

## LITERATURE CIRCLE IN PROMOTING YOUNG LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION

**Fitriana**

*fitrianarasudin@yahoo.com*

*SMPN 3 BANYUASIN 1*

**Abstract:** Reading English literary text for Indonesian students is not an easy task since reading text for literary experience is different from reading for information. This explains why reading across the curriculum or reading in the content has become a critical component of many school improvement efforts. Helping students learn from textbooks is more complicated than asking them to read the text and answer question. Teachers not only should convince them to develop effective strategies in order to read different texts, but also to develop their thoughtful interpretations of what they read and how they approach the task in order to be active participants in the classroom. Literature circles which offer the potential to promote reading for enjoyment by harnessing the social networks that exist within the peer group provide a way for students to promote their reading comprehension as they read, discuss, and respond to books.

**Key words:** *literature circle, young learners, reading comprehension*

Reading English literary text for Indonesian students is not an easy task because reading text for literary experience is different from reading for information. The students have to read English literary text as a foreign language text and understand different cultural background that is taken by the author of the literary text. As students read, they search for construct meaning based on what they bring to the text and what the text brings to them. It means comprehension is the focal point of a reading activity.

Helping students learn from textbooks is more complicated than asking them to read the text and answer question. Learning from text is more complex than it appears. This explains why reading across the curriculum or reading in the content has become a critical component of many school improvement efforts (Myers & Savage, 2005). The teacher not only should convince the students to develop effective strategies in order to read different texts, but also need to develop students' thoughtful interpretations of what read and approach the task in order to be active participants in the classroom.

In reality, many teachers realizes that the student reading skill is still weak. This condition may result from the lack of teachers' attention or effort to develop their students' thinking skill as indicated by a general practice that in a reading activity. Some studies show that students are not adequately prepared to comprehend relatively complex reading texts they need for their study (Loeneto, 2008; Diem, 2011). While, emphasis on the teaching of discrete skills associated with reading often emerges

discussions of the joys of reading and the explorations of ways in which literature can inform, support, and enrich children's social-emotional lives (Williams, Hedrick, & Tuschinski, 2008).

Literature circles offers the potential to promote reading for enjoyment by harnessing the social networks that exist within the peer group. A study done by Diem (2011) proved that there are good significant differences between the pretest and posttest of the students reading skill who are taught using literature circles, that is, 22,50 to 59,70. The approach promotes reading as an active and desirable social activity, rather than an essentially private and individual one. Survey results and interview comments, Pitton (2005), also identifies students who felt that they were more involved in the discussion and more challenged thus they learned more from participating in the literature circles. In parallel with findings of this study, there are many studies proving that reading comprehension endears students to reading books (Culli, 2002; Olsen, 2007; Rutherford et al., 2009)

Therefore, this paper aims to highlight literature circles which provide a way for students to promote their reading comprehension as they read, discuss, and respond to books. It advices to teachers who are interested in trying out this technique in their classrooms. They would be especially appropriate for K-12 because different ages get different benefits from literature circles.

## **THE CONCEPT OF LITERATURE CIRCLES**

A literature circle is a students' equivalent in the classroom of an adult book club. The aim is to encourage student-choice and a love of reading in young people. The true intent of literature circles is to allow students to practice and develop the skills and strategies of good readers (Dalie, 2001). Literature circles are small groups of students who gather to discuss a piece of literature in depth. The discussion is guided by students' response to what they have read. Straits (2007) further explains that, students may hear talks about events and characters in the book, the author's craft, or personal experiences related to the story.

On the English Foreign Language (EFL) side of the picture, Furr (2003), defines literature circles in EFL are magic in that they have the power to transform 'Foreign Language Learners' from passive, rather shy, reticent students into students who eagerly

point at their texts in order to support their arguments while sharing their opinions in English.

Literature circles were first implemented in 1982 by Karen Smith, an elementary school teacher in Phoenix, Arizona. Smith observed that her fifth grade students were very engaged and enjoyed discussing novels when they loosely organized themselves into reading groups to read books that had been donated to the classroom (Daniels, 2002).

