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Literature circles and improved comprehension in struggling readers

Abstract

The purpose of this project was to examine Literature Circles for their effectiveness with struggling readers in upper elementary classrooms and reading rooms. Research questions include, what is the impact of Literature Circles on struggling readers in upper elementary grades? and, what scaffolds help struggling readers be successful in Literature Circles?

The literature review defines Literature Circles in their various forms, and details how to begin using this method in the classroom with groupings including struggling readers. Procedures and scaffolds are identified that have had proven results with struggling readers through various research methods. Ideas for teacher assessment, self-assessment and peer assessment are included. A Literature Circle Four Day Workshop for Title I teachers presents this information in PowerPoint format. Research indicates that Literature Circles can be effective for struggling readers when teachers encourage discussion and debate, and when scaffolds and an atmosphere of trust are present in the classroom.

LITERATURE CIRCLES AND IMPROVED COMPREHENSION IN STRUGGLING READERS

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Literacy Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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By

Christine Lynn Marxen

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The purpose of this project was to examine Literature Circles for their effectiveness with struggling readers in upper elementary classrooms and reading rooms. Research questions include, what is the impact of Literature Circles on struggling readers in upper elementary grades? and, what scaffolds help struggling readers be successful in Literature Circles? The Literature Review defines Literature Circles in their various forms and details how to begin using this method in the classroom with groupings including struggling readers. Procedures and scaffolds are identified that have had proven results with struggling readers through various research methods. Ideas for teacher assessment, self-assessment and peer assessment are included. A Literature Circle Four Day Workshop for Title I teachers presents this information in PowerPoint format. Research indicates that Literature Circles can be effective for struggling readers when teacher encouraged discussion and debate, scaffolds, and an atmosphere of trust are present in the classroom.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 6

Rationale for Choosing Topic 7

Purpose of the Project..... 7

Importance of Topic 8

Terminology 9

Research Questions 9

Chapter 2. Methodology 10

Methods for Locating Sources 10

Methods for Selecting Sources 10

Chapter 3. Review of Literature 11

Procedures and Scaffolds for Literature Circles 13

Literature Circles Across Content Areas and Various Genres 16

Previous Research Conducted on the Effects of Literature Circles on Struggling Readers 17

Assessment of Literature Circles 21

Student-Led and Self Assessment..... 26

Chapter 4. Project 29

Session 1 30

Session 2..... 31

Session 3 32

Session 4 33

Chapter 5. Conclusions 36

Limitations 37

Recommendations 38

Chapter 7. References 41

Chapter 8. Appendices 44

Appendix A.....44

Appendix B.....49

Appendix C.....53

Appendix D.....65

Appendix E.....71

Appendix F.....79

Appendix G.....81

Introduction

The research is consistent in stating that literature circles are beneficial to all readers, not only students reading at or above grade level, but students who are struggling readers and English Language Learners (McIntyre, 2007). Literature Circles are conversations in which participants are invited to discuss and develop their own questions and answers in ways that expand upon individual interpretations and elevate responses to reading (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). The Literature Circle approach can be differentiated to fit the needs of most learners and can promote higher level thinking through conversation with others (McIntyre). One way students learn is by communicating with each other and sharing their thinking or ideas about a topic. Literature Circles can be used as part of a balanced approach to literacy, encouraging fluency, comprehension, word knowledge, and writing (McIntyre).

In 1996, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (IRA) issued Standards for English Language Arts. The IRA endorsed literature-based, collaborative classrooms in which students take increasing responsibility for choosing, reading, and discussing text. The standards convey the need for students to explore a wide range of books representing different cultures, periods, and regions (Daniels, 2002). Literature Circles not only allow students to take on more responsibility for their reading but they also can be used for any genre of text across the curriculum (Daniels).

Rationale for Choosing Topic

This paper explores the effects of Literature Circles with struggling readers in upper elementary grades with a focus on the engagement level, conversational techniques and overall reading comprehension in the literature circle setting. There is reason to believe that Literature Circles can offer a balanced approach to literacy when comprehension, fluency, word knowledge, and writing are all components (McIntyre).

Research on the effects of Literature Circles on struggling, upper-elementary school students is less prevalent than research on Literature Circles with middle school and high school readers. I selected Literature Circles as the focus of my research because I want to know if they are effective with this population and what scaffolds, procedures, and assessments will support this population's success.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to examine and define current Literature Circle structures and designs, and to seek information about how they can benefit the struggling reader. The project is a staff development workshop designed specifically for Title 1 teachers and teachers of reading. Throughout this literature review, various scaffolds for struggling readers will be examined for their effectiveness. Struggling reader engagement and participation in Literature Circle will also be examined. A close look at procedures for effectively setting up Literature Circles, procedures for smoothly run Literature Circles, and procedures for employing Literature Circles across various genres and content areas, focusing on the struggling reader will be discussed.

Importance of Topic

The topic of Literature Circles is relevant to teachers today because teachers are constantly looking for ways to differentiate instruction for all learners (Daniel, 2002). Teachers also need to keep up with the demands of district and federally mandated assessments and to demonstrate that all students are making adequate yearly progress in regard to assessments (Daniel). The Literature Circles approach can be applied to any genre or level of text. All students can benefit from the Literature Circle structure because they can be tailored to the needs of each student and can be part of a balanced approach to literacy (Fountas & Pinnel, 2000).

Balanced reading instruction, according to Fountas and Pinnel (1997, 1999, 2000) includes eight elements; 1) reading aloud, 2) shared reading 3) guided reading, 4) independent reading, 5) shared writing, 6) interactive writing, 7) guided writing, and 8) independent writing. Calkins' (2000) plan for balanced literacy focuses more on independent reading, both individually and in book clubs and she believes independent reading is a central part of the reading curriculum. Literature Circles have a place in any balanced literacy instruction because the approach can be either student directed and/or teacher directed, and may include reading aloud, shared reading, or guided reading. However, it is most important that the students receive the rich diversity of reading experiences that Literature Circles can provide.

Terminology

In this project several terms should be defined to help with clarity and understanding. *Literature Circles* are conversations in which participants are invited to discuss and develop their own questions and answers in ways that expand upon individual interpretations and elevate responses to reading (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). *Scaffolds* are conversations and interactions in which adults temporarily support children's development of more complex thought and language (Brabham & Villaume as cited in Bruner, 1978).

Research Questions

I have used Literature Circles in my 4th grade classroom for several years. During that time I have noticed that my top readers can have in-depth, higher level thinking discussions about text. I have also noticed that my struggling readers, while they really enjoy reading novels and other text in the literature circle structure, have difficulty engaging in meaningful conversations about their reading. They have difficulty going beyond surface level conversation to dig deep into the underlying meaning of the text. In the past, my struggling readers have had difficulty completing the reading for the literature group. When they do complete the reading, I have questioned the depth of comprehension of their reading, even when the text was at their independent reading level. My question, thus, became, what is the impact of literature circles on struggling readers in the upper elementary grades? This primary question is further defined by a secondary question, what scaffolds help struggling readers to be successful with Literature Circles?"

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain my methodology for locating, selecting, and analyzing sources for my literature review. All sources were found through a computerized database and were research-based articles from reputable, educational journals, books, or authors in the field of education.

Methods for Locating Sources

The method used to locate sources was to identify studies through a computerized database. I focused on studies conducted from 1938 to today. The following index sources were searched: Academic Search Elite (EBSCO), Wilson Educational Full Text, Emerald, ERIC (EBSCO), Expanded Academic ASAP, JSTOR, and UNISTAR. The searches were based on the following keywords and keyword combinations: *literature circles, struggling readers and literature circles, literature circles and struggling readers, book talks, literature conversations, Daniels, Beed, Vygotsky, Rosenblatt, scaffolds for literature circles, and literature discussions with struggling readers.*

Methods for Selecting Sources

I excluded literature reviews, websites, and non-research based journals from my research. Once an article was identified, the abstract was read and only research-based refereed articles were included. The focus had to include struggling readers in the upper elementary grades in the research. If the article included this population and focused on literature circles then this article became part of this literature review.

Review of Literature

Readers come together to build conversational skills for discussing texts in enlightened, personal, and thoughtful ways through the use of Literature Circes in the classroom (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). Literature Circles are supported by the transactional theory of literary reading, known as reader response (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). According to this theory, readers actively construct meaning by responding to text and then reflecting upon their responses. Literature Circles are also based on the belief that literacy develops best through social interaction and dialogue with others (Vygotsky, 1986) through the social construction of meaning. Students of all ages, socioeconomic background, cultures, and reading ability appear to benefit from the use of conversational structures such as Literature Circles (Daniels). Yet, despite their value across a wide range of students, Literature Circles are not being practiced by many teachers (Buchanan & Triplett, 2005). This lack of use is due in part to pressure to keep pace with district standards and the emphasis by prepackaged curriculum for young and struggling readers on phonics and phonemic awareness, rather than comprehension or discussion (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). However, early research articles on the impact of literature circles on young and struggling readers have suggested that students who participated in instructional conversations about texts achieved at higher levels on standardized reading tests (Au & Jordan, 1981).

Buchanan and Triplett (2005) examined the dynamics within literature circles to better understand not only how they work, but also why they work. They found that Literature Circles encourage readers to take ownership of their reading and construct meaning in active and careful ways (Buchanan & Triplett). Brabham and Villaume

(2000), in their examination of what effective readers do when they read and discuss, found that skillful readers make predictions, construct visual images, create connections to personal experiences and other texts, monitor their reading, solve word and text problems, summarize as they read, argue with the author, and evaluate content and writing style. It is these very literacy skills that can be nurtured and developed through Literature Circles, as the format serves as a launching device that help students generate their own ideas and thoughtful conversations about what they have read.

