in which reading and writing are inextricably tied to digital tools (Wood & Jocius, 2014). Digital tools offer new opportunities for literature response. Students can create responses with text, images, sounds, videos, and music. Wood and Jocius (2014) explain that with these tools students “have more opportunities to develop personal and critical connections to text” (p. 130).

In an empirical study, Bowers-Campbell (2011) sought to discover how integrating technology with literature circles could affect group dynamics and student

reading responses. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading response was used as a lens to examine her data which included discussion threads from a reading group's online literature circles. Bowers-Campbell (2011) found two themes from student responses. First, "groups actively promoted socially constructed membership" and second, "discussion posts demonstrated engaged reading processes" (p. 560). Educators have worried that moving discussions online could cause a possible disconnect in the classroom community. However, Bowers-Campbell noticed the opposite, in that "many posts demonstrated students' overt efforts to connect with each other personally while also offering diverse ideas about their chosen texts" (p. 561). The second theme noted was that students' discussions demonstrated Rosenblatt's efferent and aesthetic stances. Bower-Campbell (2011) explains, "through their descriptions of personal connections with their books and their evaluations and judgments of characters, scenes, and contemporary issues, participants demonstrated highly engaged and sophisticated reading practices" (p. 563). Therefore, the students' online responses demonstrated both stances when they discussed ways their books connected with their own lives, with other texts, and with the larger world. Although Bower-Campbell's study focused on online reading responses her findings were similar to that of Delony, Morgan, and Howell (2013).

An empirical study by Larson (2009) examined new literacies and technology integration within the context of reading workshop in a fifth grade class. Data collection and analysis included field notes, individual interviews with the students and teacher, classroom voice recordings, students' electronic journals, and online message board transcripts. Students read e-books and shared personal thoughts about the literature in an

electronic response journal. Following the reading, students used an online message board to discuss and respond to the literature. The researcher posted message board prompts that students were asked to respond to before replying to their group members. After two sessions students requested that they would like to create their own prompts. Therefore, for the rest of the study, the students initiated the literature conversation by creating and posting their own prompts. Through her study, Larson discovered that “engagement in an asynchronous online literature discussion encourages students to respond deeply to the literature, share their ideas with others, and carefully consider multiple perspectives and thoughts” (p. 646). The student-constructed prompts generated creative responses and invited group members to think deeply about the literature and voice their opinions.

Virtual and Online Literature Discussions

Social learning community and collaboration. Larson (2009) discovered in her study that “students’ engagement in online literature discussions promoted socially constructed learning” (p. 646). She emphasized that the asynchronous online message board discussions allow students ample thinking time before writing and posting their responses. Also, the format provided students equitable opportunities to share their thoughts and opinions in collaboration with others. She explains that the technology alone required students to use new literacies to communicate and socially interact with their peers. Larson (2009) suggests, “as literacy instruction continues to change, teachers should respond by offering students new opportunities and expand their learning community beyond their classroom walls into virtual learning spaces” (p. 647).

To examine the power of social networking in relation to children's literacy practice, Doyle (2010), a first grade teacher, studied the use of blogs for creative writing, book talks, responses to stories, and book recommendations. She found that her students became more eager to read what others had written, which helped them become less egocentric and more open to what others were sharing. She also explained how blogging helped her shy students have more of an opportunity to voice their stories, thoughts, and opinions without being overshadowed. Hayes (2010), a fourth/fifth grade teacher, studied students' use of authentic conversation skills in various digital tools. She found an online audience motivates students, contributes to their conversations, and interacts with their developing ideas.

Kirk and Orr (2003) reported the benefits of threaded discussions in classrooms. According to the authors, "threaded discussions are the catalyst for active learning, group learning, and other types of learning activities that require dialog and the exchange of ideas and concepts" (p. 11). Since discussion forums are asynchronous, learners have the ability to engage in the conversation at different times and from different locations. According to the researchers, threaded discussions allow learners time for reflection and to collect data to support their point of view. Often in these cooperative learning experiences, students benefit more from giving one another help than from receiving it. Still, the teacher has an essential role in encouraging student participation in discussion groups. Kirk and Orr (2003) mention the first step is to empower the students with the necessary technical skills and abilities to access the discussion and to read and post messages. Teachers should model and provide explicit directions to students on how to

write a response and post a comment. The second step to ensure students participate in the discussion is to set the stage that the discussion is an important element for the class and it will contribute to students' grades. To promote greater participation teachers should post discussion topics that build student interest and relate to their life experiences. Finally, teachers should provide appropriate feedback to keep student conversation on topic and focused on the learning goal. Kirk and Orr (2003) suggest, "stimulating individual students to share meaningful postings, which in turn, can help guide other students in utilizing higher-order thinking skills when forming replies" (p. 19).

Motivation and engagement. With increasing access to new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs, online discussions are becoming more commonly used to encourage communication and learning engagement (Hamilton & Cherniavsky, 2006). According to the International Reading Association Position Statement (2009), "teachers should use technology to motivate students and bridge the gap between students' social and academic uses of technology." Incorporating new literacies instruction can be highly motivating and engaging thus increasing students' ability to understand literature and interact with other learners.