Literature circles help readers become literate. According to Daniels (2002), Literature circles are small groups of students who meet to discuss a piece of literature which they have chosen. Each member of the circle is assigned a role which helps guide the discussion. This allows students to become critical thinkers as they read, share thoughts, ask questions, and respond to reading selections.

Literature circles share many features of the adult book-group. Small groups of four to six children meet on a regular basis in class to discuss a book they are all reading. Often, they are involved in choosing the book, rather than it being assigned to them by the teacher. Daniels (1994) adds that in an effective literature circle, students choose the book which would like to read. The group decides how much to read before the next meeting and during meetings rather than the teacher or worksheet questions that drives the discussion. The role of teacher in this approach is to encourage relatively freeflowing, expressive talk in which students articulate both literary and affective responses to their reading. These contribute to a richer understanding both of the text they are reading and of themselves as readers.

The student's discussion stems from the notes they took on the reading. The teacher takes on the role of a facilitator. Finally, evaluation takes place in the form of teacher observations and student self-evaluation.

### **Classroom Implementation of Literature Circles**

The purpose of this study is to provide extensive independent and cooperative learning for all students. Literature circles are designed to build on the concepts and skills that are taught through Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) lessons. For children to become successful learners, they need us, as their teachers, to be knowledgeable about

the literacy process and to provide them with constructive reading and writing opportunities that guarantee their right to literacy.

According to Anderson and Corbett (2008), the benefits of teaching reading with literature circles are: First, allotted time for teacher to teach reading in a small group setting. Students continue to receive extensive practice on concepts and skills that are taught. They learn responsibility and accountability for learning. They become life-long learners due to the confidence and success they have gained in the classroom. In this point student learning is strengthened as students make connections between what they have learned in a whole-class setting and what they are learning independently.

Second is organization. literature circle could be implemented four days each week. The classroom is organized into four corners: Writing Corner, Library Corner, ABC Corner, and Word Work Corner. Within each corner is a “Must Do” activity and “You Choose” activities. Students will only participate in one corner each day, completing all corners by the fourth day. They are paired heterogeneously with another student to work cooperatively in the “Must Do” and “You Choose” activities.

Third is time. Time to complete a full rotation, each day, may vary depending on the number of students in a classroom and the number of small groups that need to be seen each day. A full rotation can be completed in one hour, allowing 15 minutes for each “job”. Transition time will decrease as students develop a routine and become familiar with the system.

They also explain that there are five steps to implementing literature circles:

*Step One-Author/Book Selections:* (1) Teacher can pre-select several books for students to choose from. (2) Students then choose which book they would like to read. (3) Based on the student’s choice, the teacher can organize students into groups.

*Step Two-Role Selection and Modeling:* There are four main roles in literature circles: (1) Connector-Responsible for connecting text to experiences. (2) Questioner-Analyzes text through questioning. (3) Literary Luminary-Highlights important parts of the text. (4) Illustrator-Graphically responds to text.

*Other roles can be added as needed such as:* (1) Word Wizard - Responsible for vocabulary. (2) Character Sketcher-Analyzes characters. (3) Timeliner-Responsible for keeping track of important events. (4) The teacher selects roles for each book. (5) The teacher then models each role. (6) Students choose list their role preference. (7) Teacher

then assigns role for the literature circle based on student preferences. (8) Roles should change each time the group meets.

*Step Three-Assigning and Supporting Reading:* (1)Teacher assigns amount of reading to be completed for each group based on student skill level and difficulty of book. (2) Teacher supports students with the reading as needed.

*Step Four-Literature Circle Role Sheet or Role Expansion Activities:* (1)Students can complete activities based on their specific role. (2) Students can keep journals or use sticky notes to help facilitate discussion. (3) Students showcase their book after they have read and discussed the entire book.

(4) Students can choose the way in which they present the book, or the teacher can assign a product.

*Step Five-Assessment:*(1) Align literature circles with instructional standards. (2) Select assessment techniques. (3) Often time rubrics are an appropriate assessment tool for literature circles since the grading is often based on student growth and can be quite subjective with this strategy.

## CONCLUSION

This method increases the permanence of what has been learnt. While assisting in these acquisitions, it offers an enjoyable process to the students. Book projects offer an effective way for sharing of books with others and their understanding of the books.

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