Part of what makes Literature Circles so effective is that they are student-centered with key elements such as student responsibility and personal response (Buchanan & Triplett, 2005). They work best when teachers provide sufficient structure and scaffolding but still give students the freedom to explore the text independently (Pike & Mumper, 2004). Pike and Mumper suggest that Literature Circles provide many benefits for students including

> 1) Promoting a love for books and positive attitudes about reading, 2) Students of all ability levels can engage in real conversations about books, 3) Students interact with text on a deeper level as they engage in discussion that lead to inquiry and critical thinking, 4) Student interact and collaborate as they construct meaning from text, 5) Students are exposed to multiple perspectives from commonly discussed literature, 6) Shared decision making is enhanced as students assume responsibility for their portion of the Literature Circle, 7) Students feel a sense of ownership and empowerment regarding their own literacy development, 8) Students learn to set and achieve goals, and 9) the classroom is transformed into a literate community (p.199).

At the heart of Literature Circles are collaboration and communication or discussion and the sense of safety and importance that students feel from allowing them ownership of their own learning (Pike & Mumper).

Procedures and Scaffolds for Literature Circles

Procedures and routines for conducting Literature Circles vary and should be designed to meet the needs of the students in the classroom where they are used (Ketch, 2005). The focus should remain on the conversation students have regarding a particular text. Conversation helps individuals make sense of the world (Ketch). It helps to build empathy, understanding, respect for different opinions, and ownership of the learning process (Ketch). When used as a connection to cognitive strategies, conversation fosters comprehension acquisition (Ketch). Conversation about text is at the center of Literature Circles. Teachers should not get too bogged down about using Literature Circles exactly as they are designed in prepackaged materials. Keeping a student-centered focus is the key to creating an environment where students can share their insights and inquiries about a text.

Literature Circles support the use of launching devices or scaffolds that help students generate ideas and their own thoughtful conversations about what they have read (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). Scaffolds are conversations or interactions in which adults temporarily support children's development of more complex levels of thought and language (Brabham & Villaume). Scaffolds may take the form of printed materials or routines. One scaffold that can support students as they learn to prepare for literature circle discussions is assumption of different roles such as discussion director, illustrator, connector, etc. and preparing the role sheet to aid them in their discussion. In other cases, students may write down their questions, comments or ideas on sticky notes, also called "tabbing," (Stien & Beed, 2004, p.515) as they read, or they may develop character maps or record passages they find to be well developed to share with their literature discussion group. A character map is a tool where students record traits about the characters they are

reading about. Students can choose passages; a sentence, paragraph, or page from the book that they want to share with the group. Many scaffolds can and should slowly be withdrawn as students develop in their Literature Circle discussions so that conversations do not begin to sound scripted (Daniel).

Struggling readers are often silenced by procedures that require them to discuss or converse with students who read more quickly and proficiently then they do (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). In most Literature Circles, students determine the amount of reading to be covered for each meeting, independently read the material, and then prepare for the discussion. For struggling readers, this can be quite a challenge. Scaffolds such as listening to the assigned text on tape or read aloud, paired or choral reading can provide alternatives for struggling readers. Listening to the text minimizes the difficulty struggling readers may have decoding and fluently reading, so that they can enjoy the book and comprehend the text. Additionally, Brabham and Villaume found that some students may need help preparing for the literature discussion. Teachers who use roles as scaffolds may start by assigning all students in the group the same literature role so that struggling readers can hear the role modeled for them by other students before they are asked to do it on their own. Teachers may also provide the modeling and guidance for struggling readers themselves. Brabham and Villaume found that the important thing to remember about adjusting procedures is that every student's needs are supported so that they may contribute to the discussion as an active, reflective group member.

Daniels found that another important aspect of Literature Circles involves procedural items such as the number of students in a Literature Circle group and the choice of a text which lends itself well to discussion. Brabham and Villaume also believe

that Literature Circles need to be configured so that the size of the group does not interfere with the reader's opportunities to become increasingly adept at expressing interpretation of text and responding to the contributions of others (2000). Typically, four to six is recommended for a Literature Circle discussion; however, productive conversations can occur with as few as two students or as many as the whole class (Daniels, 1994). Again, student needs and personalities must be kept in mind when determining group size. Literature Circles can be formed to discuss novels, non-fiction, picture books, poems, chapters in a text or newspaper articles when dealing with grade school students. Often participants are given a choice of teacher-provided texts from which to choose, centered on a particular theme, author, or genre. Text quality is critical to the success Literature Circles (Daniels, 1994). Texts that relate to critical issues and experiences in readers' lives provoke a deeper level of reflection, questioning, and discussion (Brabham & Villaume, 2000).

Prior knowledge of a critical issue is important before beginning a Literature Circle study to clear up misconceptions and to build up background knowledge on a particular topic (Campbell Hill (1995), Johnson & Schlick Noe, 1995). Campbell Hill, et. al. (1995) suggest using a read-aloud prior to introducing a Literature Circle study. For example, prior to a Literature Circle study on homelessness, teachers could read aloud a picture book as a way to examine the issue of homelessness. A discussion of the topic would follow the read aloud and would be used as a time for students to share their thoughts, ideas and feelings about the topic and also a time for the teacher to clear up miscommunications the students may have. This read aloud and discussion is used as a springboard for the Literature Circle books. Campbell Hill, et. al. (1995) suggest

choosing a variety of books on the topic of homelessness, from a variety of cultures, and with both male and female protagonists, for example. The teacher may choose to give a short book talk on each book and may even read a passage from the book. The students can spend some time looking through the books before selecting their first, second and third choices. Campbell Hill, et. al. (1995) suggest considering gender and reading level balances, as well as group dynamics when putting students into Literature Circle groups.

For any student to be successful in Literature Circles, teachers must provide explicit instruction in procedural and managerial issues, the use of reading strategies or mental operations readers use to make sense of what they read, the use of writing as a means to enhance discussion and higher level thinking, and how to participate in groups (Pike & Mumper, 2004). This instruction is often in the form of mini-lessons, individual conferences, whole group or small group discussions (Campbell Hill, et. al., 1995). However, the time devoted to procedural and strategy lessons should be minimal in comparison to the time students spend reading and responding to text (Pike & Mumper).

Literature Circles Across Content areas and Various Genres

Literature Circles can be formed to discuss fictional texts as well as non-fiction texts. Scaffolding roles can be designed to fit any type of text. In a study conducted by Stien and Beed (2004), the authors developed new roles for students to complete prior to discussion of a biography text. One new role that was introduced was Fantastic Fact Finder in which the student was required to find interesting facts about the character. The Vital Statistics Collector was asked to report on personal information about the character and the Timeline Traveler was required to make a timeline to record important dates in the person's life. The authors determined that the use of these types of roles early on in

the learning process of non-fiction Literature Circles, followed by the use of tabbing, or the use of sticky notes to record comments or questions as a means of recording thoughts or ideas prior to literature meetings, promoted a love for non-fiction in students (Stien & Beed, 2004). Students in this study, through an end of the study interview, indicated they believed they were better readers of non-fiction and that they were more comfortable in choosing non-fiction to read on their own.

Previous Research Conducted on the Effects of Literature Circles on Struggling Upper Elementary Students

A study conducted by Allen and Moller (2003) explored the social interaction of two struggling readers in a multiethnic fifth-grade classroom focusing on Literature Circles across four different settings. The first setting explored in this study was a teacher-directed, whole class discussion of teacher-selected literature. The authors concluded that the two struggling readers did not have to read a word of the book to participate in this setting; all they had to do was follow along or listen while others read. Additionally, there was no way to monitor whether the struggling readers were making personal connections, inferring character motives, making predictions, or developing a deeper understanding of the text because their participation in the discussions was minimal. The teacher in the study was only able to monitor those students who were actively engaged in the whole class discussion. The teacher concluded that whole class Literature Circles were not sufficient for her struggling readers.

Student-led and self-selected heterogeneous grouping was the next setting examined. Allen and Moller (2003) used Daniels' (1994) model of Literature Circles, and utilized role sheets as a scaffold. The students, including two struggling readers, were

able to choose their own book on the teacher-selected theme. Many students thrived in this new setting, but this setting was not effective for the two struggling readers in the study because the book the group chose was too difficult for the two struggling readers and far too easy for other members of the group. This made for tension in the group and made it difficult for the two struggling readers to read and discuss the text at the same level of thinking as other members. However, the role sheets did prove to be motivating for the struggling readers. The researchers concluded that more teacher support was needed for struggling readers to be successful in Literature Circles.

The third setting studied was a student-led and self-selected homogeneous group (Allen and Moller, 2003). The book that was chosen was at the struggling readers' reading level. However, there was still very little talk about the book from the struggling readers and role sheets were not used to guide the discussion. The authors found that, although the discussion was pleasant and with far less conflict, there was little discussion about the book and the students made few connections with the text. In this setting, the struggling readers had little contact with more advanced readers and their discussions were irrelevant to the text.

The last setting Allen and Moller (2003) examined included a teacher-selected book and homogeneous grouping, with teacher guided discussion. In this setting a trust developed between the teacher and the struggling readers and the two students took risks and asked questions. The teacher played an important role in facilitating discussion, probing and asking questions of the struggling readers. The teacher's facilitation led to in-depth discussions and created a group atmosphere where they could risk asking questions without being put down. Extended time to meet was necessary for this group

and it was done in a short span of days. In this setting, the two struggling readers developed reading and discussion strategies for making meaning of the text and enhanced their comprehension. As the students were discussing, the teacher supported the group by modeling rich questions, referring to the text for answers, building on comments of students to extend understanding, and supporting interpretation of the text. The teacher also modeled respect for other's ideas, turn taking, and inclusion of all members in the group. The authors concluded that teacher support is needed initially to assure students' engagement in text-based discussions.

Recent research revealed that elementary students, including struggling readers, could have discussions that promote higher order thinking (Triplett and Buchanan, 2005). For example, Triplett and Buchanan (2005) discovered that 14 first, second and third grade, non-mainstreamed, culturally diverse, low-socioeconomic students, identified as needing reading intervention at their school, were motivated when literature discussions included their personal interests and they had opportunities to talk about their reading. When given the opportunity to converse about text, students comprehended successfully and were motivated, engaged and interactive. However, Buchanan and Triplett (2005) also found the students struggled cognitively, emotionally, and motivationally in contexts in which they were not invited to talk about what they were reading. In addition to the educational benefits, Literature Circles also support personal relationships within the group and bonds amongst students were created through the book discussions.