Carico and Logan (2004), explore the various communication tools in cyberspace to enhance the teaching and learning of language arts, specifically making meaning from and through literature. They specifically focus on the MOO (Multi-user, Object-Oriented environment), a unique tool similar to a chatroom online, and examine the MOO as a tool for literature discussions using an engagement perspective (p. 294). Logan, an eighth grade teacher, and Carico, a professor to preservice teachers,

investigated their students who were placed together in 2-3 pairs to discuss books they were currently reading. The authors found MOOs increased the engagement of both middle school and university students. Carico and Logan (2004) state, “we have seen both affective and cognitive domains engaged as our students have been drawn in through promise of interactions with people who become important to them and the promise of experiencing a different way to communicate and a different way to learn” (p. 302). They believe MOOs invite participation, specifically because these small-group discussions “take the teacher out of transmission mode” (p. 297) and move students in the role of putting ideas in motion and leading opportunities for discovery. The authors suggest that many other grade levels can benefit from how MOO increases engagement therefore teachers should try using MOO discussions to meet their own objectives.

In an empirical study, West (2019) found an increase in student motivation and engagement when technology was infused in the literacy curriculum. West (2019) examined data from another study to analyze the learning of 4th and 9th grade classrooms through the lens of New Literacies theory. The larger qualitative multiple case study explored the ways adolescents perceived themselves as writers when engaged in digital writing in their literacy classrooms (West, 2015). The findings of the theoretical analysis revealed three affordances of writing with technology tools. The affordances the participants identified when writing with technology included “the level of enjoyment and ease they experienced while writing, the features they believed provided support to help them accomplish tasks, and the features built into the digital programs that facilitated peer collaboration” (p. 165). First, the students preferred writing with

technology because it is easier than handwriting, it helps keep writing organized, and the writer can effortlessly make corrections. Second, the participants believed technology tools such as spell check helped them accomplish tasks beyond writing with paper and pencils. West (2019) explains, “resources such as spell check can allow students who struggle with spelling develop their voices as writers by allowing them to use the words they want to use instead of relying solely on the words they feel confident they know how to spell” (p. 166). Lastly, the participants preferred writing with technology because they allowed for peer collaborations. The ability to receive feedback from peers was an important source of support and motivation (West, 2019, p. 168). In conducting this analysis West (2019) found that the Internet was a primary means of literacy engagement and using the Internet required students to develop new literacies in order to take full advantage of the affordances of their Internet-mediated literacy practices.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature regarding new literacies, reader response, and online literature discussions, it has been determined that there is a further need to add to this body of research, specifically in regard to how new literacies help to reimagine what discussions of literature look like in an online environment. Online discussions have been discovered to foster energetic interaction between students, promote active learning and collaborative learning, and motivate better student engagement (Kirk & Orr, 2003). However, there is a lack of research regarding the effects of integrating online literature discussions among elementary middle-class students (Mills, 2010). The hope of this

study is to provide additional insight into how responding to literature digitally shapes students' responses and what students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Procedure of the Study

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this research study as it provides an expressive, narrative description within a natural setting (Creswell, 1998) to learn more about how third graders socially construct learning while responding to literature using digital tools. The aim of constructivism inquiry is to understand the constructions that people initially hold and how they progress over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

“Teacher research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data and analyzing it to answer those questions” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 2). In this research, a practicing educator develops an inquiry question and looks closely at their own practices in order to better understand their students as well as improve their practice. The sources of gathering classroom data were created to be used within the classroom during guided reading. This study analyzes the outcome of students collaboration and construction of meaning when reading literature and using new literacies.

The investigator aimed for “maximum variation sampling” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which looks at the investigator’s entire third grade class. Students in the investigator’s third grade classroom were invited to participate. Parents/guardians granted permission for their child to participate in the study. As many students as possible were included because it allowed the investigator to look at a “small sample of great diversity” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) such as students representing different genders,

reading abilities, and ranging technology skills. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to collect data which is relevant to how students enhance their discussions and their understanding of stories. According to Patton (2002), “purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.”

In this research, diverse qualitative data was collected in order to provide validity to the study. According to Creswell (2003), qualitative researchers engage in at least two validation strategies. In this study four strategies were conducted to validate the study: prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, triangulation of different data sources, writing with detail and thick description, and member checking.

Data Sources

To gain sufficient data to develop my research, I used several different resources to triangulate data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The first element of data collection was a pre-study survey. The survey questions were formatted to learn about students’ experiences with technology and ask what they perceive to be effective forms of collaboration. A teacher-student interview was used at the end of the study to discover student reflections of using online discussions. Another important data source for the study was students’ constructed responses to literature utilizing digital discussion tools. The students posted their responses to an open-ended question posed by the teacher. Then, students participated in open discussions by commenting on their peers’ posts. Last, I used a teacher research journal to record observations, student conversations, student actions, and my own teacher researcher reflections. Anecdotal notes were written

during student discussions about digital tools to record students' responses to technology. The teacher research journal traced my personal thoughts, questions, and reflections throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data collected over the duration of the study was used to draw conclusions about new literacies' impact on students' understanding of literature. The above-mentioned data sources were analyzed and coded for emerging themes.