In another study, Moller (2004/2005) examined one European-American fourth grade girl who was considered to be a struggling reader. This study tracked the girl's participation in a heterogeneous Literature Circle discussion group over the course of

reading three culturally diverse novels. The student in this study started out as a less capable member of the group who needed teacher support and scaffolding. The teacher supported the student by creating a learning environment rich in engaging literature and encouraging discussion and debate. All students, not just the struggling reader identified in this study, were encouraged to read a variety of reading material, which opened the door for rich discussion. The teacher explicitly taught strategies that all the students could use to be successful readers and students. They were taught response strategies such as multiple ways of connecting, asking questions, responding to text and to each other, employing visual means of response, focusing on story events and on interesting or difficult vocabulary and attending to the mood, tone and flow of textual language (Moller, 2004/2005). Students were also encouraged to respond to the text in multiple ways such as art, drama, poetry readings, Internet research, class presentations and debates. The teacher believed that the key factor for the success of the struggling reader in this study was her faith that she would achieve and belief that she had valuable contributions to make despite her status as a struggler with decoding and comprehension (Moller, 2004/2005). The teacher helped the struggling reader by helping her articulate her ideas to the group, providing her a variety of ways to write her comments down to share with the group, and by prompting her to reword or re-verbalize her comments to the group. The teacher also provided this student time to read in class, buddy reading, one-on-one reading with the teacher, and audio recordings of the books. The teacher created an atmosphere of zero tolerance for put-downs so that all students could find a respected place within the classroom community (Moller, 2004/2005). Through this scaffolding and modeling from peers, this student became a capable peer in the literature discussion. She

moved from being a shy, non-participating member of the group to a more self-confident, hard working group member and built a strong relationship with another group member. Finally, this student moved to being a more capable peer in her group, one who challenged other group members to understand characters' situations and opened her classmate's eyes to the effects of social injustices presented in the novels. Moller suggested that this student's success in the Literature Circle group was dependent upon rich, engaging literature, and the encouragement to discuss and debate by the teacher. Success was also dependent upon the scaffolding that the teacher provided, as well as the atmosphere of trust and respect that the teacher created through the belief that each child had something important to contribute and learn.

Assessment of Literature Circles

The main job of literature circles is to bring friendly, voluntary, spontaneous, book-loving discussions into the classroom just like the adult book clubs held in someone's living room (Daniels, 2002). However, when adults leave a book club they are not given a grade for their discussion, participation, or ideas presented. Assessment in literature circles can be quite challenging for teachers because they do not want to distort the original intent of literature circles, which is to get students talking about what they are reading. Yet, because literature circles can take a large chunk of the day, some way of evaluating what students are learning is necessary. Teachers are expected to give student's grades in reading and keep students accountable. Literature circles leave a rich trail of evidence of students' reading, learning, and thinking (Daniels, 2002). However, assessment must reflect the collaborative, student-centered nature of the instructional model of literature circles.

Daniel believes that before beginning literature circles it is important for teachers to ask themselves what they want students to learn through literature circles. Teachers need to know where they are going in order to get there (Daniels, 2002). Setting a purpose for literature circles is also important for the students so that they know what is expected (Johnson & Freedman, 2005). Teachers need to express to students what the goals are so it is possible to determine whether the students have reached them (Johnson & Freedman). Literature circles can be used for a variety of purposes employing many different genres. Therefore, assessment will not and should not look the same all the time. Assessment should match the purposes a teacher has predetermined. One reason for assessment could be to understand students' strengths and needs to determine the next instructional step (Daniels). Assessment communicates to students what is important because teachers choose to evaluate what the teacher thinks is important. Assessment also functions to keep track of teaching accomplishments (Daniels).

Assessment of literature circles comes in many forms, from formal tests to observation to portfolios to self-assessment (Daniels). Student role sheets can also be used as a form of evaluation (Daniels). However, for all forms of assessment it is important to collect data, keep records, and interpret the results effectively to make informed decisions (Pollack Day, Spiegle, McLellan, & Brown, 2002).

Data collecting for literature circles can come in many different forms. Checklists, questions or rubrics work well for data collecting (Pollack Day, et. al, 2002.). An important aspect of literature circles is the ability to talk and discuss literature (Pollack Day, et. al.). This is often difficult for students because they are not always exactly sure what they are to talk about in their literature circle discussions. Discussion is

often a new idea for students and is different from what they are traditionally asked to do in school (Pollack Day, et. al.). The researchers suggest that teachers model good questions and comments many times before expecting students to be able to do this effectively. It is important that teachers collect data on how well students discuss literature so that they can be supported through mini-lessons to help them understand the purpose of discussion (Pollack Day, et. al.). Some items to include on checklists, questionnaires or rubrics, to help a teacher evaluate discussion could include the following:

> Do they know what topics lead to a good discussion? Do they have trouble beginning a discussion? Do students articulate what confuses them? Do they theorize about confusing sections of text? Do students give evidence from text to support their opinions? Can students talk about whom else might like the book? Do students try to understand the book from different perspectives? (Pollack Day, et. al., p. 205).

Teachers should also collect data on how well students are interacting during discussions (Campbell Hill, et. al., 1995). Helping student work together in groups can be one of the most challenging components of Literature Circles. Students do not automatically know how to work well together and respect each other. Teachers need to teach students how to get along in a group and how to work out their differences (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). This too needs to be modeled for students. If they see how they are expected to interact with one another they will most likely respond that way as well (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). A rubric, questionnaire or checklist is a good way to keep data on student interactions (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). Teachers should look for how well students respond to each other's ideas and how they react to each other if they disagree (Campbell Hill, et al.,1995).

> Are students willing to share ideas that they have not thought through completely? Do they ask questions of others? How does student participation change when group configuration changes? (Pollack Day, et. al., 2002, p. 206).

Teacher observations of student interaction can change to fit the particular teacher's needs for his or her unique group of students (Pollack Day, et. al.).

Teachers also need to evaluate the nature of students' thinking while they are in discussion groups. Good discussion develops critical thinking but often students are reluctant to question what the author has presented and they often interpret print as always factual (Pollack Day, et. al., 2002). Students need to formulate their own opinions from what they read. Teachers can evaluate this again through the use of rubrics, questionnaires and checklists. Teachers should look for students' ability to reconsider new ideas in light of new evidence, can they theorize about the world or are the dependent upon others to tell them the right answers, can they disagree with sources of authority, and do they give their opinion and look for multiple explanations (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). Campbell Hill, et. al. (1995) suggest that it is important to teach students to think critically. This does not always come naturally for some students (Campbell Hill, et al.,1995). Teachers should conduct mini-lessons using controversial text to encourage students to think that the author's opinion or idea is not the only one (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). This will help students think more critically about text. If a teacher sets a literature circle group free to discuss without modeling expectations then the teacher will be disappointed with results (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995). Literature circles discussions, like any other instructional strategy, need to be taught first. Data collecting is an important tool, not only for teachers to evaluate students, but also for

teachers to determine if they are maintaining their predetermined purpose for conducting the literature circle.

Pollack Day, et al. encourage record keeping and suggest that it helps teachers remain organized and make data interpretation easier. They believe it is important for teachers to have their assessment goals in mind and then determine the assessment tool to be used. Individual reading logs, class-reading logs, group meeting logs, and teacher daily logs can all be used (Pollack Day, et. al.). Individual reading logs are used for students to record what they have read and how long they are taking to read. Class logs are beneficial for teachers to record each literature circle group's daily progress. Group meeting logs require group members to collaborate in gathering information on what they are doing in group and encourage them to reflect after each meeting (Pollack Day, et. al.) Some important items to include on the group meeting log would be a place for the group to record topics discussed, good things that happened that day, problems that occurred, and an overall rate of the groups' performance that day. Teacher daily logs are for teachers to record observations as they move from group to group during the discussion time. This log should include observations, reflections and questions on each group. This sheet can then be used to track students' growth and plan for further strategy lessons (Pollack Day, et. al.).

Journal responses can also be an effective form of evaluation for teachers (Campbell Hill, et. al., 1995). Journals can take on many different forms and can change to fit the genre of text that is being read. Some types of journal responses include diary entries where students take on the role of one of the characters and record what happened and how that student felt about it through the eyes of that character. Cause and effect

explanation is another form of journal response where students divide their paper into two sections with one side being the cause and the other side being the effect. Students can illustrate a place in the book where something happened as a result of an action taken by a character or event on the cause side of the paper. On the other side or effect side of the paper they could illustrate the result and write an explanation for both. Letters can be written to a friend, to their literature group, to a character in the book, or to the author as another form of journal response. These letters can include thoughts, questions, and feelings about the book so far. Character webs can be an effective way to journal about one character from the book. The students can draw a portrait of the selected character in the middle of the journal page and then list traits that describe that character around the character's portrait (Campbell Hill, Schlick Noe, & Johnson, 2001). The teacher can evaluate journal responses so that he/she can monitor the thinking and thought process of individual students and can be used to show progress over time. They can be used to evaluate the student's understanding of the book, growing ability to articulate ideas, developmental level of entries, patterns of response, and growth as writers and artists (Campbell Hill, et.al., 1995)

Student-Led Assessment and Self Assessment

Literature circles are mainly a student-led, independent activity and therefore student self-assessment should be encouraged (Campbell Hill, et al., 2001). Students can evaluate their participation, level of enjoyment, and effort by indicating their impressions on a scale of 1 to 10 (Campbell Hill, et. al, 2001).

Students may also respond in writing to questions about their discussion such as what they enjoyed most about the discussion, some concept or idea they learned,

suggestions on ways to improve the discussion, and goals for self improvement. Campbell Hill et al., (1995), in their examination of self assessment, found that when students are responsible for their own assessment they become more invested in group success (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995).

Self-reflection provides the teacher with valuable information about individual participation, progress, and perception (Campbell Hill, et. al., 1995). Self-assessment is a way for students to internalize what is expected of them in their discussions and can help improve student participation and discussion, as well as encourage students to be reflective thinkers and set attainable goals for themselves (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995).