Before beginning the study, I had students complete a survey to understand their experiences with communication technology and how they prefer to respond to literature. Student votes were recorded in a table that featured the question and tally of student responses. Then, I converted responses into percentages to display the amount of student responses for each question.

In order to discover stronger themes I triangulated the data by identifying patterns and connections within and between themes. According to Patton (1999), triangulation of sources involves “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods” (p. 1195). I reviewed the notes in my teacher research journal to look for any noticeable themes and to reflect on the development of the study. Since the journal was typed using a word processing program, I used the highlighting tool to help me code those themes by color. I started with two preliminary codes to analyze the data and allowed others to emerge during the data analysis. The two preliminary codes of student motivation and engagement and collaboration derived from the research literature (Bowers-Campbell,

2011; Carico and Logan, 2004; West, 2019; Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Kirk and Orr, 2003; Larson, 2009).

At the end of each week, I assessed student constructed responses to literature and online conversations that occurred throughout the week. Since most of the student responses were tied to specific learning standards and objectives, I noted which students did or did not meet the standards. Additionally, both student responses and comments on posts were printed and coded to identify noticeable trends within the work and conversations between my students.

I created a table of the questions and student responses. I used codes to find trends and repeating language. At the end of the study, I conducted a final interview with a few students from each guided reading group to gain a final sense of my students' thoughts toward using technology for literature response and collaboration. I audio-recorded our conversations and added the transcriptions to the table described above to continue looking for trends. I assembled all the data pertaining to particular themes and identified the key ideas. Then I counted the number of times a theme emerged. The count revealed general patterns of strength within the data.

Member checks were also held throughout the study to provide me with a confirmation of data collection throughout the study. I asked students questions to clarify data collected in my teacher research journal. The member checks were very informal and I simply recorded notes of what my students said.

Context

Community. The study site is the only public elementary school in the school district. The elementary school serves students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to fourth grade and the middle school serves grades fifth to eighth. The study site is located in Central Jersey with a town population approaching 8,000 residents. According to the 2010 United States Census, 8,097 people, 2,528 households, and 1,756 families reside in the study site's township. The racial demographics are listed as 94.5% White, 2.2% Black or African American, 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.2% Asian, 0.0% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 1.0% from other races, and 1.1% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 5.0% of the population. The median household income was \$100,000 with about 4.9% of residents below the poverty line, including 2.1% of people under the age of 18.

School. The study site serves 288 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten- fourth. The enrollment breakdown is 46% female students and 54% male students. Considering the racial and ethnic groupings within the district, 80.9% of students identify as White, 12.2% as Hispanic, 2.8% as Black/African American, 1.7% as Asian, and 2.4% as two or more races. The current enrollment by program participation shows that 18% of students receive special education services in a mainstream environment, 3% of students are provided services in a self-contained classroom, 12% of students are economically disadvantaged, and English language learners make up 3% of the student population. The teacher to student ratio is 11:1 and the school employs 31 full-time teachers. The third and fourth grade students annually participate in the *New Jersey Student Learning*

Assessment (NJSLA). Based on the 2019 performance report 53.1% of third grade students met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts and 76.2% of fourth grade students met or exceeded expectations in ELA. In Math, 79.7% of third grade students met or exceeded expectations and 76.2% of fourth grade students met or exceeded expectations.

The district vision is to produce socially responsible students who are life-long learners equipped with the necessary skills to succeed at the next level of secondary education. The school's mission statement declares a commitment to putting students first. In collaboration with all stakeholders, they provide a safe and secure learning environment free from bias, increased academic rigor, cutting edge technology, and state-of-the-art facilities. Academic offerings include 120 minutes of daily english language arts, 60 minutes of daily mathematics instruction, science, social studies, spanish, art, music, physical education, and computers. The school English Language Arts program is designed around a balanced literacy approach. Instruction exposes students to authentic literature and various text types. It includes a combination of whole group lessons and small group instruction. To meet the needs of all learners reading instruction is differentiated based on the skill levels of students. The district provides computer equipment, computer services, and Internet access to its students and staff. The district's technology vision is to improve learning and teaching through research, teacher training, collaboration, dissemination, and the use of global communication resources. Grades second through eighth are one-to one with Google Chromebooks, grades Prek through first have access to iPads and every classroom has a SMART Board. All students receive

forty minutes a week of technology education in computer class. The technology curriculum is aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Classroom. An elementary school third grade classroom is the study site that informs this research. The student population is made up of 21 general education students including thirteen boys and eight girls. The study took place during the one-hundred twenty minute english language arts (ELA) period. The ELA curriculum is taught through small group instruction including forty minutes of guided reading centers. One of the guided reading centers includes an online discussion center which was created specifically for the study. Students utilized online discussions weekly to write a personal response to a text and comment on their peers' posts. The physical space of the classroom consists of 21 student desks put together in groups of four or five, a kidney-shaped table used for small group instruction, a square table, a standing desk, and two bean bags. The classroom is equipped with a Chromebook charging station with 21 Chromebooks, a SMARTboard, a chalkboard, and bulletin boards. The bulletin boards display an English Language Arts focus wall, math vocabulary and resource wall, students' work, and a Star of the Week board. On the chalkboard is accountable speaking stems and teacher made anchor charts. The back wall of the classroom contains bookshelves that hold baskets filled with classroom library selections and other instructional materials.