Portfolios are a collection of their products or collectibles related to a book. Some or all of the products from the book may be included in the portfolio. Teachers can require that some products be included and/or students may choose products they would like to include. Some products that may be included in the portfolio are role sheets, reading response journals, rubrics, checklists, post-it note jottings, extension activities, and evaluations from the teacher, self-reflections, group reflections, or any other products collected during the reading of a particular piece of literature (Campbell Hill, et. al., 2001). All of these artifacts allow teachers a broad look at student's growth over time. They allow teachers to track student thinking, their preparation, and their interactions. Since these products are naturally occurring, they are a form of assessment that matches the student-centered, collaborative nature of literature circles and no formal test or separate worksheets are necessary (Campbell Hill, et. al., 2001).. The portfolio provides a clear picture of what a student has learned, said, and thought.

Literature circles provide many naturally occurring forms of assessment over time. The teacher is never limited in the type of assessment that can be used with literature circles. Assessment can be changed or altered to fit the needs of the teacher and class, and can be modified to meet the predetermined purpose or goals the teacher has set up for the literature circle. Keeping assessment focused on the set purpose can make assessment of literature circles easier on the teacher and friendlier for student use.

The Project

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the staff development project, *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers.* This project is designed for Title I teachers and/or teachers of struggling readers. The workshop is divided into four separate sessions focusing on Design and Effectiveness, Scaffolds, Assessment, and Putting It All Together, respectively (see Table 1 for overview of the workshop timeline). The intent of this staff development series of four workshops is to provide teachers with the tools they need to use Literature Circles effectively with struggling readers and to bring conversations about literature into the classroom for all students.

Workshop Session	Session Overview	Session Time Frame
Session 1: Design and Effectiveness	-Dynamics of Literature Circles -Benefits of Literature Circles -Literature Circles with Struggling Readers	Week One One Hour 30 Minutes
Session 2: Scaffolds and Procedures	- Definition of Scaffolds - Examples of Scaffolds - Procedures for Setting up Literature Circles - Prior Knowledge and Mini-Lessons	Week Two One Hour 30 Minutes
Session 3: Assessment	- Purpose of Assessment - Data Collection - Record Keeping - Student Self-Assessment	Week Three One Hour 30 Minutes
Session 4: Putting It All Together	- Participate in a Literature Circle Discussion - Focus on Discussion Aspect of Literature Circles - Round Table Discussion - Evaluation of Workshop	Week Four One Hour 30 Minutes

Table 1: Four-Day Literature Circles Workshop Overview

Session 1: Design and Effectiveness of Literature Circles

Session One of the workshop on *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers* will be an hour and a half session titled Design and Effectiveness of Literature Circles. The workshop will begin with an introduction of myself, including my professional experiences, followed by an introduction of all those present at the workshop. They will be asked to introduce themselves and tell what district they are in and what position they are currently working in. An overview of the four-day workshop will be discussed and the PowerPoint and handouts for all four days (Appendixes A-H) will be provided on the first day.

Session One of the workshop *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers* on the Design and Effectiveness of literature circles will be presented through a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix A). I will begin by explicitly defining Literature Circles, followed by a discussion of teachers' experiences, if any, with Literature Circles to date. We will also discuss what they have heard or read about Literature Circles. We will also discuss some successes and disappointments people have had if they have attempted Literature Circles before.

Workshop One will include specific information about the dynamics of Literature Circles, the benefits of Literature Circles, and Literature Circles with struggling readers. The dynamics of Literature Circles will include the Eleven Key Ingredients to conducting a successful Literature Circle by Daniels (2002). It also includes eight reasons, along with detailed explanations, as to why Literature Circles work effectively with all students.

Before presenting ideas on the effectiveness of Literature Circles with struggling readers, I will ask participants to share any experience they have had conducting Literature Circles with struggling readers. Discuss what went well and what needed to be

tweaked or changed to meet the needs of the struggling reader. Lastly, research from three different studies conducted by three different groups of authors (Allen and Moller, 2003, Triplett and Buchanan, 2005, Moller, 2004/2005) will be presented on the effectiveness of Literature Circles with struggling readers. After the research has been presented I will ask the participants to think of a struggling reader in their classroom. We will then discuss what the participant feels would help that student be successful in the Literature Circle group. This talking point is a preview into what the participants know about scaffolding for the struggling reader and setting up explicit procedures for conducting Literature Circles, which is the topic of Session Two.

Session 2: Scaffolds Used in Literacy Circles

Session Two of *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers* is also presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix B) and includes handouts with examples (Appendix C). Session Two is an hour and a half workshop titled Scaffolds and Procedures and will include specific information on how to set up a Literature Circle program and exactly what scaffolds may be provided to help the struggling reader be successful. Session Two will begin with an explicit definition of the word scaffold. Several examples of scaffolds including role sheets, tabbing, maps and graphic organizers, alternatives to independent reading, and modeling and guidance are all described and examples are provided in Appendix D. Participants will be asked to describe any scaffolds they have used with their students in a round table discussion at their table. A discussion on scaffolds previously used and how they benefited the struggling reader will be conducted and shared out with the entire group.

Important procedures to consider prior to and during a Literature Circle are also included in Session Two. Specific procedures such as group size, text choice, prior knowledge, mini-lessons, and writing are the keys to a successful Literature Circle and research in this area will be described. Additionally, the importance of developing students' prior knowledge before reading is shared and ideas are given for how to build prior knowledge with struggling readers. Ideas for mini-lessons on topics ranging from reading strategies, to procedural and managerial issues, to discussion strategies and how to get along in a group are all shared. A brief Day Three preview of the four main topics of assessment; purpose, data keeping, record keeping, and self-assessment, will be shared.

Session 3: Assessment for Literacy Circles

Session Three titled *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers* describes research in the area of Assessment of Literature Circles. This hour and a half workshop is broken into four main topics, which include the purpose of assessment of Literature Circles, data collection, record keeping and student self-assessment. This workshop is presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix D) and includes several handouts for assessing Literature Circles (Appendix E).

Session Three begins with statements about why it is important to assess Literature Circles and the importance of setting a purpose before beginning. Examples of data collection types such as checklists, rubrics, and questionnaires are shared. Data collection may be gathered on student discussion, student interaction, or student thinking during a Literature Circle meeting.

During Session Three on assessment, the importance of record-keeping is highlighted, as well as the types of record-keeping, including individual and class reading logs, group meeting logs and teacher daily logs. The purpose of self-assessment as well as types of assessment and examples are also described in this workshop. Journals, portfolios, and checklists are types of self-assessments and several examples of each are detailed. Participants will have a round table discussion on types of assessment that they think would be helpful for them if they used Literature Circles in their classroom. Volunteers will share their thoughts out with the entire group. Lastly, a preview will be given of Session Four titled *Putting it All Together.* Participants will be given the opportunity to put everything they have learned about Literature Circles into practice. They will be participating in a Literature Circle with the people sitting at their table.

Session 4: Putting It All Together with Literacy Circles

Session Four of the workshop titled *Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers* is a culmination of everything participants have learned in the workshop. Session Four is titled Putting It All Together and is presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix F). It is very important to give practicing teachers time to process new information and try it out to see how it all comes together. Teachers, even with the best of intentions, could leave the workshop excited to implement Literature Circles but they may not put theory into practice due to time constraints. This is why I have built in time for teachers to try Literature Circles out within the session. It is my hope that they will leave the Workshop thinking that Literature Circles is something they are not intimidated to implement in their classrooms.

I want them to leave having had time to process and think about how they might use Literature Circles in their classrooms.

The purpose of having participants actually complete a Literature Circle is not so much about practicing procedures as it is about participating in a quality discussion. Each teacher will have to determine what procedures will work best for his/her students. Instead, the focus is on the discussion. Participating in a discussion, using role sheets, will put teachers in the shoes of the students and their experience with Literature Circles.

To begin, each table group of 4-6 will choose a well-known fairy tale to take through the Literature Circle process. Each participant will start by choosing a Literature Circle role sheet from those described in the PowerPoint from Daniels (2000). Each member will have a job either as the Discussion Director, Illustrator, Connector, Passage Master, or Summarizer. If there are more than five people in a group then two people may complete the same job. Once jobs are decided on then groups will decide how they will read the material. They may choose to read the text aloud or independently. Due to the short length of the book, participants will read the book in its entirety and then complete their role sheet. Once role sheets have been completed then the discussion can take place, having each member share his or her role sheet and thoughts about the book. Because they are literate adults, the discussions will most likely be rich and engaging.

Upon completion of the Literature Circle discussion, participants will reflect on their discussion. They will be asked to evaluate their discussion and talk about what made their discussion of good quality. Participants will discuss what was necessary to keep the discussion flowing. Next they will make a list on chart paper of what they learned from

their discussion that they think will be important to teach students prior to starting Literature Circles. Each table will be asked to share out their ideas with group.

Lastly, participants will synthesize their learning and reflect on the workshops' value. In a round table discussion, I will ask them to discuss the following:

- How will you take what you have learned in this workshop and use it with your students?
- What are some challenges you can anticipate with using literature circles with struggling readers?
- What do you see as the strengths of using literature circles with struggling readers?

We will discuss each question together after round tables have had a chance to discuss.

Finally, participants will be asked to complete a workshop evaluation and turn it in (Appendix G). This will be my way of evaluating what went well and what I need to improve on with this workshop.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of my project, focusing on the ways that scaffolds can help struggling readers to be successful in Literature Circles.

Research in Literature Circles indicates that struggling readers can be successful when certain scaffolds, procedures, and a safe learning environment are put in place (Brabham & Villaume, 2000). First, a level of trust must be created in the classroom. Students must feel like they can openly share their ideas and thoughts without judgment or criticism and that their contributions are valuable to the discussion. Teachers hugely impact the level of trust that is developed within a Literature Circle that includes struggling readers. Teachers need to encourage struggling readers to contribute their ideas and validate them by deepening their contribution to the group. Teacher support and participation in Literature Circles proved to be the most important ingredient to support the comprehension and engagement level of struggling readers in the group (Daniels, 2002).

Research in Literature Circles suggests that both heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings can be successful with struggling readers (Daniels, 2002). It is more important to consider student personalities when grouping students rather than ability. A teacher's predetermined purpose for the Literature Circles should drive grouping decisions, not ability necessarily.

Struggling readers often need support in reading and discussion strategies. These strategies can be part of a mini-lesson or can be built in to group discussions before, during, or after Literature Circles. Providing support in these strategies for all students is

vital to the success of the Literature Circle discussion. Students, especially struggling readers, need to be taught how to discuss and how to make deeper meaning of the text.

Role sheets, tabbing, journals, and/or diaries to help students record their thinking before, during, and after reading proved to be important for students to synthesize their thinking before participating in a Literature Circle discussion group. Students, including struggling readers, can refer to their notes during discussion and can use these to facilitate their discussion and participation in the group.

Finally, choosing books that interest the struggling reader is important to keeping that student's interest and engagement level high. Students' success in Literature Circles is dependent upon rich and engaging literature. This should be kept in mind when teachers or students are selecting books for the Literature Circle discussion.

Teacher encouraged discussion and debate, scaffolds, and creating an atmosphere of trust and respect are the key ingredients to struggling readers' successes in Literature Circles. I learned that Literature Circles can be an effective learning strategy for struggling readers when the above ingredients are in place. However, Literature Circles are not a complete instructional program in and of themselves. Teachers need to pay close attention to the needs of their students and adjust their instruction accordingly.

Limitations

This review and project was limited to only struggling readers in upper elementary grades. Additional information on the effects of struggling readers in Literature Circles, if a broader age and grade range was examined, is a topic for

additional research. The effects of Literature Circles on struggling readers from grades kindergarten through twelfth grade may have provided more valuable information.

More current research needs to be conducted on the effects of Literature Circles and struggling readers. Further research in the area of heterogeneous verses homogeneous groupings and Literature Circles needs to be further investigated. This research would help teachers just starting out with Literature Circles to determine how they could group students to have the most success. Also, research in the area of role sheets verses other types of student documentation could be further examined for effectiveness. Research is conclusive that teacher support and guidance is necessary to make Literature Circles successful for struggling readers. However, can too much support be detrimental to student's ability to synthesize his or her own understanding of text? These ideas need further action research.

Recommendations

Literature Circles are an effective strategy for struggling readers if several key ingredients are in place. First, teachers must create an atmosphere of trust and respect so that students feel comfortable to discuss the book and open up about sensitive topics. Secondly, teachers must encourage active participation, discussion and debate by guiding and leading students into conversations using rich and engaging literature, which lends itself to thought-provoking discussion. Struggling readers are more motivated to participate in Literature Circles when the book is on a topic that interests the student. Finally, teachers need to provide several scaffolds to ensure the struggling readers success. Scaffolds include careful consideration of the student's Literature Circle group members and book they are reading. The book needs to be at the student's independent

reading level if you are expecting the students to read the book on their own before the Literature Circle meeting. Another way to scaffold for struggling readers is to partner them up for the reading or allow them to read the book on tape. The use of role sheets or tabbing during or after reader can help the struggling reader to think about and determine key points they would like to discuss in the Literature Circle meeting. This can help them to prepare ahead of time so that they may make valuable contributions to the discussion. Being prepared ahead of time for the discussion can help the struggling reader feel more confident in their contributions to the discussion. Again, the teacher's participation in the discussion is very important for the struggling reader and can be the key to success or discouragement in the group. Struggling readers also benefit from keeping their ideas and thoughts in a journal or diary to help them synthesize their thinking. These can be used as an assessment tool for the teacher to see how the student is progressing in their thinking about literature. Struggling readers also benefit from feedback on their performance in the form of checklists, rubrics, and personal communication. These key ingredients add up to a successful Literature Circle discussion for a struggling reader.

My Workshop provides information and effective strategies for teachers to help struggling readers be successful in Literature Circles. It is my intent that teachers will be able to use the information and strategies from my workshops to better facilitate the participation of struggling readers in Literature Circles in their classrooms. Each teacher will have to decide what procedures, scaffolds, and assessments will work best in their classroom. Research on effective implementation of Literature Circles has shown that struggling readers can be successful participants in Literature Circle activities. It is my

hope that teachers will find these workshops informative and useful and will take what they have learned from this workshop and put it to use in their classrooms.

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Appendix A

PowerPoint Presentation

Session 1

Design and Effectiveness Workshop

Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers

A Workshop for Title I Teachers
Day 1
Design and Effectiveness
Presented By:
Christine Marxen

What are Literature Circles?

Literature Circles are conversations in which participants are invited to discuss and develop their own questions and answers in ways that expand upon individual interpretations and elevate responses to reading (Brabham & Villaume, 2000)

Talking Point

Discuss the following with a partner at your table.

- Have you ever used literature circles? If so, what has your experience been like? Describe some successes and disappointments you have had with them.

What do Literature Circles look like?

Eleven Key Ingredients (Daniels, 2002)

1. Students choose their own reading materials.
2. Small temporary groups are formed based on book choice.
3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet regularly to discuss their reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide their reading and discussion (response logs, role sheets, post-it-notes).
6. Discussion topics come from the students.

Eleven Key Ingredients

7. Group meetings are open, natural conversations about books.
8. The teacher serves as a facilitator.
9. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.
10. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.
11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates and then new groups form.

Why Choose Literature Circles?

- Benefits all readers
- Promotes higher level thinking
- Develops communication skills
- Balanced approach to a literacy program
- Any genre of text
- Cross-curricular
- Endorsed by the IRA
- Encourages responsibility in students

Literature Circles Can Benefit All Readers

- Grade level readers
- Above grade level readers
- Below grade level readers
- English Language Learners
- Special Education students
- Struggling readers

Promotes Higher Level Thinking

- Students are asked to use the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy throughout the Literature Circle process.

How is Higher Level Thinking Used in Literature Circles?

Students are encourage to ask each other questions, explain and justify opinions, articulate reasoning, and elaborate and reflect upon knowledge.

Develops Communication Skills

The social interaction that takes place in the literature circles is critical to its success. Listening to other modes of thinking, being able to verbalize content, and hearing other perspectives contribute to deepening comprehension (Burns, 1998).

Balanced Approach to Literacy

Literature Circles encourage:

- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Word knowledge
- Writing

Genre of Text

Literature Circles can effectively be used with any type of text.

- Fiction
- Non-fiction
- Newspaper
- Magazine

Literature Circles Across the Curriculum

May be used in any subject including:

- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Reading
- Specials such as P.E., Music, Art
- Health

Literature Circles Endorsed

- The International Reading Association or IRA encourages the use of literature-based curriculum and collaborative classrooms where students take responsibility for choosing, reading, and discussion of text.
- National Council of Teachers of English

Talking Point

Discuss the following with a partner at your table.

- If you have had experience with literature circles, what was your experience like with struggling readers?

Effectiveness with Struggling Readers

Allen and Moller, 2003

- Teacher-selected book
- Homogeneous grouping
- Teacher-guided discussion
- Establish trust with the reader

Effectiveness with Struggling Readers

Triplett and Buchanan, 2005

Motivation occurs when Literature Circles focus on:

1) Personal interest
2) Opportunities to talk about their reading

Effectiveness with Struggling Readers

Moller, 2004/2005

- Rich engaging literature
- Discussion and debate encouraged by teacher
- Scaffolding- tabbing, role sheets, teacher participation, mini-lessons
- Atmosphere of trust and respect

Talking Point

Discuss the following with a partner at your table.

- Think of a struggling reader in your classroom; what do you think would help that student be successful in a literature circle group?

Appendix B

PowerPoint

Session 2

Scaffolds and Procedures

Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers

A Workshop for Title I Teachers
Day 2
Scaffolds and Procedures
Presented By:
Christine Marxen

Scaffolds Defined

Scaffolds are conversations or interactions in which adults temporarily support children's development of more complex levels of thought and language (Brabham & Villaume, 2000).

Examples of Scaffolds

- Role Sheets
- Tabbing
- Maps/Graphic Organizers
- Alternatives to reading
- Modeling and guidance

Talking Points

Discuss the following with at your table.

- What scaffolds have you used with your students? Describe your experiences.

Role Sheets

Fiction

- Discussion Director
  Questions for Discussion
- Connector
- Illustrator
- Passage Master
- Summarizer

Role Sheets

Non-Fiction

- Fantastic Fact Finder
- Vital Statistics Collector
- Timeline Traveler
- Etc.

Tabbing

Students write down their questions, comments, or ideas on sticky notes as they read. These tabs serve as a discussion points when the group meets.

Maps/Graphic Organizers

Struggling readers can benefit from filling out a map or graphic organizer either during or after reading to help them organize what they have read.

Examples:

- Character map
- Character Development
- Cause Effect map
- Plot map
- Order of Events map
- Etc.

Reading Alternatives

Some struggling readers may not be able to independently read the assigned reading. Provide alternatives such as:

- Listening on tape
- Partner reading
- Choral reading

Modeling/Guidance

- Teachers need to Model, Model, Model! Explicit instruction in procedural and managerial issues, reading strategies,and how to participate in groups and hold a discussion is a must.
- Assign roles in the beginning so struggling readers can hear the role modeled before they have to do it on their own.

Procedures

- Key to making Literature Circles run smoothly.
- Adjust so that every student's needs are supported so that they may contribute to the discussion as active, reflective group members.

Procedures to Think About

- Number of students per group
- Text choice
- Prior Knowledge
- Mini-lessons
- Writing/Journaling

Number of Students in a Group

- 4-6 students is recommended.
- More or fewer students can still have a productive conversation.
- Keep students needs in mind when determining group size.
- Consider gender, reading level balances, and group dynamics.

Determining Text

- Group members select text from a group of teacher provided texts often centered around a theme, author or genre.
- Teacher selects a book for a group based on reading level and interests, centered around a particular theme, author or genre.
- Text quality is critical to success of Literature Circles.

Importance of Prior Knowledge

Students must have prior knowledge of the critical issue or theme before reading.