Students. The student participants in this study are in third grade. Consent forms were distributed along with information about the study to parents/guardians of each student in the class. Parents or guardians of nineteen students who wished to participate indicated this on their consent forms. The participant group discussed in this study

consists of twelve boys and seven girls. Of the students in this group, twelve are Caucasian, two are Black, two are Hispanic, two are Asian, and one is biracial (Black and White). Three students have an individualized educational plan while one student has a 504 plan. In addition, one student requires a one-to-one aide. To protect their privacy, all students have been given pseudonyms.

This chapter discussed the use of qualitative study format to determine how third graders socially construct learning while responding to literature using digital tools. I explained the context of this particular study, details of the procedures, and gave an overview of the collected data sources and how they were analyzed. The next chapter will describe the patterns and findings that were revealed from the data analysis.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter four discusses the results of this study which investigated how students collaborate and construct learning using new literacies to understand literature. Conducted over a period of seven weeks, the study used surveys, teacher-student interviews, student-constructed responses, observations, and teacher- research journal notes to determine major themes that emerged when students responded to literature digitally. As these data sources were analyzed and coded, five key findings emerged from the research: (1) students were highly motivated and engaged when responding to literature using online discussions; (2) online discussions provided opportunities for students to effectively communicate and increased their ability to collaborate; (3) students redefined literary responses when digital tools were employed; (4) students used new literacies to create deeper meaning of their learning; (5) digital tools created greater classroom efficiency.

Student Motivation and Engagement Increased

The results of the pre-study survey confirmed my belief that students are naturally motivated by technology. One of the pre-study questions asked, “How would you rate your ability to use technology?” The results showed 74% of students expressed that they were excellent and 26% expressed they were good at using technology. Since students felt confident in their ability to use the technology they were excited to respond to literature when digital tools were involved. Every week in guided reading, students met with me in the teacher center to read a text and practice literacy skills. Following the

teacher center, students participated in the online discussion center where they used the digital tool Padlet. When I first introduced Padlet the students were eager to log into their accounts and “see” each other virtually. When students saw their group visited the online discussion center that day I heard comments such as, “Yay Padlet!” and “Yes!” The students would respond to prompts I posted about a text then they commented to their peers. The students were beyond excited that their peers could read their initial responses and it motivated them to do their best work. For example, when students would finish writing their initial response they would eagerly ask a peer in their group to read their response. Also, when I observed students in the online discussion center, I noticed very few instances of disengagement such as aimlessly looking around the room or talking to peers about unrelated topics. Students focused on writing their responses and commenting to their peers. Student engagement was so high that students seemed unaware that they were practicing literacy skills and writing about text. For example, one of my interview questions asked, “Do you like using technology to communicate in school? Why?” One student said, “Yes, because when we are communicating on Chromebook it’s like you don’t even have to talk.” Another student said, “Yes, I think it’s very fun because it’s kind of like texting because not a lot of us have phones and the ones who do we don’t have each other’s numbers so it’s fun just to kind of like type.” Thus, students enjoyed using Padlet to communicate in class.

I especially noticed motivation when students would talk about using Padlet outside of guided reading. In my teacher-research journal, I noted multiple instances where students asked me when their group would get to use Padlet. Additionally, students

were eager to tell others about their use of technology in school. For example, at the end of each week students wrote letters home in their Friday Journals describing their week at school. Multiple students wrote about how they enjoyed using Padlet and others explained how they used the tool in guided reading. Here are a few samples from students' journal entries:

Madison: This week was a blast. In reading we are doing padlet it is so much fun! We are putting pictures in it and adding comments and responding to our friends.

Eliana: In reading we are using an app called Padlet we can talk to friends about what they are thinking.

Jude: This week was awesome. To start, we are using padlet. Padlet is were my class respons [sic] to the teacher's assignments. Now we get to coment [sic] to each other.

The features of technology also highly motivated and engaged students. One of the pre-study survey questions asked how students like to respond to a text. The results showed 89% of students prefer to respond using technology as opposed to paper and pencil. When asked to share their reasoning behind this choice, many students felt as though it was faster to type and send their responses rather than write with a pencil and paper. Students' interview responses also revealed that they found typing easier because it eliminates erasing mistakes and checking for spelling errors. One student explained that she has trouble with spelling and when she uses Padlet it tells her when a word she wrote is spelled wrong so she can fix it before she posts her response. For a student who has demonstrated frustration in writing due to her inability to spell, this was an important

perception. The level of ease and support provided by technology motivated my students to accomplish the literary tasks assigned to them.

Effectively Communicate and Collaborate

Another recurring theme that I observed throughout the study was how online discussions increased students' ability to collaborate and provided opportunities for them to effectively communicate. In the online discussion center, students were instructed to read and comment on their peers' posts. Each week as I read through students' comments I noticed how they would share their thoughts and opinions in collaboration with one another. As an example, the students in the yellow reading group read the story *Ujiji* and responded to my prompt which asked what they believed was the theme of the story. The following conversation was posted in the yellow group:

- Eliana: (initial post) The theme of the story is that it's important to be caring and fair to people. The story shows this because Kifaru was not being fair to the tickbirds because he had ticks on his back so he told the tickbirds to eat them but they couldn't chatter or singing so the birds listened to him because they were scared of Kifaru.
- Sammy: (reply to Eliana) Eliana I agree with you and I also think it's about not being bossed around and live in peace with symbiosis.
- Eliana: (reply to Sammy) What do you mean symbiosis?
- Sammy: (reply to Elaina) Remember Ujiji said lots of animals live in symbiosis and work with each other.

Sammy expressed that she agreed with Eliana. In addition, she shared her own opinion about the theme of the story which extended Eliana's initial ideas about the text. Online discussions also allowed for multiple students to collaborate at once. For example, during an interview, one student explained, "When I responded to Todd we were commenting to

each other today and Brad joined in at the end like it's kind of funny like we will all start talking." Collaborating with more than one person also helped students realize that they can rely on their peers to construct solutions. In another interview, a student said, "You can ask anybody literally in your whole entire group. You can get information when you're having trouble."

At the beginning of the study, I introduced Padlet over a series of mini-lessons. As a class, we created an anchor chart that explained directions and expectations of creating an initial post and comments. I quickly noticed that most of the class did not understand how to communicate through online comments. For example, students were using comments to give simple compliments: "Good job," "Sam, this is a great answer!" and "I like your phodo [sic]." Also, students were using comments to correct each other's mechanics: "I like it but I think it is a run on sentence" and "Good but you didn't capitalize." As a result of discovering this problem, I decided to explicitly teach my class how to use discussion stems. Then I modeled how to comment effectively by commenting back to each of their initial posts. The next time my students commented to one another, I noted the use of discussion stems and probing questions. Here is a conversation between students communicating effectively:

Melissa: (reply to Emma's initial post) I agree with you Emma because I would be sad for Jack too. Have you ever lost a family member?

Emma: I have never lost a person in my family have you Melissa?

Melissa: No I have never lost a parent like Jack before.

Emma: My mom lost her Dad did your mom or dad lost their parent?

Melissa: My mom lost her dad and my dad lost his sister.

Emma: Ohh that is so sad.

This is another conversation between students communicating effectively:

Matt: (reply to Sofia's initial post) I just have 1 questions for you Sofia. If you were Anita what would you do to save Dona Maria?

Sofia: I would do exactly what Anita did but go to the hospital every day.

The following is a third example from the students' discussion threads:

Karen: (initial post) I would ask Jack Thayer how big was your cabin on the Titanic. I want to know how roomy it was.

Kade: (reply to Karen's initial post) I like your question but what does roomy mean?

Karen: Roomy means a lot of space.

Thus, all it took was further teaching and modeling for students' to effectively participate in an online community.

Redefining Literary Responses

It did not take long for me to realize that my students were naturals when using technology. During week two of introducing Padlet, all of the students were posting to the same wall. When I was walking around and observing them in action, I noticed students' posts had emojis, photos, and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format), which is a short animated picture with no sound. When I asked how they figured out how to add the images, they each mentioned a peer who showed them. One student explained that he saw the small camera button and when he clicked it he realized he can take a picture or search for images to insert in his post. I praised him and made sure he knew that he had taught

me something I had not previously known. This instance was a shift in traditional teacher and student roles. As my students were teaching *me* and their peers about something tech-related.

My students redefined how they could post and comment on Padlet when they added images and emojis. A conversation that stood out to me was when one of my students asked his neighbor, “How do I get the emoji with no mouth?” His neighbor replied, “Why do you want that?” He responded, “To show that Kifaru said the tickbirds couldn’t talk.” On another day I asked a student why she chose to include a picture of money in her post. She said, “In my post I wrote about how the poachers kill animals to sell their tusks to get money.” Both conversations show how students used images or icons to communicate with their peers. During interviews, I asked a few students to further share their purpose in adding the pictures and emojis:

Kade: I use a picture because when I am reading I like to create a mental picture in my head and I put a picture to help people, like see what I’m seeing.

Carey: I use pictures because if someone doesn’t really know what you’re talking about, they can look at your picture and they can better understand what you’re saying.

Luke: Using emojis helps me. It helps me because just using the word “sad” you don’t really see it but if you put a little emoji you can really know what they are talking about.

Thus, the students’ creative use of pictures and emojis enhanced their conversations by adding voice and expression.

Since my students seem to be ahead of my learning in their use of language and new literacies I also asked them if they had any other ideas of how we could use Padlet in the classroom. One of my students said,

If there is some way you can have like two groups and it will say Lesson 8 and Lesson 8 story. You can use that to look at the story again. Like being able to see the book to use that as evidence. Like you can just go on and copy the book onto a post.

His idea blew me away! Ultimately, he wanted the story digitally this way he could have two tabs open and include evidence from the story in his post. My third grade student developed a new way that we could use technology to redefine our literary practices.