- Clear up misconceptions
- Build background knowledge
- This is especially critical for ELL and struggling readers

Building Prior Knowledge

- KWL charts
- Classroom discussion
- Read-Alouds
- Videos

Provide Mini-Lessons

- Reading Strategies
- Procedural and managerial issues
- Writing
- Higher-level thinking strategies
- Discussion strategies
  - Discussion Etiquette
  - Preparing for Discussions
  - What Makes a Good Discussion?
  - Tools for Discussion
- How to get along in a group

Appendix C

Handouts

Session 2

Scaffolds and Procedures

Discussion Director

Name: _____ Group: _____

Book: _____ I read page _____ to page _____.

You are the Discussion Director. Your job is to write down open-ended questions that your group will want to talk about. Try not to focus on the nitty gritty details, but more the main ideas and your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns you had as you read. Please list at least four questions on the lines below.

1. _____

_____

_____

2. _____

_____

_____

3. _____

_____

_____

4. _____

_____

_____

5. _____

_____

_____

Clever Connector

Name: _____ Group: _____

Book: _____ I read page _____ to page _____.

You are the **Clever Connector.** Your job is to find **at least three** connections between the material your group is reading and the world outside the story. Think of ways the story has to do with your own life at school, home, or in the community, to similar events, or to other people or problems. Whatever the reading connects YOU with is worth sharing!

Some connections I found between this reading and other people, places, events . . .

1. _____
_____
_____

2. _____
_____
_____

3. _____
_____
_____

4. _____
_____
_____

Artful Artist

Name: _____ Group: _____

Book: _____ I read page _____ to page _____.

You are the **Artful Artist**. Your job is to draw some part of the story that you really liked:

CHARACTER – SETTING – PROBLEM

AN EXCITING PART

WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN NEXT

Don't tell anyone in your group what you are drawing. When your group shares, let the group members **tell you** what they think you have drawn.

Make your drawing on the back of this sheet or on a large piece of drawing paper so that you can put in everything that you want.

Draw what you want!

One picture or a group of pictures.

Remember – You are the artful artist!

Passage Master

Name: _____ Group: _____

Book: _____ I read page _____ to page _____.

You are the **Passage Master**. Your job is to find **two** parts in the story that you want to read aloud to your group. Look for places in the story that make you:

LAUGH – FEEL SAD – WONDER ABOUT
PLACES WHERE THE AUTHOR WRITES GOOD CONVERSATION
PLACES THAT DESCRIBE

For each passage, write down the page and why you chose that part.

Page: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Summarizer

Name: _____ Group: _____

Book: _____ I read page _____ to page _____.

You are the **Summarizer**. Your job is to list the key events and write a short summary (about four or five sentences) of today's reading. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a quick summary of the key points or main events of the reading assignment.

Key Events:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Summary:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name _____

FACT FINDER

As the Fact Finder, it is your role to find interesting and important facts in your book to share with your literature circle discussion group. Your facts can include numbers.

Tape or glue edges together.

Front

Fact Card

Book Title: _____

Author: _____

Fact Topic: _____

Fact: _____

Fold here

Back

Draw, diagram or chart your fact.

This Fact Card belongs to: _____

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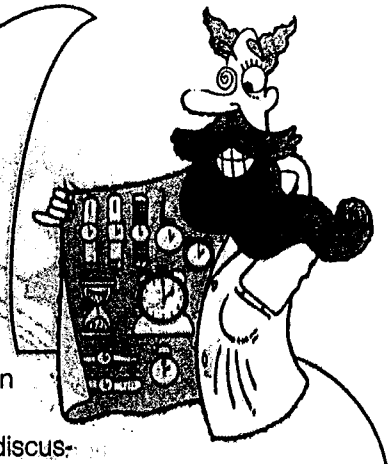
Name _____

TIME LINER



Your role as the Time Liner is to create a time line that chronicles the important events in your fiction or nonfiction book.

As you read your assigned pages, use sticky notes to tag pages of events you think may be important enough to record on your time line. After you've finished reading, select 10 events and record them in the proper sequence below. Some important events might be the introduction of a new character, a battle, a natural disaster, a character's accomplishments, a move, a journey, a birth or a death. During your literature circle discussion, you will need to explain why you chose the events to include on your time line and allow group members to add additional important events if they wish.

1. _____

   Page(s) _____

2. _____

   Page(s) _____

3. _____

   Page(s) _____

4. _____

   Page(s) _____

5. _____

   Page(s) _____

6. _____

   Page(s) _____

7. _____

   Page(s) _____

8. _____

   Page(s) _____

9. _____

   Page(s) _____

10. _____

    Page(s) _____

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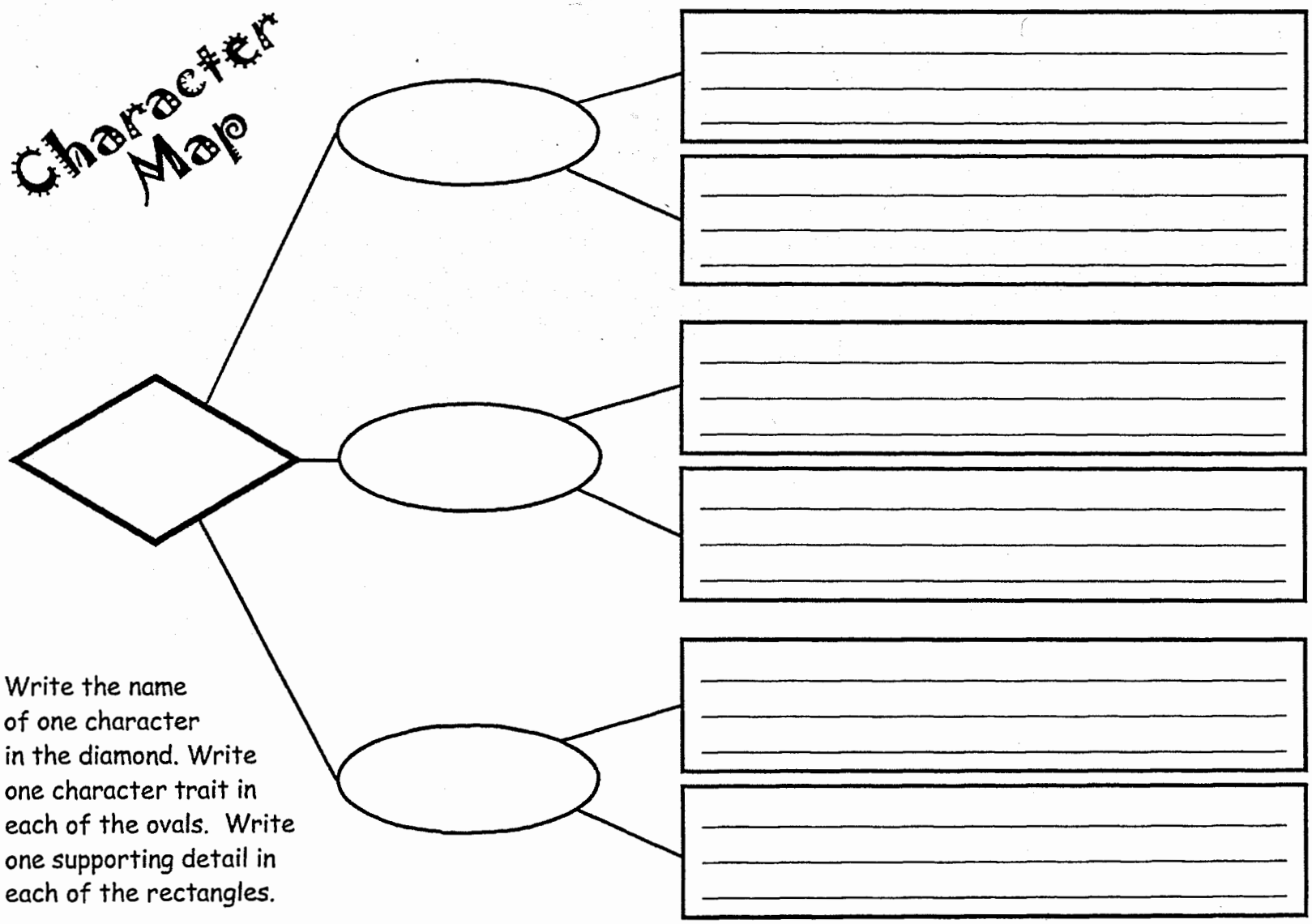
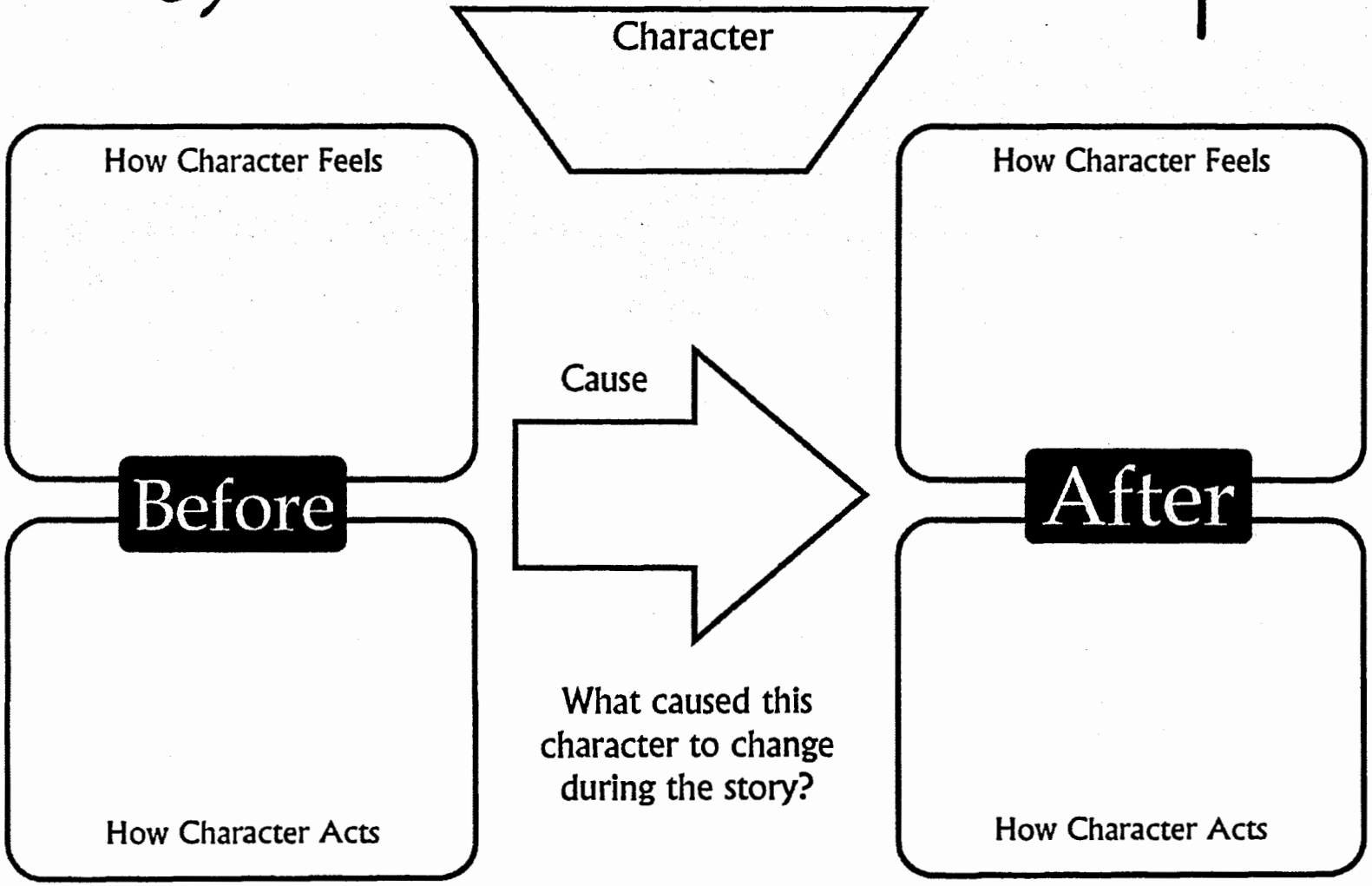
Character Map

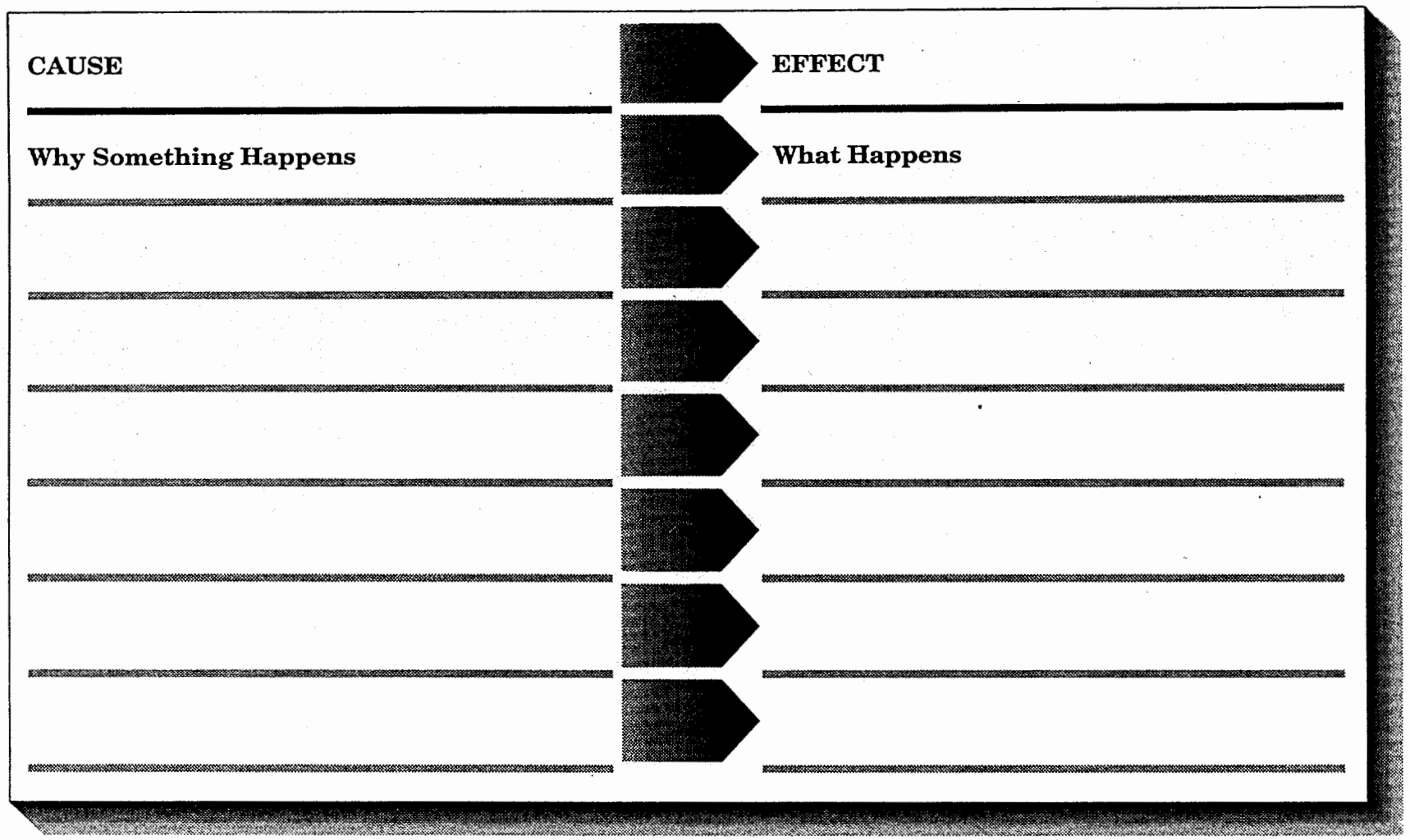


Write the name of one character in the diamond. Write one character trait in each of the ovals. Write one supporting detail in each of the rectangles.

Developed by Laura Candler (Teaching Resources at http://home.att.net/~teaching)

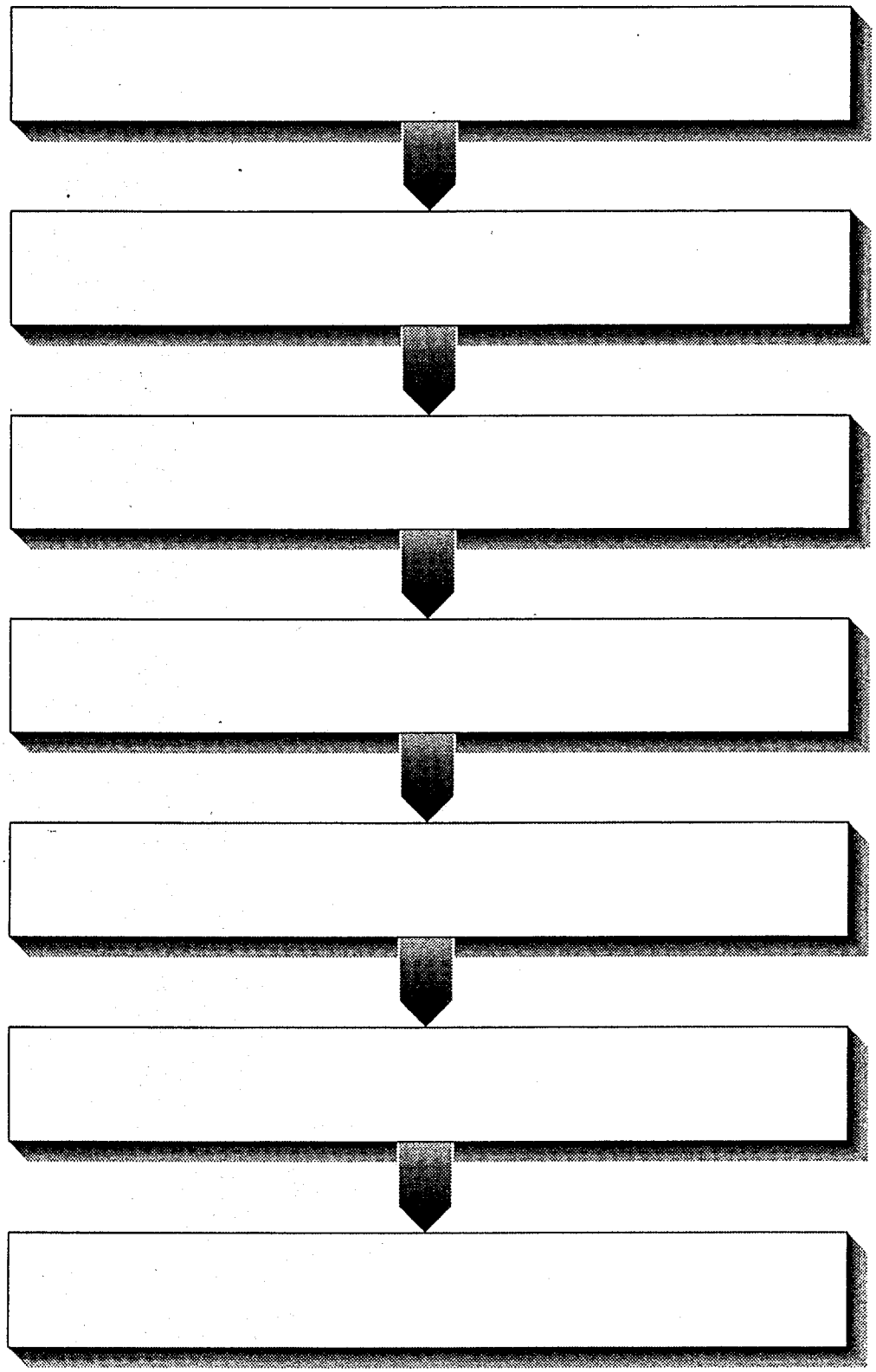
Character Development Story Map





23 Cause and Effect Text Pattern

Macmillan / McGraw-Hill



17 Sequence of Events Text Pattern

Macmillan / McGraw-Hill

Appendix D

PowerPoint

Session 3

Assessment of Literature Circles

Appendix D

PowerPoint

Session 3

Assessment of Literature Circles

Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers

A Workshop for Title 1 Teachers

Day 3

Assessment

Presented By:

Christine Marxen

Assessment in Literature Circles

- Assessment must reflect the collaborative, student centered nature of the instructional model of Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002).
- Literature Circles leave a rich trail of evidence of kids' reading, learning and thinking (Daniels, 2002).