Enhanced Understanding of Stories

After analyzing student-constructed responses and comments I found that my students used new literacies to create a deeper meaning of their learning. Students used the digital tool Padlet to respond to prompts that I would post on their reading groups' wall. My prompts reflected the story and literary skills their group worked on in the teacher center that week. Students took this opportunity to share with me and their peers what they understood about the literature. A moment that stands out to me is when a group of students were in the online discussion center, and I heard:

Casey: Rachel you wrote humans are helpful when they save elephants from lions. They didn't do that they saved them from predators.

Rachel: Yes the rescue team saved the baby in the article, remember when a lion came the shot their gun in the air.

When reviewing students' constructed responses, I saw this student's post about the book

The Great Storyteller:

Anita drew the birds because Dona Maria said when the last bird on the tree leaves then i disappear. Anita said you could live for many years now but she didn't get that Dona maria didn't mean it like that. She would still pass away.

Anita did everything she could but Dona Maria said that she would be in her heart just like her dog Chispita and she would still have all her feelings for her. 😭😭



It is important to point out that this student wrote one short sentence the first time he responded to a prompt on Padlet: "I want to be a soccer goalie and a doctor." There was a visible difference in the posts at the start of the study compared to the end of the study. In the beginning, students wrote short and limited responses. As many did not seem confident in sharing their learning. By the end of the study, it was obvious my students' confidence had grown. Students started restating the question(s), they included text evidence, they utilized transition words, and their mechanics improved. Even more exciting an ESL (English as a second language) student in my class was able to show her understanding of the literature. She is currently in a silent period, thus she does not speak unless she is asked a specific question which she answers in only one or two words.

However, her Padlet responses were multiple sentences long:

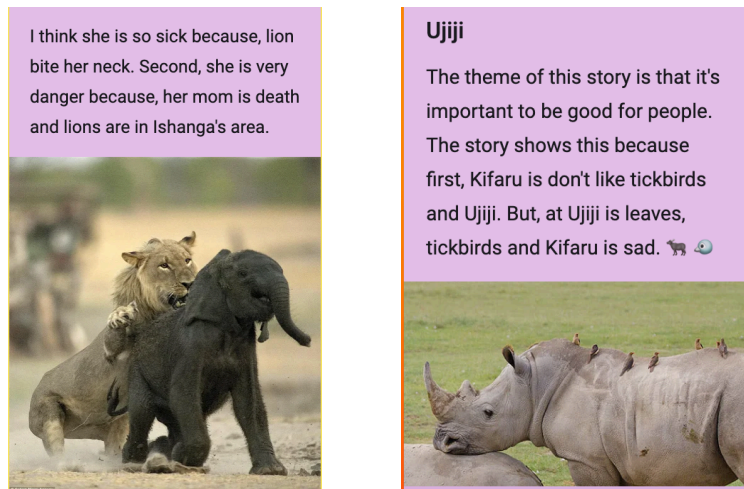


Figure 1. Sample Discussion Post

Although she does not feel confident to verbally explain her learning she feels comfortable writing about her learning on Padlet.

Students also used the posts and conversations of their classmates to better understand the literature. For example, here three students help each other better understand a story:

- Tommy: (reply to Kade's initial post) I wonder if the story is about the person who wrote the book.
- Kade: It might be based on his or her life? Who knows.
- Brad: You guys its fake remember its realistic fiction.
- Kade: You are rite [sic] but then it could happen.

In the interviews a few students described how Padlet helps them understand the texts they read. Todd explained that when I post a question it helps him “think more about the story.” Kade said,

When you read your group's wall it's like oh I forgot about that or it gives you a different perspective. Like let's say when I read Chloe's I might say to myself, "Oh I didn't think about it that way" and I can comment to Chloe, "I like that idea I wasn't thinking about that." And I think that's fun.

Even my students were able to recognize that new literacies create a deeper meaning of their learning.

Greater Classroom Efficiency

The use of digital tools in guided reading had a positive affect on my teaching which lead to a positive affect on my students' learning. Looking over my teacher research journal, I noticed the impact Padlet had on the way I formatively assess my students. Since students use Padlet during guided reading I was not able to monitor them synchronously. Instead I logged into Padlet on my own time and would read their responses and comments. One way this increased the efficiency of my lessons is when my students had difficulty communicating through online comments. Being able to read their comments after guided reading allowed me to plan for future instruction. An excerpt I retrieved from my teacher journal features a reflection of how I planned for instruction:

Last week I was thinking about how I can help my class see what I expect to see in their comments to each other. Therefore, this week after all the students wrote an initial response to my post I commented back to each student to model how to comment by agreeing/disagreeing and asking a question.

Then after I explicitly taught them how to communicate effectively I was able to easily monitor their progress moving forward. In addition, I was able to recognize specific

students who were still having difficulty and I continued modeling how to comment effectively on their posts.

Additionally, Padlet allowed me to assess my students' understanding of the literature and learning objectives. Every week I would log in to Padlet to view my students responses which I would read through and grade. It would have been impossible for me to do this with every student during a verbal guided reading discussions. The use of Padlet allowed me to read and assess all of my students responses on my own time.

The digital tool Padlet also made it easy for me to differentiate. As I previously mentioned I created walls for each of my guided reading groups (blue, green, yellow, and red). I was able to customize each group's wall to reflect their color and the story they were currently reading. For example, I was able to set the title, background, group icon, and prompt. In my teacher journal I noted, "Now that I added the lesson number and book titles to the reading group names my students are easily able to find the current weeks wall on my Google Classroom." In addition, I could choose the participants which made it effortless when group members changed.

All of this evidence leads me to the conclusion that new literacies enhanced the literacy experiences of my students. Chapter five presents a summary of the findings as well as the conclusions that were drawn from the study. It will also provide implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Summary

This study examined how new literacies help to reimagine what discussions of literature look like in an online environment. The study data that was gathered from my teacher- research journal, student-constructed responses, observations, surveys, and interviews suggest that the use of new literacies enhanced the literacy experiences of my third-grade students. The findings show that responding to literature digitally can increase classroom efficiency, student engagement, and student motivation. Online discussions also provided opportunities for students to effectively communicate and increased their ability to collaborate. As the study progressed, it was evident that students used new literacies to create deeper meaning of their learning. Digital tools also caused a shift in traditional teacher and student roles as students used digital tools to redefine literary responses.

Conclusions of the Study

My goal for this study was to investigate how students collaborate and construct learning using new literacies to understand literature. I specifically sought to discover how responding to literature digitally shapes students' responses and what students perceive to be effective forms of collaboration. I was also curious to learn what happened when students used new literacies to collaborate and construct meaning when reading literature, how students used digital spaces to construct environments that enhance their discussions and their understanding of stories, and what students perceived to be effective

forms of collaboration. Prior to beginning the study, I immersed myself in the literature that supports the integration of new literacies to enhance student learning. This study supports and extends the findings of that research.

Following the completion of this study, I conclude that my third-grade students were highly successful when responding to literature digitally. By engaging in online discussions, the students seem to demonstrate more willingness to take risks as learners and share their ideas with others. Larson (2009) states, “engagement in an asynchronous online literature discussion encourages students to respond deeply to the literature, share their ideas with others, and carefully consider multiple perspectives and thoughts” (p. 646). Through the students’ constructed responses, interviews, as well as the observations recorded in a teacher research journal, it became clear that students used the posts and comments of their classmates to make meaning of the literature.

Furthermore, it can be deduced that students benefit from the cooperative learning experience of online discussions. The International Reading Association (2009) discussed the need for literacy educators to integrate new literacies into the curriculum to prepare students in becoming effective communicators and increase their ability to collaborate. I assert that online discussion tools are effective new literacies that can be integrated into the curriculum. The data shows that the students within the study shared their thoughts and opinions in collaboration with one another. It should be stressed that teaching students “authentic conversation skills” (Kist, 2010, p. 66) were, in fact, necessary before asking my students to comment meaningfully. Teaching my students how to use discussion stems and probing questions helped them develop conversation skills to

communicate in mutually respectful ways. Thus, it has been determined that it is important to explicitly teach and model conversation skills before asking students to communicate effectively.

The data collected in this study also suggests that students used digital tools to redefine literary responses and enhance their discussions. My students redefined how they could write a response when they included emojis, photos, and GIFs in their posts and comments. When I look back at the way online discussions were used throughout the study, it is clear that these tools gave students, “more opportunities to develop personal and critical connections to text” (Wood and Jocius, 2014). Not only did my students transform the learning experience but they took on the role of the teacher. In this circumstance, I was no longer the most literate person in the classroom. Cammack, Coiro, Kinzer, & Leu (2014) explained that teachers will be challenged to thoughtfully guide students’ learning within information environments that are richer and more complex than traditional print media (p. 1599). The data shows that giving students the opportunity to engage in new literacies in the classroom improved motivation and provided students with control in their learning.

The final conclusion that I drew from this study is that most students perceive online discussions to be an effective form of collaboration. An analysis of the data showed that the use of online discussions increased understanding of the literature and led to high levels of motivation among my students. As an example, my students showed great excitement to write a response when their peers could read their posts. They also

found it faster and easier to collaborate using the digital tool Padlet. Thus, students recognize digital spaces have the ability to expand their learning community.

Limitations

A qualitative methodology was used in this research study in order to reach conclusions. Therefore, neither statistical data and analysis were used. This study focused on nineteen third grade students in one school and in one classroom. Of the students in this group, twelve are Caucasian, two are Black, two are Hispanic, two are Asian, and one is biracial (Black and White). For this reason, conclusions cannot be generalized across all students and backgrounds at this grade and age level. Furthermore, the study was completed within a short period of time. Data collection, analysis, and reporting were conducted over several weeks. This limits results to only the experiences that occurred during this short time of student's educational experiences. It may be beneficial to design a study that lasts from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year since conducting a longer study could help validate the findings.

Implications

It is critical that educators teach students the necessary skills to successfully engage in 21st-century technologies. This study can offer valuable information to teachers and help them see that when new literacies are integrated into the curriculum, it can lead to several positive outcomes. These outcomes include increased student motivation and engagement, effective forms of communication and collaboration, redefined literary responses, enhanced understanding of literature and greater classroom efficiency.