Set a Purpose

- Teachers need to have an instructional goal in mind.
- Students need to know what is expected of them.
- Teachers need to express the goals to their students so they can determine whether students have reached them.

Data Collection Types

- Checklists
- Rubrics
- Questionnaires

Data Collection on Student Discussion

- Modeling good questions and comments is crucial for student success in Literature Circles.
- Keep data on how well students discuss literature.
- Student discussion can be supported through mini-lessons.

Some Questions to Think About

- Do they know what topics lead to a good discussion?
- Do students articulate what confuses them?
- Do they have trouble beginning a discussion?
- Do they discuss confusing parts of the text?
- Do they give evidence from the text to support their opinion?
- Do they try and understand the book from different perspectives?

Data Collection on Student Interactions

Teachers should look for how well students respond to each other's ideas and how well they react if they disagree.

Some Questions to Think About

- Are students willing to share ideas they have not yet thought through completely?
- Do they ask questions of others?
- How does student participation change when group configuration changes?

Data Collection on Student Thinking

Teachers need to evaluate the nature of student thinking while they are in discussion groups.

Some Questions to Think About

- Do students question what the author is saying?
- Do they believe the text is always factual?
- Do students formulate their own opinion?
- Do they reconsider new ideas in light of new evidence?
- Do they disagree with sources of authority?

Sample Checklists, Rubrics and Questionnaires

- Discussion Rubric
- Discussion Evaluation
- Discussion Self-Reflection
- Anecdotal Notes on Literature Discussions
- Literature Discussion Notes
- Teacher Observation Checklist-pg. 1
- Teacher Observation Checklist-pg. 2
- Teacher Observation Checklist-pg. 3

Record Keeping

Teachers need to keep records to remain organized and make data interpretation easier.

Types of Record Keeping

- Individual Reading Logs
- Class Reading Logs
- Group Meeting Logs
- Teacher Daily Logs

Individual Reading Logs

- Used for students to record what they have read and how long they are reading.

Class Reading Logs

- Beneficial for teachers to record each literature circle group's daily progress.

Group Meeting Logs

- Used for group members to collaborate in gathering information on what they are doing in group and encourage them to reflect after each meeting.

Teacher Daily Logs

- Teachers record observations as they move from group to group during discussion time.

Student Self-Assessment

Students should evaluate their participation, level of enjoyment, and effort using a scale or responding in writing.

Why Self-Assess?

Self-assessment is a way for students to internalize what is expected of them in their discussion and can help improve student participation and discussion, as well as encourage students to be reflective thinkers and set attainable goals for themselves (Campbell Hill, et al., 1995).

Types of Self-Assessment

- Journals
  - Diary Entries
  - Cause and Effect Explanation
  - Letters
- Portfolios
- Checklists

Discussion Self-Reflection
Group Evaluation-pg. 1
Group Evaluation-pg. 2

Diary Entries

- Students take on the role of one of the characters and record what happened and how that student felt about it through the eyes of that character.

Cause and Effect Explanation

- Students divide their paper into two sections with one side being the cause and the other side being the effect. Students can write about and/or illustrate a place in the book where something happened as a result of an action taken by a character. On the effect side they can write and/or illustrate the result.

Letters

- Letters can be written to a friend, their literature circle group, to a character in the book, or to the author. They can include thoughts, questions, and feelings about the book so far.

Portfolios

- Collections of student products or collectibles related to a book.
- Teachers can require some products be included and students can select products they would like to include.

Why Portfolios?

- Teachers can track student thinking, preparations, and interactions.
- Products are naturally occurring and a form of assessment that matches the student centered, collaborative nature of literature circles.

Products to Include in Portfolio

- Role Sheets
- Journals
- Rubrics
- Checklists
- Post-it Note Jottings
- Extension Activities
- Evaluations- teacher and/or self

Final Thoughts on Assessment

- Keep assessment focused on the predetermined purpose and/or goals the teacher has set.
- Alter assessment to fit the needs of the class and the predetermined purpose and/or goals.

Appendix E

Handouts

Session 3

Assessment of Literature Circles

Observation Checklist

STUDENT NAME _____

Rubric Items	*Date/Comments/Observation*
Understanding of Literature Discussion Do the students know what types of things to talk about? Is there trouble beginning a discussion or picking a new topic? *("What do we talk about?")*	
Do the students articulate what confuses them? *("I didn't understand why the character chose to return home.")*	
Do the students theorize about confusing sections of the text? *("I wonder if it means that she was sorry for what she had done?")*	
Do the students give evidence from the text for their opinions and evaluations? *("It says right here in the book that she was afraid.")* What type of evidence do they give? Is it based on their own experiences or the text or something else? *("I would never do that if that happened to me.")* Can the students talk about who else might like the book? *("My little sister would like this book better than I did.")*	
Do the students try to understand the book from others' perspectives, such as the author or main character? *("I think the author was making a point about how tough life was back then." "I don't like that the main character joined a gang, but I guess he felt he had to.")*	

Rubric Items	*Date/Comments/Observation*
Student Interaction Do the students respond to each other's ideas? What are their responses like? Do they agree or disagree with each other's ideas? *("I agree that she was selfish, but I think she had reasons for being a brat. It wasn't her fault.")*	
Are the students willing to disagree? How do they go about disagreeing if they do? *("I don't think that's right. I think she had a good reason for being mean to her sister.")*	
Are the students willing to share tentative ideas, things they haven't thought through completely? *("I've been wondering if that wasn't because things were different then . . . well not different completely, but . . . do you know what I mean?")*	
Do the students ask questions of others? What types of questions do they ask? *("Did you like the book, Ryan? What do you think the character should have done?")*	
How does student participation change in different groups?	
Critical Thinking Are the students willing to reconsider ideas in light of new evidence? What do students do when presented with conflicting evidence? *("That's a good point . . . I forgot that she had made the promise to her friend.")*	
Do the students actively theorize about the world or are they dependent on others to tell them the right answers? *("Well, it might be that . . ." as opposed to "I don't know. What do you think?")*	

Rubric Items	*Date/Comments/Observation*
Are the students willing or hesitant to disagree with sources of authority? *("I don't care if the books says . . ." as opposed to "Well, the book says so . . . so it must be true.")*	
Does the student see others as sources of expertise on which to draw? *("Let's ask Drew. He knows a lot about baseball.")*	
When the students give reasons for their opinions, are those reasons internal *("That doesn't fit my experience")* or are they external, depending on outside authorites, including their parents, their peers, their friends, the book, or other adults? *("My teacher last year said it means this.")*	
Do the students identify complexity in answers or do they just determine ideas as right or wrong? *("I wonder if she was mean because of all the times people let her down," as opposed to "She was mean and that's all that matters.")*	
Do the students look for multiple explanations or does one suffice? *("He joined the army for excitement . . . or maybe he felt he had to join the army to help his sister . . . or maybe he wanted to get out of his terrible home situation.")*	
Literary Content knowledge What content knowledge do students use? Do they use terms such as character, setting, tone, theme, foreshadowing? Do they talk about terms without having a name for them?	
Do students notice the sound and feel of language? Do they attend to devices such as metaphor and simile and how they help them enjoy a book?	

Class Log

Student Groups		Date
Group 1		
Group 2		
Group 3		
Group 4		
Group 5		

Group Meeting Log

DATE _____

Group members present _____

Group members absent _____

Did everyone read the chapters and prepare a journal entry? _____

Book and chapters read for today _____

Prompt(s) _____

How did your group feel about this prompt? use it again don't like it use it often

Topics discussed _____

_____

_____

Good things that happened today _____

_____

Were there any problems today? _____

_____

How did your group go today? Was this better/worse than other groups in which you have participated?

_____

_____

Teacher Daily Log

Group	Date	Observations	Reflections/ Questions	Strategy Lesson
Group 1				
Group 2				
Group 3				
Group 4				
Group 5				
Whole-Class Discussion				

Self-Assessment Form

NAME _____

1. **What do you do well in literature circle discussions?** _____

2. **What problems do you have?** _____

3. **How has your participation in literature circles changed over the last _____ weeks?**

4. **What is one thing you would you like to get better at in literature circles?** _____

Appendix F

PowerPoint

Session 4

Putting It All Together

Literature Circles and Improved Comprehension for Struggling Readers

A Workshop for Title 1 Teachers
Day 4
Putting It All Together
Presented By:
Christine Marxen

Putting It All Together

- Divide into groups of 4-5.
- Let each group choose a well known fairytale for their Literature Circle: Cinderella, Rumplestiltskin, The Three Little Pigs, The Three Billy Goats Gruff, etc.
- Decide who will complete each role sheet- Discussion Director, Summarizer, Illustrator, Passage Master and Connector

Putting It All Together

- Read text in its entirety with a partner.
- Complete role sheet either independently or with a partner.
- Conduct Literature Circle discussion using role sheets. Each person share their role sheet.
- Respond: Talk freely about reactions to the fairytale.

Focus on Discussion

- Evaluate your discussion.
- What made your discussion quality?
- What was necessary to keep the discussion flowing?
- What did you learn from your discussion that you think will be important for you to teach your students prior to being part of a literature circle discussion.

Conclusion
Round Table Discussion

- How will you take what you have learned in this workshop and use it with your students?
- What are some challenges you can anticipate with using literature circles with struggling readers?
- What do you see as the strengths of using literature circles with struggling readers?

Evaluation of Workshop

Please fill out the workshop evaluation in your packet and turn it in on your way out. Thank you!

Evaluation Form

Appendix G

Workshop Evaluation

Workshop Evaluation

Please answer the following questions so that I can make improvements to this workshop as necessary. Thank you!

1) What do you see as strengths of this workshop?

2) What are some areas that could be improved?

3) Is there any additional information you were hoping to learn from this Workshop?

4) Comments?