One enduring implication for this study is the impact of reflecting on my own instruction to continue to use new literacies and broaden student experiences utilizing technology to collaborate and socialize with peers. The positive results and the students' reactions to the digital tools suggest that providing students the virtual space to respond to literature helps students create deeper meaning. At the beginning of the study, this space also revealed students' inability to communicate effectively. However, the results of this study suggest that when students are taught how to participate in an online community they can recognize the benefits of sharing ideas with their peers.

Within my school environment, an implication could be that more teachers integrate new literacies into their curriculum. I could share my study and its conclusions with my colleagues through professional development. Then teachers of other grade levels can learn how to include online literature responses and discussions in their classrooms.

In closing, integrating new literacies into third grade reading centers can improve how students collaborate and construct meaning of literature. This study supports previous research which suggests that the Internet and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICTs) enhance and redefine literacy instruction and learning. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the field and inspire educators to think about how they can integrate new literacies into the curriculum. In order to reach the needs of our 21st- century learners literacy instruction must evolve. As educators we can make sure that students are prepared for their literacy future by utilizing new

instructional strategies and resources that effectively use information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the classroom (International Reading Association, 2009).

References

- Carico, K. M., Logan, D., & Labbo, L. D. (2004). A generation in cyberspace: Engaging readers through online discussions. *Language Arts, 81*(4), 293-302. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.rowan.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/docview/196868467?accountid=13605>
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Delony, S., Smith Morgan, E., & Howell, K. L. (2013). A Case Study of the Role of Reader Response in Two Elementary Classrooms. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education, 1*(1), 1–12. Retrieved from <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1110815&site=ehost-live>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory ; strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
- Gilster, P. (1997). *Digital Literacy*. New York: Wiley.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hamilton, E.R. & Cherniavsky, J. (2006). Issues in synchronous versus asynchronous e-learning platforms. In H.F. O’Neil & R.S. Perez (Eds.), *Web-based learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 87–105). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- International Literacy Association. (2012). Adolescent literacy (Position statement). Retrieved from <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/wherewe-stand/adolescent-literacy-position-statement.pdf>
- International Reading Association. (2009, May). *New literacies and 21st-century technologies*. DE: International Reading Association.
- Kirk, J. J., & Orr, R. L. (2003). A Primer on the Effective Use of Threaded Discussion Forums. Retrieved from <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED472738&site=ehost-live>

- Kist, W., Doyle, K., Hayes, J., Horwitz, J., & Kuzior, J. T. (2010). Web 2.0 in the elementary classroom: Portraits of possibilities. *Language Arts*, 88(1), 62-68. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.rowan.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.rowan.edu/docview/748977628?accountid=13605>
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). Sampling "the new" in new literacies. In M. Knobel, & C. Lankshear, *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 1-22). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2014). Studying new literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(2), 97-101. doi:10.1002/jaal.314
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2011). *New literacies*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press.
- Larson, L. C. (2009). Reader response meets new literacies: Empowering readers in online learning communities: The collaborative online learning communities featured in this study provided students equitable opportunities to share their thoughts and voice their opinions about literature.(report). *The Reading Teacher*, 62(8), 638. doi:10.1598/RT.62.8.2
- Leu, D.J., Jr., Kinzer, C.K., Coiro, J., & Cammack, D.W. (2004). Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the Internet and other information and communication technologies. In R.B. Ruddell & N. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th ed., pp. 1570–1613). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Mills, K. A. (2010). A review of the “Digital turn” in the new literacy studies. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(2), 246-271. doi:10.3102/0034654310364401
- Patton M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208.
- Patton, M. Q., & Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Pool, C. R. (1997). A new digital literacy: A conversation with paul gilster. (interview). *Educational Leadership*, 55(3), 6.
- Rheingold, H. (2012). Stewards of digital literacies. *Knowledge Quest*, 41(1), 53-55.

- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Shagoury, R. & Power, B. (2011). *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher Researchers* 2nd ed. ME: Stenhouse.
- The NCTE definition of 21st century literacies. (2013, Feb.). National Council of Teachers of English.
- West, J. A. (2019). Using new literacies theory as a lens for analyzing technology-mediated literacy classrooms. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 16(2), 151–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2042753019828355>
- Wood, S., & Jocius, R. (2014). Beyond fun and games: Using an iPad as a tool for critical response. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(2), 129.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Appendix A

Pre-Study Survey



Student Survey

1. Do you have access to technology at home?

Yes No

What kind(s) of technology? _____

2. How would you rate your ability to use technology?

Circle one: Excellent Good So-So Not Good

3. Have you ever communicated using technology?

Yes No

Circle all that apply:

Email

Online chat

Texting

Instagram

Twitter

Facebook

FaceTime

Video Game live chats

Other: _____

4. Have you ever participated in an online discussion in school?

Yes No

Appendix B

Student Interview



Interview Questions

Do you think you are good at using technology?

Do you like using technology to communicate in school? Why?

Do you ever tell people about things we do with technology in our classroom? (ex. family, friends)

Do you like using the app Padlet to respond to a text? If so, why do you like it?

How does using Padlet better help you understand the text you are reading?

Do you have other ideas on how to respond to each other using Padlet?

Have you included pictures or Emojis in your responses? If so, why?

How do you think Padlet could help you more?